



IMPACT CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY ON CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN CUSTOMER-CENTRIC SERVICE FIRMS

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Abstract: Research Aims: investigate the impact of customer service delivery on customer relationships management in customer-centric service firms in Nigeria.

Design/methodology/approach: mixed-method research design was employed, with an infinite population size focusing on customers from 19 selected retail stores across Lagos State. The Godden (2004) model sample size was used, determining a sample size of 246. Multistage sampling techniques were utilized, and primary data was collected through structured self-administered questionnaires, face-to-face, and telephone interviews. A total of 150 questionnaires were retrieved for analysis. Standard multiple regression (SPSS version 26) was used to analyze the quantitative data, while NVivo software version 12 was used for qualitative data.

Research Findings: the output from the tested hypotheses revealed that both predictor variables significantly explained the dependent variables. The hypothesis test at a 0.05 (5%) significance level did not support the formulated hypothesis that customer service delivery has no significant relationship with customer relationship management, with $p < 0.000$. The variables jointly and significantly affected customer delivery ($r = 0.629$, Adj. $R^2 = 49\%$).

Conclusion: the study concluded that quick responses to customer needs and complaints, effective and efficient order processing, and the provision of technical support are essential components for building customer relationships.

Keywords: Customer Complaints Handling, Customer Relationship Management, Customer Patronage, Customer Service Delivery, Retail Service Provider.

Introduction

Customer service is on ensuring that service providers not only meet but also exceed customers' expectations. The retail business plays a crucial role in the economy of any nation, and its importance cannot be emphasized enough, particularly considering recent events. Retailing refers to the whole set of activities undertaken to offer products and services to clients, with the aim of meeting their specific demands (Adebayo, 2023). In order to fulfil consumer desires, it is crucial to comprehend the preferences of clients and effectively meet their needs, hence ensuring customer satisfaction and encouraging repeat purchases. Customer service refers to the various actions undertaken by retail service providers to enhance the convenience of potential customers in visiting a store or obtaining information about the retailer's offerings. The prompt completion of transactions by potential customers contributes to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Parashuraman, et al., 1994).

Customer relationship management is an ongoing activity that encompasses not only engaging with customers and comprehending their behaviour, but also organizing it in order to enable the firm to choose the most effective strategy to satisfy its clients (Abubakar et al., 2022). The main objective of customer relationship management is to ascertain the identity of each valued client and provide personalized services to them. The responsibility for customer service is solely with the retail service providers; it does not occur spontaneously. Future financially successful retail service providers will acknowledge that customer demand for their goods is not just price elastic, as shown by economists, but also service elastic (Adebayo, 2024). In addition, brick-and-mortar retail service providers have been actively involved in customizing the consumer experience in order to cultivate a loyal customer base that would often patronize their stores. This is essential as a substantial number of in-store retail consumers would prefer to buy at locations that give the normal amount of personalized attention. Consumers expect individualized offers according to their preferences. Retail businesses would find it simpler to track their customers' shopping habits, favored brands and items, and present them with rewards that are relevant to their requirements with this remarkable loyalty program. Service providers are seeking to grow closer to their clientele by leveraging information and communication technologies. This is to develop durable ties and understand more about their clientele. Companies are adopting CRM as a vital component of their company and marketing strategies owing to the adoption of specialized consumer segmentation, classification, and targeting aided by technology use and the aggressive expectations that include a customer-centric culture (Myint, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has enforced a paradigm shift in how store-based retail outlets perform customer service, with an emphasis now being on cultivating client loyalty and satisfaction. Due to these paradigm changes, owners of store-based retail establishments now have to put a higher focus on offering effective and efficient service quality in order to retain their prized clients from shopping elsewhere and to guarantee that they receive value for their money. Service providers in the retail sector, particularly those operating store-based retail outlets, view it as important to make sure that customers and front desk officers (sales officers) are in constant communication about the health precautions that customers should take while visiting their business outlets. This is essential to block or delay the pandemic's spread, which may be assisted by physical contact at retail locations. In order to stop the spread of potentially dangerous viruses, stores are now appropriately adhering to the new standard protocol, which includes limiting the number of customers in the store, having hand sanitizers available, having sales staff and customers wear face

masks, taking customers' body temperatures as they enter the store, and implementing cashless payment methods (Xu et al., 2020).

