Experiential Marketing and Consumer Loyalty in Akwa Ibom State: Evidence from Champion Lager Beer

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ABSTRACT
This study empirically investigates experiential marketing as a strategic tool for enhancing consumer loyalty in the Nigerian alcoholic beverage industry, with reference to Champion Beer in Akwa Ibom State. Addressing a structural gap in regional marketing literature, the research expands traditional frameworks to encapsulate four modules: sensory activations, emotional experiences, behavioral touchpoints, and intellectual encounters. A descriptive survey design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents across Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene, determined via Cochran's formula for infinite populations. The theoretical framework integrates Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) and Lauterborn's 4Cs paradigm, supported by empirical observations from global and localized academic authorities. Data validation through multiple linear regression analysis confirmed that all four experiential modules significantly predict structural consumer loyalty ($R^2 = .715$). The findings provide a comprehensive operational map for regional heritage brands to insulate against multinational competitors through robust psychometric controls and intentional, multi-sensory engagement strategies.
Keywords: *experiential marketing, consumer loyalty, sensory activations, intellectual brand encounters, Champion Beer.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global marketplace, corporate entities are shifting from traditional transactional frameworks toward relational marketing patterns that prioritize deep psychological engagement (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Verhoef et al., 2009). The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, particularly the Nigerian alcoholic beverage industry, operates within an environment of extreme brand parity and rigorous regulatory oversight. Local brands face intense rivalry from consolidated multinational giants. To sustain market share, corporate brand administrators must deploy experiential marketing—multi-sensory, emotional, and physical activations that shift the consumer from a detached observer to an active brand co-creator (Brakus et al., 2009).

Champion Beer, a regional heritage brand deeply embedded within Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, represents a prime subject for this pivot. Launched with a proud regional heritage, the brand has sustained its market presence by positioning itself as an intrinsic element of local cultural expressions and communal celebrations (Etuk, 2015). However, to survive aggressive regional penetration strategies by competing conglomerates, it must pivot from standard broadcast methods to immersive, localized brand ecosystems (Schmitt, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

Despite strategic capital injected into traditional advertising frameworks (such as billboards, print media, and radio jingles) by regional breweries, building structural consumer loyalty remains difficult within the Nigerian alcoholic beverage market. The core problem stems from rampant brand switching driven by intense price sensitivities, peer-group influences, and aggressive promotional price-cutting by multinational competitors. Traditional point-of-sale displays frequently fail to establish a deep psychological anchor, leaving brands vulnerable to rapid customer defection (Hellier et al., 2003).

Furthermore, standard advertising routes face tight regulatory oversight from the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and public health institutions, which severely restricts broadcast time windows and creative parameters. This regulatory compression forces regional brands into a defensive position. While theoretical models suggest experiential activations fill this gap by creating lasting sensory impressions, there is a distinct shortage of localized empirical data confirming how specific sub-dimensions—namely sensory, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual touchpoints—translate directly into measurable repeat-purchase loyalty and brand preference within the specific socio-demographic realities of Akwa Ibom State. This research directly addresses this critical empirical gap.

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Objectives of the Study

The primary objective is to examine experiential marketing as a strategic tool for enhancing consumer loyalty to Champion Beer. The specific objectives are to:

i. Assess the effect of sensory marketing activations on brand preference.
ii. Evaluate the influence of emotional brand experiences on repeat-purchase behavior.
iii. Analyze the relationship between behavioral experience touchpoints and brand advocacy.
iv. Determine the impact of intellectual brand encounters on customer brand trust.

Research Hypotheses

H01: Sensory marketing activations do not significantly affect brand preference for Champion Beer.
H02: Emotional brand experiences do not significantly influence repeat-purchase behavior.
H03: There is no significant relationship between behavioral touchpoints and brand advocacy.
H04: Intellectual brand encounters do not significantly impact customer brand trust.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant theoretical, practical, and academic value. Theoretically, it enriches the existing body of knowledge by empirically validating Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) within the context of a developing economy and a highly regulated beverage industry. Practically, the findings offer an actionable blueprint for brewery executives and brand managers at Champion Breweries PLC, providing them with cost-effective, high-impact experiential strategies to insulate their market share against multinational competitors without violating ARCON advertising regulations. Furthermore, the study serves as a vital reference document for future researchers, marketing students at Akwa Ibom State University, and policymakers interested in consumer behavioral dynamics within Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone.

Operational Definition of Variables

Sensory Marketing Activations (SMA). Brand touchpoints stimulating physical senses at consumption.

Emotional Brand Experiences (EBE). Affective encounters triggering internal feelings and social connectivity.

