

DETERMINANTS OF BANKS PATRONAGE IN NIGERIA: THE SEARCH, EXPERIENCE AND CREDENCE FACTORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine Search, Experience and Credence (SEC) factors as determinants of banks' patronage and its implication on fund mobilization and fund applications for sustainable development in Nigeria. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select the sample size of the account holders in the selected banks. Data were collected by use of self-administered questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale. Findings revealed that Search attributes ranked higher followed by Experience attributes and the Credence attributes in that order. The study concluded that bank customers are highly sensitive to the SEC before making decision about patronage. Therefore, Service Organizations like banks should consider these when developing strategy for customers' patronage. The paper recommends that banks' marketers and customer relationship officers should be properly trained on the importance of SEC attributes in order to attract customers for patronage.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction; Search, Experience and Credence attributes; Customer Patronage; Fund Mobilization, Fund Application, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

The volume of patronage in banks determines the volume of investible funds available in form of loans and advances that can be used for purposes of economic growth and development. Hence, the more functional the banks are, the better for the economy because banks as financial intermediaries channel funds from surplus spending units to deficit spending units. The Search, Experience and Credence attributes therefore determines the pool of financial resources available for economic transformation and sustainable development of a nation.

Products/services can be seen as the offering of any firm designed to address its existing and potential customers in a way and manner that this act will result to greater inward values when compared to the outward values offered to the customers; which if achieved, will result into profit. However, before this can be achieved there is need for customers to take decision to patronize the product/service. It is worthy of note that the process of taking this important decision by the customers is a determinant of the continuous existence of a firm. Many times, the decision to patronize is answerable to some very important factors such as Search, Experience and Credence.

Stigler (1961) was about the first scholar to work around the concept of (SEC) through his economics of information theory before Nelson (1970, 1974) and Darby and Karni (1973) extended this work when they considered how different types of attributes interact with consumer search and trial. Search attributes are ones that can be verified prior to purchase through direct inspection or readily available sources (Nelson, 1970; 1974), experience attributes are those that can be verified after use or consumption of the goods/services (Ford, Smith & Swasy 1990) while credence attributes are those that are difficult to verify even after use (Darby and Karni 1973). Summarily, SEC is concerned with attributes that can be determined by the prospective customers before taking a purchase decision; attributes that can be evaluated during and after the purchase decision has been made and attributes that cannot be evaluated even when the purchase decision has been made. Goods/services may have one, two or all the three types of attributes required before Consumer finally takes a decision to patronize.

Ford, Smith and Swasy (1990) further provided clearer definitions for SEC attributes which were adopted in this study that: Search claims are those claims that can be accurately evaluated prior to purchase using prior knowledge, direct inspection, reasonable effort and normal channels of information acquisition; Experience claims are accurately evaluated when the product/service has been purchased and used for a period of time which is relatively short in comparison to the product's total usage life; while Credence claims are those that cannot be accurately evaluated even after the product/service is used because of lack of technical expertise or cost of obtaining sufficient accurate information. Marketing Product/Service on the basis of attributes is a popular means of generating differentiation.

It is a universally accepted proposition that the marketing of services is different from the marketing of physical goods. To address these aspects of intangibility, George and Berry (1981) and Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2011) suggested a number of guidelines because service is a performance, the service employee's behaviour plays an important role; therefore, some of the advertising should be directed at employees.

Second, because of the variability, service customers perceive a risk and, consequently, seek word-of-mouth recommendations; therefore, service advertising should stimulate word of mouth. Third, to handle the problem of

intangibility, advertising should make the service tangible by using tangible cues and concrete images such as the image of an Elephant as is in the First Bank Nigeria Advertisement. Legg and Baker (1987) argued that the intangible nature of services presents problems to consumers at both the pre- and post-purchase stages. At the pre-purchase stage, consumers have difficulty understanding the service and forming evoked sets; at the post-purchase stage, Consumers have difficulty evaluating the service experience.

