

Customer Relationship Marketing and its Effect on Customer Retention in Selected 5 Star Hotels in Owerri Imo State

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of relationship marketing on customers' retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state, Owerri, in a bid to achieve this, the researcher made use of a descriptive survey design. With an inestimable population and 286 respondents were selected randomly from 5 hotels for the study. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Simple regression analysis was used in analyzing the data and the study found out that relationship marketing aims to build stable customer (retention), and reduce customer exit. Thus we concluded that higher level of customer retention is associated with a higher of trust, and there is a relationship between customer retention and commitment. We therefore, recommends that to cope with competition in the market, hotels should endeavour to ensure that their old customers are happily maintained to ensure their trust and commitment .

Keywords: Customer Relationship Marketing, Effect, Retention, 5StarHotels

Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Hotels today are working in a highly competitive and rapidly changing work environment. Five-Star Hotels in Imo state on the other hand know the importance of establishing strong relationships with customers to ensure long-term profitability and sustainable core revenues. Five-Star Hotels has shown a high influence in retaining

customers or keeping relationships. In the face of slowing industry growth and the new increased competition, today's hotels are under tremendous pressure to grow organically. The terrifying competition from both traditional and modern operations and emerging marketing strategies (like guerrilla marketing) has made a large number of hotels to have trouble meeting performance expectations due to difficulties in differentiating their business, difficulties in reaching customers likely to respond positively to new sales opportunities and difficulties in making the most of their valued workers (Gyasi, 2012). Thus hotels that define and implement solution to such problems as identified above are those that will successfully compete and thrive into the future. These are the hotels that can be able to keep their main asset-customers in place such hotels therefore needs to establish good relationships with their customers so as to create a customer loyalty image that in turn will lead to their sustenance (Ndubuisi, 2007).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This study emphasizes on the effect of relationship marketing on customer retention of Five-Star hotels in Imo state. However, several problems has been that several studies on relationship marketing and customer retention has been fragmented or inconclusive. Moreso, most studies in the area has been on the service sector with very little research on trust, empathy,, bonding, reciprocity of

customers and retention. It is therefore acquired from this background that the research attempts to investigate the effect of relationship marketing on customer retention of Five-Star hotels in Imo state.

1.3.Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the effect of customer relationship marketing on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state. Specific objectives of the study include;

1. to examine the effect of trust on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state
2. to examine the effect of empathy on customers' commitment of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state
3. to ascertain the influence of bonding on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo State
4. establish the effect of reciprocity on the patronage behaviour of customers of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state

1.4.Research Questions

1. How is the effect of trust on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state?
2. What is the effect of empathy on customers' commitment of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state?
3. What is the influence of bonding on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo State?
4. What is the effect of reciprocity on the patronage behaviour of customers of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state?

1.5.Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed to guide the study

- H₀₁:** There is no significant effect of trust on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant effect of empathy on customers' commitment of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers.
- H₀₃:** Bonding with the customers has no influence on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.
- H₀₄:** There is no significant effect of relationship reciprocity on the patronage behaviour of customers of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers.

1.6.Significance of the Study

This work would be of great relevance in many ways,

To hotels, it would serve as a guide to effective understanding and management of customers towards retaining them and not only having them as customers, thus, serving as an eye opener towards improving various business practices that will aid in retaining customers. Further, it will educate or enlighten hotels on the area of concentration and expansion.

Secondly, to customers, they will benefit as the study intends to suggest measures towards effective management of customer experiences. Also, it will aid to save money on marketing; it cost significantly more to acquire a new customer than it does to retain an existing one. Save money and reduce marketing expenses by keeping your old customers who are already familiar with your products and services.

Thirdly, in relationship marketing, the most efficient advertising strategy is free word-of-mouth advertising; this is the most cost effective advertising one can have and it only comes from loyal, happy customers. Repeat customers are more likely to tell their friends and family about the business and its products. Customers are happy to tell people about excellent services they received or a product that he enjoyed.

Furthermore, previous customers pay premium prices. Long time, loyal customers are far less price conscious than new customers because they value company's products and so they are willing to pay the price for the products or services. many customers associate higher prices with products and retained customers trust of the company that can deliver this quality over competitors.