According to Grizk & Grizk (2020), the COVID-19 outbreak and the public health response had a huge effect on the international economy, and the retail business was no exception. The COVID-19 epidemic has had a severe effect on the retail industry, notably on brick-and-mortar establishments. Lockdown measures and social distance have led to changes in consumer behaviour, including changes in the things they buy and consume as well as their relationships with service providers. Another notable development during the pandemic's height is that customers no longer have to physically visit retail locations to shop; additionally, the popularity and variety of products are more evident when purchasing online as opposed to the limited assortment found in physical stores (Reibstein, 2002). When shopping online, buyers may freely and audaciously visit a number of websites before making a final selection. Customers may buy products whenever they need them owing to the internet, which also offers them the opportunity to research and contact commodities providers on their various websites (Smith, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Today's fierce competition in the physical retail sector means that providing customers with efficient, high-quality service leads to their satisfaction, which in turn guarantees their loyalty. In an effort to provide its loyal customers with goods and services that they want, a number of retail companies have shifted from product-centric to customer-centric marketing. Every customer-centric organisation must prioritize improved customer service delivery initiatives since they are the key to organisational success.

One of the challenges confronting store-based retail outlets today is the need for personalized products and services from retail outlet service providers. Customers are very particular and are always searching for that unique opportunity to own and customize their own products. As per Banwari & Walfried (1996), cited in Levy & Weitz (2012), the customer service customization approach motivates service providers to tailor their offerings to meet the specific needs of every client. To make solutions that are more intelligent and suited to the demands of their customers, retail managers must reconsider their approaches.

Palmer (2010) adds that skillfully managing the experiences of retail customers is one of the most crucial strategies to get a competitive edge and cultivate a strong customer connection. When seen from this angle, the customer experience is seen as a novel phenomenon that encourages customers to make purchases at certain establishments. Furthermore, according to research released by Oracle in 2012, 89% of customers said they would patronize a competitor's business as a result of a negative customer experience brought on by poor customer service.

Literature Review

The Customer Service Concept

Consumers are an organization's most precious resource as without them, none of its businesses can prosper. Providing exceptional customer service is one of the most important things retail organisations do since they realize it impacts the company's future orientation (Tax, et al., 2013). Kotler (2006) asserts that different people will define customer service differently depending on the circumstances. Lalonde and Zinser (1976) defined customer service as the exchanges a

company has with its customers to increase or pique their interest in making purchases of products and services. This claim makes it abundantly evident that providing helpful information to customers regarding how to use products and other services through post-purchase services is all part of providing excellent customer service, in addition to the effort made by service providers during the exchange process with customers.

Customer service has an obligation to implement a CRM in order to cultivate client loyalty via providing excellent customer service. Sam (2019). A retail company's capacity to maintain and expand its customer base is contingent upon its capacity to carry out CRM efficiently and establish a strong rapport with customers, as stated by Wirtz et al. (2016). This is the reason why offering excellent customer service is so important. According to Rinehart et al. (1998), a common reason for the integration of marketing and logistics is customer service. This claim supports the use of customer service as a unifying factor in guaranteeing that a company's highly fulfilling goods and services are delivered to the ultimate customers on schedule and in the appropriate format. This is in opposition to the theory put out by Boove and Thill (1992), which was quoted by Kanovska (2010).

According to this theory, customer service is the effort that every organisation does to ensure that its esteemed clients are satisfied. Their research also highlighted the fact that providing customer service may enhance the value of the goods that consumers buy and ultimately use. According to Buchanan (2011), providing services to consumers before, during, and after a purchase is also considered customer service. The success and achievement of this process are perceived by the staff members who are able to adapt to the different personalities of the customers. The amount of customer service provided by a company determines its potential to increase revenue and produce more sales (Adebayo, 2024a).

Furthermore, according to Ogunnaike and Ogbari (2008), customer service in service marketing is often misinterpreted as a means of resolving holdups and complaints from customers, which may eventually pave the way for disloyalty on the side of the latter when they continue to shop at the same location. The company providing the service must be able to provide value in order to attract new clients and maintain existing clientele in order to create customer satisfaction. Customers are likely to be devoted and highly happy as a result of a well-packaged customer relationship management program. Stated differently, customer relationship management influences customer loyalty by encouraging consumers to refer friends, family, and other acquaintances for in-store shopping or product and service purchases.