Search, Credence, Experience attributes complicate consumer valuation of products because pre- and post-consumption values may not coincide. Lack of consistency between pre- and post-consumption valuations can significantly affect repeat purchase decisions. Zeithaml et. al. (2011) introduced the three types of goods into marketing, via the service literature, as a theoretical framework to better conceptualize the proposed purchase evaluation differences between goods and services Their classic piece placed goods and services on a continuum in Which traditional Consumer goods anchored one end of the spectrum (easy to evaluate) and pure services anchored the other end (difficult to evaluate). Goods, they proposed, have more search qualities While services exhibit more experience and credence qualities due to their unique characteristics – intangibility, non-standardization and inseparability while Mittal (1999) classified the non-search ability of services, i.e. the experience and credence attributes, as one of the five properties of intangibility.

Those services bearing more credence qualities are harder to judge while services high in experience are in the middle of the continuum in terms of evaluation difficulty because services tend to have more experience and credence qualities, consumers may employ different evaluation processes than those high in search qualities. As services become more difficult to evaluate, there tends to be more uncertainty (i.e. more risk), hence, in general, the greater the degree of perceived risk in a pre-purchase context, the greater the consumer's propensity to seek information about goods and services (Murray 1991; Guseman 1981; Murray and Schlacter 1990). In the light of the above, this present study is in alignment with the postulations and discussions of the SEC attributes with specific attention to service orientation given the fact that the study is carried out among selected banks; an industry noted for intangible activities and delivery of various services to its customers.

Statement of the problem

Every modern financial system contributes to economic development and enhancement in standards of living by rendering diverse services to the entire economy. These services include clearing and settlement schemes to facilitate trade, channeling economic resources between savers and borrowers, and various products to deal with risk and uncertainty (Allan, Chris and Bernard, 2011). This role is made possible by the aggregate of funds mobilized through customers' saving. This fund mobilization is a function of patronage and this patronage is a derivative of Search, Experience and Credence Attributes of the customers.

The consumer evaluation framework has been widely utilized in research in marketing over the years and there is no doubt that there is the need to effectively define and build better measurements in order to test theories in a more meaningful and rigorous way. There is dearth of services literature which addresses the measurement issues associated with search experience, and credence qualities especially as it relates to the behavior of customers in the Nigerian banking industry. There is no doubt that the consumer evaluation framework has been active in the marketing literature for several years but has not been sufficiently defined or measured in Africa given the available literatures on this subject matter.

The major studies done are those by the European scholars (i.e. Zeithaml et. al., 2011; Murray and Schlacter, 1990; Alexandris, Dimitriadis & Markata, 2002; Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Murray 1991; Guseman, 1981). This work therefore, provides the preliminary elements in building a better measure for examining the differences in the consumer evaluation processes of banking using the search, experience and credence (SEC) qualities with particular attention to the Nigerian Banking Industry.

Research questions

- i. Does Search as an evaluation framework determine the choice of bank patronage?
- ii. What is the significance of Experience framework as a determinant of choice of bank patronage?
- iii. To what extent does Credence as an element of customer decision making process, determine choice of bank patronage?
- iv. How does Search, Experience and Credence attributes be used to evaluate customer satisfaction?
- v. What is the link between customer satisfaction and bank patronage in the selected Nigerian Banks?

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to appraise (SEC) attributes as a determinant of customers' patronage in selected Nigerian Banks while the specific objectives are to;

- i. measure the extent to which Search as an evaluation framework determine the choice of bank patronage.
- ii. evaluate the significance of Experience framework as a determinant of choice of bank patronage.
- iii. examine the extent to which Credence determines choice of bank patronage as an element of customer decision making process.

Research hypotheses

Ho₁: The extent to which Search as an evaluation framework determine the choice of bank patronage is not statically significant

Ho₂: Experience framework as a determinant of choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant.

Ho₃: The extent to which Credence as an element of customer decision making process determine choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual overview of (SEC) framework

Zeithami (1981; 2000) and Zeithaml et. al. (2011) discussed the (SEC) framework as she and her co-researcher developed their hypotheses (goods versus services) but did not specifically hypothesize differences between search, experience and credence goods. However, almost implied in her hypotheses development is the further delineation of the service framework, i.e. extending the difference to include the three classifications search/experience/credence. For Search qualities, Zeithaml (1981) concluded that it includes attributes such as color, style, price, fit and smell; Experience qualities include taste, wearability and purchase satisfaction; however, credence qualities were not mentioned in their paper. Literature has shown really that, services provided by professionals and specialists are typically high in credence qualities, i.e. expert services (Emons, 1997). Although, useful both among goods and services, the (SEC)

framework has the strongest appeal among service industry scholars. Ostrom and Iacobucci (1995) argued that this type of service industry distinction, i.e. experience and credence enhances theory development because the findings are not particular to some unique industry but are generalizable to other like type service situations.