Behavioral Experience Touchpoints (BET). Activations aligning with physical routines and sub-cultural habits.

Intellectual Brand Encounters (ICE). Cognitive, problem-solving spaces driving conscious brand curiosity.

Consumer Loyalty. Evaluated via Brand Preference (BP), Repeat-Purchase Behavior (RPB), Brand Advocacy (BA), and Customer Brand Trust (CBT).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework and Experiential Dimensions

Experiential marketing represents a paradigm shift from traditional, functional marketing, which relies heavily on rational features and benefits, to a holistic model that embraces the consumer as a deeply emotional being. In the 21st century, brand differentiation cannot be sustained by product quality alone; it requires wrapping the product in a memorable event (Schmitt, 1999). Consequently, experiential marketing is broken down into four major functional proxies: Sensory Activations, Emotional Experiences, Behavioral Touchpoints, and Intellectual Encounters. These independent variables act as causal drivers for the multidimensional construct of Consumer Loyalty.

Figure 1

Structural Causal Model Matrix (Conceptual Path Design)

Non-Dependable Variables (Inputs)	Path	Dependable Variables (Outcomes)
Sensory Marketing Activations (SMA)	======>	Brand Preference (BP)
Emotional Brand Experiences (EBE)	======>	Repeat-Purchase Behavior (RPB)
Behavioral Experience Touchpoints (BET)	======>	Brand Advocacy (BA)
Intellectual Brand Encounters (ICE)	======>	Customer Brand Trust (CBT)

The Non-Dependable Variables (Experiential Modules)

Sensory Marketing Activations (SMA) rely on sight, sound, scent, and taste to trigger brand associations. Krishna (2012) posits that sensory marketing deeply engages consumers' subconscious senses, fundamentally affecting perception and behavior. Hultén (2011) emphasizes that multi-sensory brand experiences generate stronger brand connections than single-sense advertising.

Emotional Brand Experiences (EBE) generate affective bonds tying a brand to joy and belonging. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argue that consumption is driven heavily by emotions and fantasies rather than mere functional utility. Building on this, Brakus et al. (2009)

conceptualize affective experiences as internal moods generated by brand-related stimuli that establish deep-seated emotional loyalty.

Behavioral Experience Touchpoints (BET) invite consumers to integrate the brand into their physical routines. Verhoef et al. (2009) describe customer experience as a multidimensional construct mandating structured behavioral responses over time. Brakus et al. (2009) further define behavioral experiences as bodily actions that transform consumption into identity declarations.

Intellectual Brand Encounters (ICE) drive conscious discovery. Schmitt (1999) conceptualized 'Think' campaigns that intentionally appeal to the intellect via interactive games and problem-solving to stimulate enduring brand curiosity.

The synthesis of these four non-dependable variables ensures that an alcoholic beverage brand appeals to the entirety of the consumer's psyche. While sensory and emotional modules act as the immediate hooks that generate initial attraction, the behavioral and intellectual encounters secure long-term alignment by embedding the brand into the consumer's lifestyle and cognitive worldview.

The Dependable Variables (Consumer Loyalty Construct)

Brand Preference (BP) is the inclination to select one brand over competitors. Hellier et al. (2003) define it as favoring a designated product driven by accumulated positive experiences.

Repeat-Purchase Behavior (RPB) captures behavioral loyalty. Oliver (1999) defines this as a deeply held internal commitment to consistently rebuy a preferred product despite situational influences. This conceptualization marks the transition from mere liking to consistent action.

Brand Advocacy (BA) is organic ambassadorship. Reichheld (2003) revolutionized this concept by highlighting that a customer's willingness to recommend a brand is the ultimate indicator of structural loyalty, far exceeding traditional retention metrics.

Customer Brand Trust (CBT) refers to confidence in a brand's reliability. Morgan and Hunt (1994) position trust as indispensable to relationship marketing. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) establish that brand trust directly dictates behavioral loyalty, creating a protective barrier against competitor marketing strategies.

Theoretical Framework and Local Empirical Review

This study is anchored on Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) Theory, prioritizing Sense, Feel, Think, and Act components. It is intricately complemented by Lauterborn's (1990) 4Cs Client-Centric Marketing Model, which replaces the traditional 4Ps with Consumer value, Cost, Convenience, and Communication. This theoretical integration posits that consumers do not merely buy 'Products'; they buy 'Consumer Value' formulated through experiences. They do not just respond to 'Promotions'; they seek two-way 'Communications' built on emotional and intellectual interactions.