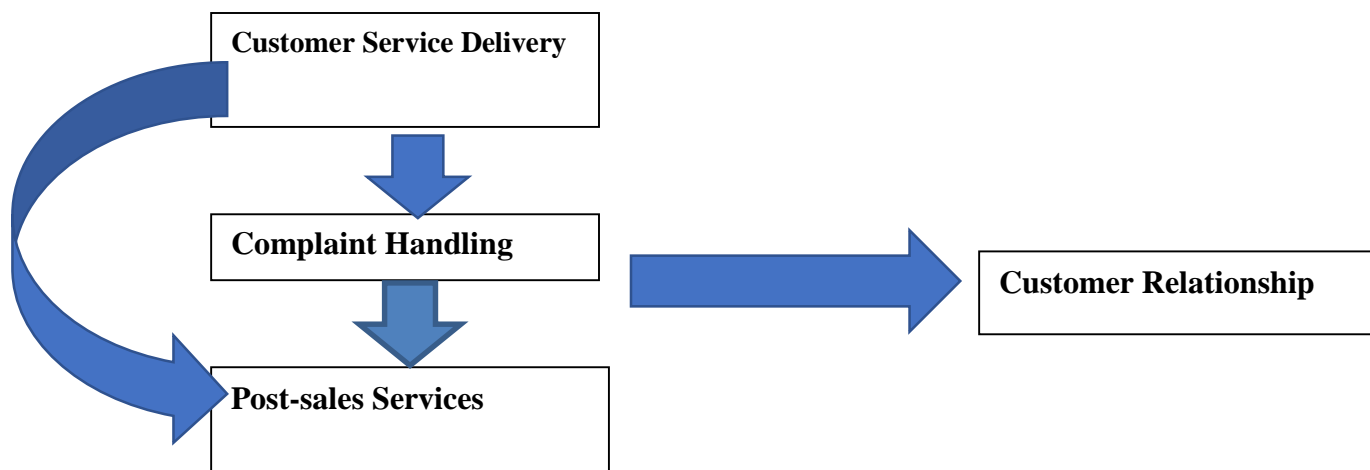
Concept of Customer Relationship

Customer relations is a marketing function that involves communicating with an organization's stakeholders. According to Coehlo and Henseler (2012), customer relationships and interactions are fundamental tools used to accomplish business goals and create a long-lasting competitive advantage that will support an organisation over the long run. A management approach called customer relationship management (CRM) combines and sets up information technology with marketing. Since its first implementation in the United States during the late 1990s, it has been widely embraced by enterprises worldwide. Conversely, some individuals have a negative opinion of CRM; among other things, they think it is difficult to implement properly and does not perform well when it comes to cost-benefit analysis.

Customer relationship management is a well-known and effective tactic for preserving and fostering a firm's relationships with clients, customers, and sales prospects in order to ensure ongoing commercial endeavors. With an emphasis on sales and marketing, customer support, and technical duties, it entails using technology to plan, manage, and automate business operations (Zamil, 2011). CRM places a higher priority on the value that businesses provide to their clients than on the goods or services they market. By using customer relationship management (CRM), businesses may establish robust ties and foster open communication with their valued clientele. This need, according to Indah and Dewi (2013), also suggests that the company will promote high-quality products and services at competitive prices and also cater to customer expectations, which might lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty.

According to Abubakr et al. (2021), the goal of customer relationship management is to enhance customer happiness, loyalty, and profitability. From this vantage point, offering them the goods and services they need is feasible. Furthermore, CRM may be quite helpful to a variety of businesses of different sizes since it directly links to the effectiveness of organizing, distributing, and developing values (Abubakr, et al., 2021).