Conceptual models of (SEC)

Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy (1993) used the experience/credence framework in their sustainable competitive advantage model for services. Their proposed model used the experience/credence framework (i.e. one of the “characteristics of services and service industries”) as a moderating variable, The model links the type of service with the importance of brand equity, relationships and communication effects as a source of competitive advantage. In their initial article on the service quality model, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985; 1988) stated that of the ten dimensions of service quality, only two which is tangibility and credibility could be known in advance. In other words, those are the only search properties among the service quality dimensions. Six of the dimensions they stated are experience properties – access, courtesy, reliability, responsiveness, understanding the customer and communications. Only two of the dimensions fall into the category of credence properties which are competence and security. They stated further that Consumers are probably never certain of these attributes, even after consumption of the service. Their model suggested that services tend to have more experience qualities than credence qualities.

Klein (1998) used the SEC paradigm in her model of consumer information search to explain how interactive media will influence consumer behaviour. Interactive media alters consumer behaviour through the direct impact on both pre-purchase and ongoing consumer information acquisition processes, e.g. lowering customer information acquisition costs. The increased scope of attribute information changes the balance of search, experience and credence attributes, words, interactive media can potentially shift a product’s SEC to the left (easier to evaluate) on Zeithaml’s (1981) continuum model. Klein (1998) conclusion was that interactive media has the drastically lower search costs, to provide consumers with a experience and to open up the breadth of search venues. Ford, Smith and Swasy (1990) argued that product ratings from such places as consumer reports transform credence and experience attributes into search attributes.

Theoretical framework

The SEC variables were founded on the theory of Economics of the original work of Stigler (1961) and variously extended by Nelson (1970, 1974); Darby and Karni (1973) who later classified the products into three categories according to how consumers evaluate the product.

This classification was initially developed to help explain the notion that consumer information about quality often has profound effects upon the market structure of consumer goods. Nelson (1970) explained the role of information and its links to advertising and address the fact that advertising is frequently affected by consumer ignorance about quality differences among brands. He defined two types of qualities that had distinct characteristics in terms of consumer evaluation processes. Search qualities are those that can be fully evaluated prior to purchase, e.g. the style of a dress. Experience qualities are those that must be first purchased and consumed before the consumer is able to evaluate. Nelson (1970) argued that in addition to consumer search process as defined by Stigler (1961), the consumer can also determine the quality of a good by purchasing and using it, i.e. experience. Among other predictions he argued that personal recommendations be relied upon more for the purchase of goods than search goods, i.e. “guided sampling”.

Darby and Karni (1973) introduced credence goods to extend the information acquisition classification into a more precise taxonomy. Credence qualities, they proposed, are those that the consumer can never fully evaluate even after purchase and consumption, i.e. those accepted on faith. Credence qualities they opined are expensive to judge even after purchase. They claimed that when goods high credence qualities are sold, both branding and client relationships are used to help establish quality.

Sustainable Development

Two elements have been identified as crucial to sustainable development, they are: people-oriented programme and transformation of economic and social lives of beneficiaries (Barbier, 1987; Todaro, 1981). Hence, sustainable development in any economy depends to a very large extent on the banking sector. The Search, Experience and Credence Attributes of the customers are critical elements to the survival of banks.