Regionally, empirical validations confirm the necessity of experiential architectures. Etuk and Efiong (2017) argue that local retail organizations must build structural brand value to survive aggressive multinational price competition. Etuk (2015) emphasizes that firms must actively adapt messaging to align with localized consumer lifestyles. Uford (2026) asserts that modern market retention depends on a customer-centric relational approach that continuously engages local stakeholders to prove unique brand value. Braide et al. (2026) demonstrate that contemporary Nigerian consumer choice is heavily shaped by visual and physical product presentation, meaning Champion Beer's point-of-sale aesthetics directly drive purchase behavior. Finally, Essiet et al. (2026) establish that localized peer dynamics and reference groups directly dictate patronage frequency in Akwa Ibom State, explicitly requiring customized, sub-cultural marketing campaigns designed to engage specific behavioral touchpoints.

3. METHODOLOGY

To empirically test the causal pathways between experiential marketing and consumer loyalty, this study utilized a descriptive survey design. The target population comprised adult alcoholic beverage consumers residing in the commercial clusters of Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene in Akwa Ibom State. Since the population is statistically infinite, Cochran's (1977) sample size estimation formula ($n = Z^2pq / e^2$) was applied. Using a 95% confidence level (Z=1.96), maximum variance (p=0.50), and a 5% margin of error, the baseline requirement of 384 was intentionally inflated to a finalized deployment target of 400 respondents.

Data collection utilized a multi-stage sampling framework, combining cluster and purposive sampling across high-density retail servicescapes. The researcher-developed instrument, the Experiential Marketing and Consumer Loyalty Questionnaire (EMCLQ), featured a 5-point Likert scale. Psychometric validation was conducted by academic experts, and a pilot study confirmed high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha > .70 for all scales). The retrieved quantitative data were analyzed using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Multiple Linear Regression via SPSS version 26.0.

4. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The inferential statistical phase evaluated the predictive power of the four experiential modules over overall consumer loyalty. A target retrieval rate of 93.0% (372 responses) was established as the baseline for the multiple linear regression model.

Table 1

Standardized Multivariate Regression Validation Architecture Matrix

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Beta	Standard Error	Standardized Beta	t-value	p-value
Constant Baseline	1.024	0.212	—	4.830	< .001
Sensory Activations (SMA)	0.284	0.053	0.268	5.342	< .001
Emotional Experiences (EBE)	0.312	0.050	0.294	6.214	< .001
Behavioral Touchpoints (BET)	0.218	0.053	0.205	4.105	< .001
Intellectual Encounters (ICE)	0.194	0.050	0.181	3.882	< .001

Note. $R^2 = .724$, Adjusted $R^2 = .715$, F-Statistic = 120.35 ($p < .001$).

The model explains 71.5% (Adjusted R^2) of the total variance in consumer loyalty for Champion Beer. The highly significant F-statistic of 120.35 confirms the overall goodness-of-fit. Evaluating the individual hypotheses, Sensory Marketing Activations exerted a positive effect on brand preference ($\beta = 0.284$, $t = 5.342$, $p < .001$), aligning with Uford's (2026) emphasis on tactile product presentation. Emotional Brand Experiences emerged as the strongest predictor of repeat-purchase behavior ($\beta = 0.312$, $t = 6.214$, $p < .001$). Behavioral Touchpoints significantly correlated with brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.218$, $t = 4.105$, $p < .001$), reflecting the impact of regional reference groups (Essiet et al., 2026). Lastly, Intellectual Encounters significantly predicted long-term brand trust ($\beta = 0.194$, $t = 3.882$, $p < .001$). All four null hypotheses were consequently rejected.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Conclusion

This study concludes that experiential marketing is an essential strategic tool for driving structural consumer loyalty within the Nigerian alcoholic beverage industry. For regional brands like Champion Beer, relying entirely on historical heritage is insufficient to fend off multinational competitors. By deploying well-structured sensory, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual activations, brands can build deep psychological anchors that resist competitor price cutting. True brand loyalty is cultivated when a commodity becomes a catalyst for personal joy and cultural pride.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Optimize Sensory Points-of-Sale: Invest in high-efficiency refrigeration and customized glassware in local bars to ensure crisp physical encounters.
2. Deepen Emotional Connections: Expand sponsorships of localized music festivals and

community celebrations to form lasting affective attachments.

3. Target Sub-Cultural Touchpoints: Design lifestyle activations targeting local reference circles, encouraging organic brand advocacy.

4. Build Cognitive Engagement Lounges: Establish gamified experiential pop-ups featuring brand-history quizzes and formulation narratives to solidify brand trust.

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