Conceptual framework of the study



Sources: Researcher's Conceptualization, 2024

The conceptual framework model examined the impact of customer service delivery through its variables (complaint handling and post-sales services) on customer relations in selected retail businesses in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Juanamastan, et al. (2019) conducted a thorough investigation into the various factors that lead to a business's eroding reputation and dwindling customer loyalty. Their findings demonstrated the critical role that customer relationship management (CRM) plays in boosting customer loyalty and enhancing a company's corporate image. Based on a mix of observation, documentation analysis, and interviews, the study results highlight how crucial it is for businesses to maintain a favourable brand image as a strategic need for building customer loyalty and trust. This research offers significant insights into how firms may achieve long-term success and a competitive edge in the market by emphasizing the critical role that CRM plays in fostering positive customer interactions and building a positive image.

In order to better understand consumers' expectations and experiences with certain components of logistic customer service quality, Kadłubek and Grabara (2015) performed research. The research first outlined the theoretical foundations for the SERVQUAL methodology and logistics service quality. Through a subsequent presentation and analysis based on a real-world example, the study attempted to integrate theoretical ideas of logistic service quality with the actual use of the SERVQUAL approach. This study examined consumer expectations and experiences as important factors to consider when evaluating customer service within the context of commercial motor freight companies. The assessment takes into account 294 consumers' expectations and impressions of the logistic customer service offered by 147 Polish commercial cargo motor transport companies. By looking closely, the research aimed to identify the complex features of customer service quality and add to the body of knowledge on service quality in the logistics industry.

In shopping centres in Izmir, Turkey, Kursunluoglu (2011) investigated the intricate dynamics of customer service on patron pleasure and loyalty. Using a quantitative methodology, the research used a mix of in-person interviews and email correspondence to poll four hundred customers. Regression analysis was used in the study to establish a quantitative association between customer service and loyalty and satisfaction. The customer service characteristics that were discovered were found to account for 13.9% and 12.5% of the variation in loyalty and satisfaction, respectively. Additionally, the data showed that 43.2% of the variation in customer loyalty could be explained by the major contribution of customer happiness. These results highlight how vital customer service is to building long-lasting connections with consumers and how merchants must improve their customer service tactics to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. In a research Adebayo (2023) focused on the effects of atmospheric ambience on consumers' experiences in service marketing, particularly in relation to store-based retail businesses. The study's population size was unlimited since it focused on the patrons of 19 retail locations in the Lagos state metropolis and used quantitative approach as its research strategy. The Godden (2004) model sample size was utilised and 246 was established as the sample size; convenience sampling procedures were used in the research. The main data was collected using a survey approach using a questionnaire. After 246 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, 150 were eventually located and coded in preparation for data analysis. The data was analysed using SPSS version 26 and standard multiple regression. The study's result demonstrates that a retail outlet's ambience has a significant role in drawing in new customers, keeping existing ones, and improving their overall shopping experience. The study suggests that retail practitioners should focus as much as they can on ways to enhance their retail store environment. They should also work feverishly to make sure that their customers can easily access and exit the store by efficiently managing the parking lot.

In research by Teshita and Gemedi (2021), the Oromia Credit and Savings Share Company in Bule Hora, Ethiopia, evaluated the impact of customer relationship management (CRM) techniques on customer loyalty and retention. The purpose of the study was to examine how well the financial institution's operational CRM procedures increase customer loyalty and retention rates. Simple random sampling was used in a methodical manner to guarantee that the sample of customers used for data gathering was representative of the whole customer base. Using SPSS version 20, the collected data were carefully examined using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The results of the research show a strong association between the four carefully considered CRM aspects. It was unequivocally shown that CRM practices have a major influence on customers'

loyalty and retention to the business, confirming the vital role CRM plays in preserving a competitive advantage and guaranteeing customer pleasure and loyalty in the banking industry. Suleiman and Musnadi's (2018) analysis look at research that assessed how customer relationship management (CRM) methods affected customer satisfaction, which in turn affected customer loyalty at an Islamic bank in Aceh Province. The study included all of the bank's customers, with 250 people chosen at random for convenience as participants. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data, allowing for the investigation of complex relationships between variables that are apparent and hidden. The results of the research showed a good relationship between CRM activities and customer happiness as well as allegiance, with satisfaction acting as a crucial bridge to increase loyalty.