Empirical framework

Yun and Makoto (2006) explored how age and Web shopping influence the SEC ratings of product and services in online shopping. The ANOVA results showed that age and the Web shopping experience of consumers are significant factors. A generation gap is identified for all but one experience good. Web shopping experience is not a significant factor for search goods but is for experience and credence goods. There is an interaction effect between age and Web shopping experience for one credence good. Peng, Nicholas and Saboyasachi (2009) analysed the differences in consumer evaluation between search and experience goods in the online context. By using data from actual consumers' browsing behaviour, they examined search patterns rather than rely on self-reported data. The article pointed to the continued relevance of the search/experience classification in online settings, but these distinctions were not based on consumers' perceived ability to access product quality before purchase; rather, as the differential effects of web-based communication mechanisms illustrate, differences in the type of information sought precipitated distinct online browsing and purchase behaviour. In their study, Galetzka, Verhoeven and Pruyn (2006) attempted to add to the understanding of the antecedents of Customer satisfaction by examining the effects of service reliability and service validity of search, experience and credence services. Their findings revealed that service validity and service reliability independently affect customer satisfaction with search services. For experience services service validity and service reliability are necessary conditions for customer satisfaction. For credence services, no effects of service validity were found but the effects of service reliability on customers' satisfaction were profound.

A survey was conducted on electronic commerce, the products being sold online and their categorization as to either search, experience and credence type, the result show some significant differences between factors influencing the perception of a certain product type (Mityko, 2012). The Search Experience Credence model has also been described by some scholars as a Multi attributes model which is based on assumption that there are important attributes consumers can evaluate before making a purchase decision. These scholars argued that this is not often the case in services because some attributes are more difficult to evaluate than others (Tsotsou & Wirtz, 2014). The study done on credence and the effect of consumer liking of the food; indicates that credence characteristics play an important role in the modern food marketing system. They further revealed that consumers' food choices are increasingly influenced by credence cues and labels and information signaling credence, are thus important search attributes (Fernqvist & Ekelund, 2014). The gap established from these empirical studies and other few ones available is the fact that most researchers usually concentrate

on the combination of search and experience variables in determining consumer decision process of patronizing a particular product/service. Besides, most of the studies have been done in the advanced countries other than Africa. But, this present study is designed to independently test the three variables of SEC in the Nigerian Banking Industry and to measure the most influential of the attributes that determine choice of bank's patronage of the banks' customers in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, exploratory and descriptive researches were employed because the research objectives include determining the degree to which one variable (dependent) affects the other variable (independent) i.e. examining (SEC) variables and their relationships on bank customers' choice of patronage.

Population and Sample Size

All the customers of the five selected top banks in Nigeria formed the population of the study; since the population of the customers was large, Israel (2009) develop a model that determines the sample Size from a large population size. i.e.;

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where

n_0 = sample size, Z = value of the normal curve that cuts off an area a at the tails ($1 - a$ equals the desired confidence level, e.g., 95%), e = the desired level of precision, p = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, and $q = 1 - p$.

therefore, the customer's sample size for the study at 95% confidence level and 1% precision is denoted by; $Z = 1.96$, $p = (0.5$ maximum variability assumed) since actual variability in the proportion is not known), $q = 0.5$, $e = 0.05$. therefore, the sample size for the customers become:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 385$$

Sampling Techniques and Method of Data Collection

Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select the sample size of the account holders, since the target population remains homogeneous. The data used for this research was collected mainly from the primary source with the use of self administered questionnaire to gather information from the primary source. The questionnaire was designed to address the relationship between (SEC) Variables and customers choice of bank patronage. The questionnaire items employed had section A and B in which 'A' was designed to capture the bio-data information of the respondents while 'B' was structured to capture information on the variables of search, experience, credence and bank customers' choice of patronage. A 7-point Likert scale was used in order to ensure the robustness of the responses which ranges from 7 points definitely agreed to 1 point definitely disagreed to elicit responses from the target respondents in extracting these pieces of information the questionnaire was carefully worded with simplicity before its administration to the respondents.

Model Specification

The relationship in this study was defined as: $CCP = f(\text{SEC Variables})$, where (SEC) is denoted as Search, Experience, Credence. Hence in testing this hypothesis, multiple regression model was used i.e.

$$CCP = f(\text{SCH, EXP, CRE})$$

Hence, the model becomes:

$$CCP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SCH} + \beta_2 \text{EXP} + \beta_3 \text{CRE} + C_e$$

Where:

CCP = Customer Choice of bank patronage, SCH = Search, EXP = Experience, CRE = Credence, CE = Error Term

Hypothesis one

H₀₁: The extent to which Search as an evaluation framework determines the choice of bank patronage is not statically significant.