Theoretical Review

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The unpleasant sensation that arises when a person holds two competing ideas simultaneously is known as cognitive dissonance. Consumer behavior research has largely embraced the concept of cognitive dissonance because of its powerful capacity to explain customers' post-purchase suffering (Salzberger & Koller, 2010, as stated in Jamshed et al., 2021). The idea of cognitive dissonance holds that individuals are driven to either justify or explain their attitudes, beliefs, and actions or change them in order to lessen the dissonance. Festinger first described cognitive dissonance in 1957, and it has been widely accepted in the study of consumer behavior. It describes an unpleasant psychological state that develops when interactions between different cognitive aspects are inconsistent or irreconcilable (Festinger, 1957). When it comes to explaining the feeling of disquiet that customers often have after making a purchase, cognitive dissonance shows considerable explanatory power.

Festinger (1957) argues that this theory is justified by the fact that a buyer in this situation will seek to reassure himself by avoiding information sources that could contradict or undermine his purchasing confidence and behavior and by searching for information through effective customer service delivery programs to support the product or service he has chosen.

Expectancy Theory of Customer Satisfaction

The idea of customer satisfaction expectancy is based on the concept of satisfaction provided by Howard and Sheth (1969), which states that satisfaction is determined by how well expectations and perceived experiences match at a certain time. Oliver went on to expand on this concept's structure in two articles (1980). The expectancy theory states that a person's degree of satisfaction is based on the kind and intensity of disconfirmation they encounter when contrasting their expectations with the actual provision of a service (Ekinci & Sarakaya, 2004). Customers acquire goods and services based on prior notions about how effectively they would function (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001).

The expectation theory states that consumers base their selection of goods and services on their pre-purchase expectations for satisfaction and performance. The amount of customer satisfaction is determined by the degree and quantity of disconfirmation that a consumer experiences when their expectations are not satisfied by the service they actually acquire, as shown by expectation theory (Jamshed, et al., 2021). Subsequently, the degree of expectations functions as a standard by which the product is assessed; that is, results are assessed in relation to expectations as soon as the object or service is used. When the outcome is what was expected, this is confirmation. Disconfirmation occurs when outcomes do not match expectations.

Underpinning Theory: Expectancy Theory of Customer Satisfaction

The Expectancy theory of customer satisfaction served as the foundation for this research, and the notion of cognitive dissonance was added for good measure. The underlying theory's thorough explanation of customer satisfaction—especially when seen through the prism of service performance in relation to expectations—justifies its selection. This theory is more well-known than others in the field of customer satisfaction because it is dependable and strong when assessing satisfaction, especially in businesses that provide experience services.

Methodology

To analyze the influence of customer service delivery on customer relationships in a subset of store-based retail firms in Lagos State, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. For quantitative data, a self-administered questionnaire was utilized, while qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The modified questionnaire included closed-ended, structured questions to simplify analysis. Similarly, a detailed semi-structured personal interview was conducted using a pre-established interview guide for the qualitative survey. This guide was prepared in advance to ensure the researcher could ask all relevant questions about the influence of customer service delivery on customer relationships, given that the interviews were conducted with customers of selected retail shops in Lagos.

The multistage sampling strategy, which involves selecting sample respondents at various stages using multiple sampling processes, was employed. The study was conducted at all identified retail outlets in Lagos State on weekends, using availability sampling to identify consumers who were present. Purposive sampling focused on the three largest store-based retail outlets (Shoprite, Spar, and Buyrite). The final sampling method involved randomly selecting study participants through mall intercepts and distributing the questionnaire to customers of the designated retail outlets in Lagos. The use of this multistage sampling procedure noted with its bias nature has been a limitation to this study. For analysis, regression (SPSS version 26) was used for quantitative data, while NVivo software was utilized for qualitative data.

Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Customer Service Delivery

The mean and standard deviation indicated below shows there are 10 items representing customer service delivery with two dimensions (complaint handling and post sales services). All the items recorded high levels of mean score. “Customers’ patronage is aroused through immediate and instant response to technical problem encountered by the customers” recorded highest mean score ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.093$), whereas “Excellent post sales services increases the chances of retail store in building customer loyalty” recorded a lowest mean score of ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.101$) respectively. This result shows that “Customers’ patronage is aroused through immediate and instant response to technical problem encountered by the customers” is the main characteristic representing the customer service delivery in selected retail store in Lagos Nigeria.

TABLE 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Customer Service Delivery

Code	Detail	Mean	SD
Complaints Handling			
CH1	Service providers' efforts in providing immediate and quick responses to customer inquiries ensure a good customer relationship.	4.15	.908
CH2	Timely responses to customer orders and transactions by service representatives enhance customer satisfaction.	4.15	.925
CH3	Immediate and instant responses to technical problems encountered by customers arouse customer patronage.	4.16	1.093
CH4	Retail officers' ability to apologize when mistakes are made enhances customer repeat purchases.	4.09	.976
CH5	Immediate handling of complaints meets and often exceeds customer expectations.	4.11	.914
Post Sales Services			
PSS1	Efficient post-sales services contribute to customer satisfaction.	4.05	1.060
PSS2	Quickly resolving problems in the delivery or receipt of products enhances customer attraction.	4.01	1.141
PSS3	Excellent post-sales services increase the chances of building customer loyalty.	3.95	1.101
PSS4	Effective post-sales services generate positive online reviews and recommendations.	3.98	1.071
PSS5	A store's brand image and product prestige are improved through excellent post-sales services.	4.01	1.114

Sources: Field Survey, 2024

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Customer Relations

The mean and standard deviation indicated below reveal there are five items representing customer relation. All the items recorded high levels of mean score. “Customers’ perception of store that celebrate customers on their birthdays and other festive periods build loyalty” recorded highest mean score ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.153$), whereas “Customers are satisfied when service providers communicate with them through different platforms” recorded a lowest mean score of ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.153$) respectively. This result shows that “Customers’ perception of store that celebrate customers on their birthdays and other festive periods build loyalty” is the main characteristic representing the customer relation in selected retail store in Lagos Nigeria.

TABLE 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Customer Relations

Code	Detail	Mean	SD
CUR1	Effective communication between service providers and customers ensures customer loyalty.	4.04	1.134
CUR2	Stores that reward loyal customers enjoy consistent patronage.	4.05	1.116
CUR3	Customers are satisfied when service providers engage with them through multiple platforms.	4.00	1.153

CUR4	Customers build trust in a retail firm that promptly addresses complaints and negative feedback.	4.01	1.156
CUR5	Customers' perception of a store that celebrates them on birthdays and festive occasions fosters loyalty	4.07	1.153

Sources: Field Survey, 2024

Regression Analysis and Hypotheses Test between Customer Service Delivery and Customer Relations

Multiple regression analysis was conducted in determining the relationship between customer service delivery (complaints handling and post sales services) and customer relation of selected store- based retail outlets in Lagos state Metropolis.

Table 3: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.629 ^a	.510	.496	.96751	1.902

a. Predictors: (Constant), Post sale Service, Complaints Handling

b. Dependent Variable: Customer Relations

Sources: Researcher's Survey, 2024

The summary of the model presented in the table above highlights that the R-Square value is 0.510. This means that 51% of the variance in the dependent variable, which in this context is customer relations, can be accounted for by the independent variables related to customer service delivery, specifically complaints handling and post-sales services. Conversely, the remaining 49% of the variation is attributable to factors not captured by the model. Such a significant portion of explained variance suggests that the formulated regression model is effective for predictive purposes, indicating a substantial impact of the included customer service variables on customer relations.

Table 4: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.904	2	7.472	8.910	.000 ^b
	Residual	112.216	147	.839		
	Total	118.221	149			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Relations

b. Predictors: (Constant), Post sale Service, Complaints Handling

Sources: Researcher's Survey, 2024

The findings of the study of variation in customer relations were summarized in the above table, where the residual sum of squares (value of 112.216) was smaller than the huge value of the

regression sum of squares (12.904). The outcome showed that a large portion of the volatility in the operation customer relationship could be explained by the model. As a result, the estimated F-value (8.910) with a significance value of 0.000 in the table above is less than the p-value of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). This implies that changes in customer relations might be mutually influenced by the whole customer service delivery.

Table 5: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.167	.474		1.501	.000
Complain Handling	.204	.093	.172	2.206	.029
Post-sale Service	.256	.074	.269	3.416	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Relations

Sources: *Researcher's Survey, 2024*

The table's dependent variable clearly shows how customer service delivery variables—such as handling complaints and providing post-sale services—impact customer relations. This serves as a standard for analyzing the influence of the two independent variables. Specifically, Hypothesis Ha proposed that complaint handling has a positive association with customer relations. The data showed a statistically significant positive relationship between customer relations and complaint handling ($\beta = 0.204$, $t = 2.206$, $p = .029$). The conclusion indicates that customer relations are ultimately shaped by how complaints are managed, thus confirming Hypothesis Ha.