Therefore;

H₁: $\text{CoP} = f(\text{SCH})$; thus, the elements of SCH are WoM, PoI, and TeC. i.e. $\text{CoP} = f(\text{WoM, PoI, TeC})$

Where:

CoP = Choice of patronage, SCH = Search, WoM = Word of mouth, PoI = Positive information, TeC= Testimonial of Customers.

Therefore, the regression model becomes: $\text{CoP} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{WoM} + \beta_2 \text{PoI} + \beta_3 \text{TeC} + \varepsilon$

Hypothesis two

H₀₂: Experience framework as a determinant of choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant.

H₂: $\text{CoP} = f(\text{EXP})$; thus, the elements of EXP are FoP, CoP and HoC i.e. $\text{CoP} = f(\text{FoP, CoP, HoC})$

Where: CoP = Choice of Patronage, FoP= Friendliness of Personnel, CoP = Courtesy of Personnel, HoC = Handling of Complaints.

Therefore, the regression model becomes: $\text{CoP} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{FoP} + \beta_2 \text{CoP} + \beta_3 \text{HoC} + \varepsilon$

Hypothesis three

H₀₃: The extent to which Credence as an element of customer decision making process determines choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant.

H₃: $\text{CoP} = f(\text{CRE})$; thus, the elements of CRE are BoS, SoB, and VPB i.e. $\text{CoP} = f(\text{BoS, SoB, VPB})$

Where:

BoS = Best of Service, SoB = Solidness of Bank, VPB – Very Perfect Bank. Therefore, the regression model becomes:

$$\text{CoP} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{BoS} + \beta_2 \text{SoB} + \beta_3 \text{VPB} + \varepsilon$$

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Table 1: Analysis of Search Elements as a determinant of Choice of Bank Patronage (Coefficients)

Model	Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	Constant	2.241	.026	.034	.519
	Words of Mouth (WoM)	2.144	.033	.006	.132
	Testimonies of Customer (ToC)	27.484	.000	.846	.977
	Positive Information (PoI)	6.537	.003	.065	.008

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2018) using SPSS 22.0

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Search framework as a determinant of choice of Bank Patronage

Null Hypothesis (H ₀)	R Square	F	Sig.	Decision
The extent to which search as an evaluation framework determines choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant	.925	1149.83	0.00	Reject H ₀

a. Predictors: (Constant), Choice of Bank Patronage (CoBP)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Testimonial of Customer (ToC), Word of Mouth (WoM), Positive Information (PoI).

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2018) using SPSS 22.0

The results in the Table 1 showed the level of determinant and influence of each of the predictors; Words of Mouth (WoM), Testimonial of Customer (ToC), and Positive Information (PoI) variables in the choice of bank patronage by customers in Nigeria.

The model indicated that, standardized beta coefficients (.090, .165 and .070) revealed that Testimonial of Customers, Positive Information and Words of Mouth influence the customers' choice of bank patronage in Nigeria in order of their importance and weight respectively. The results also indicated the degree of influence that each element has on the predictor; i.e. Testimonial of Customer (0.90) ranks first, followed by Positive Information (0.165) while the least influencing element was Word of mouth (0.07). The implication is that all the Search elements greatly influence the customers' choice of bank patronage in Nigeria. Also, ToC and PoI elements are statistically significant ($P < 0.05$, sig= .000 and .003) while WoM is not statistically significant but has a positive relationship with the predictor.

The result the Table 2 that, R² value of (Search elements) accounted for 92.5% variance in customers' of bank patronage in Nigeria. The overall regression model was statistically significant in term of its goodness of fit (i.e. F= 1149.835; $p < 0.05$) to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that 'Search' as an evaluation framework significantly determines the choice of bank patronage to a large extent in the context of Nigeria environment.