Hypothesis Hb posited that post-sale services are positively associated with customer relations. The data revealed a strong and positive link between post-sale services and customer relations ($\beta = 0.256$, $t = 3.416$, $p = .001$), supporting Hypothesis Hb at the 5% significance level. The overall summary of this regression analysis suggests that customer service delivery, particularly in terms of complaint handling and post-sale services, significantly influences the relationships between store-based retail enterprises and their customers in the Lagos State Metropolis. This indicates that the alternative hypotheses were accepted as the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, in the Lagos State Metropolis, customer service provision substantially impacts the relationships between consumers and store-based retail firms. The study's results align with the empirical findings of research by Juanamasta et al. (2019), Gbadeyan (2010), Rhamdhani et al. (2017), Venkateswaran and Sundram (2021), Nzilani et al. (2018), Kursunluoglu (2011), Adebayo (2024b) which reveals that customer service delivery has momentous influence on customer relations in retail business are indifferent to the finding of this research work.

Qualitative Analysis

Table 1: Participants' Background Information (Qualitative Interview)

S/N	Participants' Codes	Location of retail store	Years of Patronage	Date of Interview
1.	Info 1	Badagry	3 years	18 th November, 2023
2.	Info 2	Mushin	2 years	16 th December, 2023
3.	Info 3	Lekki	5 years	13 th January, 2024
4.	Info 4	Shomolu	4 years	20 th February, 2024

Source: Authors compilation, 2024

How has customer service delivery helped in building customer relationship?

Based on the interview discussions with the participants, relevant customer service delivery themes and sub-themes that relates to customer relationship emerged in **(Figure1)** as a way through which the customer service delivery can be used to build customer relationship.

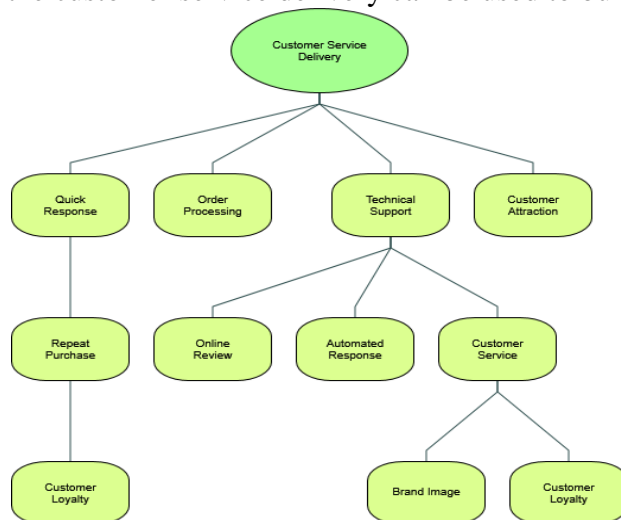


Figure 1: Thematic Representation of Customer Service Delivery

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2024

Technical Support

Retail service providers strengthen customer relationships by offering technical assistance, aiming to ensure a positive customer experience and leaving customers with a favorable impression of the store. The primary goal of technical assistance is to find quick and cost-effective solutions to any technological issues that arise before, during, or after a customer's purchase. These issues may stem from perceived or actual defects in the purchased goods or services. Therefore, to attract consumers, the retail store's technical support team must identify and address product or service issues promptly and engage with customers in a friendly and helpful manner. Retailers should

recognize the importance of product technical assistance, as academic studies (Saccani et al., 2006) show that it maximizes purchases, increases revenues, and enhances customer satisfaction.

Key elements of customer service delivery, gathered from informants 1, 2, 3, and 4, include providing technical support, processing orders efficiently, and promptly responding to customer requests and complaints. Info2, Info3, and Info1 highlighted the importance of technical support and timely resolution of customer issues, suggesting that excellent and efficient customer service is crucial for developing client loyalty through customer relationship management. Info2 emphasized that well-trained technical support representatives, responsible for quickly resolving technical issues, increase customer satisfaction and foster loyalty. Info1, Info3, and Info4 stressed the need for quick and easy order processing to build customer relationships leading to loyalty.

Buchanan and Michael (2010) define customer service as offering assistance before, during, and after a transaction, with staff adaptability to individual customer preferences being essential for success. From this perspective, retail enterprises can create stronger personal connections with customers by providing excellent customer service. A retail company with strong customer relationships is more likely to understand their needs, quickly resolve issues, and foster mutual respect and understanding.

Interview participants expressed that providing excellent customer service through prompt resolution of needs and complaints, efficient order processing, and technical support fosters positive customer relations between retail stores and their patrons.

For example, participant **INFO2** expressed thus:

“The service provider has been able to retain me due to their unsurpassed customer service programs. The firm have realized through their customer service program that satisfied customers are loyal, and loyal customers tell other customers and advertise the benefits of patronizing the retail outlet or firm. Then the quick response to customer complaint most especially when it involves technical issues or when there is incongruence with the service received by the customer have been so exemplary.”

The position of **INFO2** is in tandem with **INFO1** who affirms that;

“The retail firm management has been able to establish some successful customer service program by processing the customer orders in time and that of the other staff in ensuring that there is a good customer relationship between them and their customer.”

While supporting the statement of **INFO2**, **INFO3** their response to the question reveals that;

“The effective training being enjoyed by the employees in the modern art and science of customer service have also contributed immensely in handling customer complain by actively listening and reply with courteous and polite language and mannerism has contributed immensely in attracting more customers.”

Summary of Finding

The study aimed to explore, using a quantitative approach, the relationship between customer service delivery and customer relationships in Nigerian retail firms. The results of the multiple regression analysis, which tested the hypothesis that a service provider's customer relationship posture and effective customer service delivery are significantly correlated, revealed that customer relations are significantly influenced by sub-variables such as complaint handling and post-sale services used as proxies for customer service delivery.

Additionally, informants from the interviews stated that aspects of customer service delivery are valuable tools for enhancing and developing customer connections. They also indicated that

customer service delivery programs have a positive and significant association with customer relationship management. This suggests that if retail organizations implement a customer-oriented and effective customer service delivery plan, they can build strong customer connections that lead to customer attraction and loyalty.

Furthermore, during the interviews, informants reiterated that customer service delivery programs and customer relationship management have a positive and significant relationship. They emphasized that customer service delivery elements are essential for establishing long-lasting customer relationships, ultimately indicating that effective and efficient execution of customer service is crucial for achieving client loyalty through customer relationship management. These findings align with Gbadeyan's (2010) quantitative analysis, which examined the relationship between customer relationship management and hospital service quality in Nigeria. Gbadeyan's study found that patient interactions, personalization, and interactive management are critical components of CRM adoption in Nigerian hospitals.

Conclusion and Recommendation

According to the research, retail companies that establish a robust and customer-oriented service delivery model can build strong customer relationships, leading to increased customer attraction and loyalty. Key elements that support service quality and client loyalty include providing technical assistance, processing orders efficiently, and responding promptly to customer demands and complaints.

To attract new customers, retain existing ones, enhance brand awareness, and improve employee and customer retention, the study suggests that service providers focus on developing a customer service delivery program aimed at fostering long-lasting customer relationships. These steps include:

- Proper understanding of the expectation of the customers from the retail service providers;
- Effective, proper and clear communication with the customers;
- Quick response to customer needs and complaints
- Interaction with the customers should be personalized; and
- A feedback mechanism which should be put in place for improvement in the operation of retail services.

This study suggests that further studies could be carried out in this area by using customer satisfaction as a mediating variable while the scope of the study could be wider in term of geographical coverage than what is obtainable in this study by future researchers.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure:

We the authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest concerning the publication of this script, titled "Impact of Customer Service Delivery on Customer Relationships in customer-centric service firms in Nigeria." No financial, personal, or professional attachments prejudiced the research outcomes. All aspects of the study were conducted independently, ensuring objectivity and integrity throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

In the course of this study, the researchers guarantees that the data collected is used for the envisioned drive, respect and stand by the pledges given to the retail service providers about the privacy of certain types of data released and keep the secrecy of the respondents.

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