Hypothesis 2

Table 3: Analysis of Experience framework as a determinant of choice of Bank patronage (Coefficients)

Model	Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
				Beta	Lower Bound
1	Constant	1.282	.201	-.141	.667
	Friendliness of Personnel (FoP)	.030	1.110	-.025	.890
	Courtesy of Personnel (CoP)	-.010	-.400	-.689	.042
	Handling of Complaints (HoC)	.899	33.520	.000	.855

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2018) using SPSS 22.0

Table 4: Analysis of extent to which Experience framework determines choice of Bank Patronage

Null Hypothesis (H ₀)	R Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Experience framework as a determinant of choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant	.829	448.908	0.00	Reject H ₀

- Predictors: (Constant), Choice of Bank Patronage (CoBP)
- Predictors: (Constant), Friendliness of Personnel (FoP), Courtesy of Personnel (CoP), Handling of Complaints (HoC)

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2018) using SPSS 22.0

The results in the Table 3 showed the level to which Experience (i.e. Friendliness of Personnel (FoP), Courtesy of Personnel (CoP) and Handling of Complaints (HoC) determined and influenced the choice of bank patronage by customers in Nigeria. The model indicated that the variable with the highest influence is Handling of Complaints (0.899), Friendliness (0.030) while the least determinant element is Courtesy of Personnel (-0.010). The implication is that, all the Experience elements greatly influence the customers' choice of bank patronage in Nigeria. Also, HoC and FoP elements are statistically significant ($P < 0.05$, sig = .000 and .004) but CoP is not statistically significant because sig = 0.33, $P > 0.05$. Also, the R² value of .829, indicated that Experience framework accounted for 82.9% variance in customers' choice of bank patronage in Nigeria. The overall regression model was statistically significant in terms of its goodness of fit ($F = 448.908$, Sig 0.000). Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis (H₀) and concluded that Experience framework is a determinant of choice of bank patronage in the context of Nigeria environment.

Hypothesis 3

Table 5 Analysis of Credence framework as a determinant of choice of Bank patronage (Coefficients)

Model	Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
				Beta	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	Constant	7.769	.000	1.855	3.115	
	Friendliness of Personnel (FoP)	.292	4.134	.172	.485	
	Solidness of Bank (SoB)	-.082	-1.179	.239	-.231	.058
	Very Perfect Bank (VpB)	.437	8.252	.000	.276	.449

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2018) using SPSS 22.0

Table 6: Regression Analysis of Credence framework and choice of Bank Patronage

Null Hypothesis (H ₀)	R Square	F	Sig.	Decision
The extent to which Credence as element of Customer decision making process determines choice of bank patronage is not statistically significant.	.314	42.503	0.00	Reject H ₀

- Predictors: (Constant), Choice of Bank Patronage (CoBP)
- Predictors: (Constant), Very Perfect Bank (VpB), Solidness of Bank (SoB), Best of Service (BoS)

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2018) using SPSS 22.0

Table 5 showed the results of the extent to which Credence elements of the customer decision making process determine the choice of bank patronage by customers in Nigeria.

The model indicated that customers consider Perfect Bank and bank that offer best services most while taking the decision of their bank's choice in Nigeria. The solidness of the bank does not primarily matter to the customers at the point of decision making in as much the bank is ready to offer them best satisfaction. The results showed Very perfect.

Bank with (0.437) and Best of Service (0.292) to greatly determine the customers' choice of bank patronage in Nigeria, statistical significant at $P < 0.05$ (sig= .004 and .000). However, SoB was not statistically significant and was negatively related to the dependent variable. Table 6 results reflected the R^2 value of .314. In other words, Credence elements accounted for 32% variance in customers' choice of bank patronage in Nigeria. The overall regression model as indicated by the F-Statistics was statistically significant in term of its goodness of fit ($F = 42.508$, Sig 0.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected for the study that Credence as an element of decision making process does not determines choice of bank patronage amongst the customers of the Nigerian Banks.

CONCLUSION

This study was established with the primary purpose of analyzing how SEC attributes i.e. Search, Experience and Credence determines bank customers' patronage which ultimately determines mobilization of investible funds for economic growth and development. The results of the study have actually revealed that among the three SEC attributes, Search was a major determinant compared to the other two (i.e. Experience and Credence) of which Word of Mouth played a significant influence among the elements of Search attributes. The Search, Experience and Credence attributes can be used by banks to bring about more customer satisfaction for their services which will eventually translate to more funds for investors for sustainable development. The increase in customer satisfaction will consequently results in more customer patronage for the banks who are able to effectively use these attributes to their advantage. Also, the study was done with the intention of determining whether customers pay particular attention to each of these variables while evaluating choice of bank patronage. The study has revealed a high sensitivity of bank customers to these tools which is in alignment with the works of scholars like: Yun and Makoto (2006), Zeithaml (1981), Darby and Karni (1973).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Inherently, the SEC attributes exist in the consciousness and sub-consciousness of every intending and existing customer. They really form the basis of their choices depending on the attention and sensitivity of the various elements of these attributes. In view of this finding, the study recommends that:

Service delivery firms; especially banks should consider the SEC attributes as important and relevant factors in bank customers' evaluation of choice of bank patronage for sustainable development. The banks marketers and customer relationship officers should be properly trained on the importance and principles of SEC attributes vis-à-vis customer's behavior towards their services and they should cautiously make their existing customers have a good story to tell about their banks. This will increase the volume of financial resources available to them for loans and advances for sustainable development. It will also aid the banks that recognize this, to leverage on the benefits of Search and Experience attributes to win other new customers for their banks and improve upon their service delivery.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The uniqueness of this study is the evaluation of the individual elements of each SEC attributes viz Search (i.e. Word of Mouth, Positive Information and Testimonial of Customers); Experience (i.e. Friendliness of Personnel, Courtesy of Personnel, and Handling of Complaints) and Credence (i.e. Best of Service, Solidness of Bank, and Very Perfect Bank). These elements used within the context of the Nigerian Banking industry, brought out clearly what the attention of customers are focused on during period of making choice(s) about the right bank to patronize. More importantly, is the combination of Credence variable with the other two (i.e. Search and Experience) which is usually left out in most studies and the fact that this variable was equally significant in the Nigerian situation as it affects the banking customers which formed the major contribution to wealth of academic knowledge in the area of customer and service quality measurements.

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Note:

* Added authors – the reason for this addition is to defray the cost of the publication

BANK CUSTOMERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A

BIO-DATA:

Instruction: Please fill as appropriate

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age: 18-25 26-40 41-55 56 and above
3. Educational Qualification: School Certificate NCE/ND
HND/B.Sc. Masters Ph.D. Others
4. Job Types: Student Civil Servant Self Employed
Others
5. Marital Status: Single Married Divorced Widowed
6. Period of Banking with your Bank:
Below 1 year 2-4years 5-7years
8-10years

SECTION B

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR PREFERENCE WITHIN CUSTOMERS' CATEGORIES USING (SEC) ATTRIBUTES

INSTRUCTION: Please tick (✓) or write your responses on the space provided from the seven options available as answers to each of the statements in the cells i.e.:

DA = Definitely Agree, GA = Generally Agree, SA = Slightly Agree, UD = Undecided, SD = Slightly Disagree, GD = Generally Disagree, DD = Definitely Disagree

STATEMENT	DA	GA	SA	UD	SD	GD	DD
Search Evaluate from others who have experienced the service in the past.							
1. Your choice of bank is based on word of mouth from an existing customer.							
2. Your bank's patronage is as a result of positive information provided by an experienced customer.							
3. Your choice of bank is based on your excellent comments by existing customers.							
4. You are patronizing/prefer your bank as a result of testimonial received from an existing customer.							
5. Friends/neighbours who have experienced the service in the past have formed a part of your decision for preference/patronage.							
Experience The actual customer's experience							
1. You are presently with your bank as a result of the friendliness of the personnel.							
2. The courtesy exhibited by your bank's personnel cannot be compared with other banks.							
3. Your complaints are handled properly and with care.							
4. You have an excellent experience with your bank.							
5. Your bank handles your complaints just in time.							
Credence These are the perceived values by the customers towards the bank's services (faith)							
1. Come rain, come shine, you believe that your bank's services are the best.							
2. No matter what happens, your bank cannot be affected negatively.							
3. Your bank is the best among all the banks around.							
4. You believe everything about your bank is perfect.							
5. Even if there is an hitch in your bank's operations, it cannot be as a result of negligence of your bank.							