Finally, to the society at large, it will lead to positive social change

1.7.Scope of the Study

The study is delimited to effect of relationship marketing on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers. Contextually, the study is domiciled in service oriented strategies, and the independent variables; commitment, loyalty, retention, patronage, and dependent variables : empathy, bonding, trust and reciprocity. Geographically, the study will be limited to three (3) local government areas in Imo state in the South East geo-political

zone of Nigeria . The restriction will be for purposes of convenience and accessibility.

1.8.Operational Definition of Terms

Marketing: This is the management process through which goods and services move from the producer to the customer

Marketing Concept: This has to do with the identification of customers needs and wants and satisfying more profitable than competitors.

Relationship marketing: According to Kotler (2010) is the process of creating, maintaining

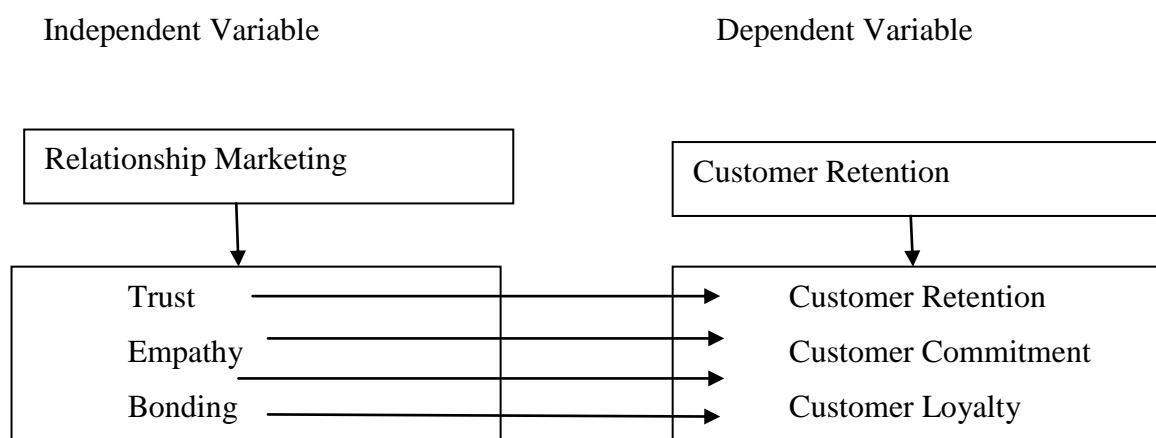
and enhancing strong value, laden relationship with customers and stakeholders.

Customer: This can be perceived as a person or company that buys goods regularly. Customer retention is the activities and actions companies and organizations take to reduce the number of customer defections.

Satisfactions: This is a function of perceived performance and expectation

Effect: This is the powerful effect that practice of relationship marketing has on the customer’s retention.

**Review of Related Literature
Conceptual Review**



2.1.Relationship Marketing

Digare et al (2012) stated that relationship marketing includes all activities directed towards the establishment , development and maintenance of exchange relationships. According to Berry et al (2013), relationship marketing is seen as company’s behavior with the purpose of establishing, maintaining and developing competitive and profitable customer relationship to the benefit of both parties. To Palmatire (2008), relationship marketing is the process of identifying, developing , maintaining and terminating relational exchange with the purpose of enhancing performance.

Ndubuisi (2007) argued that the only real sustainable business growth strategy is through a mutual symbolic relationship with customers which enables an organization to understand their needs more clearly and to create and deliver superior value.

As stated by Nguyen (2006), there have been various ways for organizations to implement relationship marketing strategies, which are

expected to have impact on customer satisfaction, retention and loyalty. In this regard, they identified varieties of strategies; service quality, price perception, value offered, compliant resolution, alternative attractiveness and so on that could be used to execute relationship marketing.

a. Goals and Strategies of Relationship Marketing

According to Cheng et al (2003), the primary goal of relationship marketing is to build and maintain a base of committed customers who are profitable for the organization. Relationship marketing seeks to identify, maintain and increase the yield from best customers through long-term, interactive, value-added relationship. It has two primary objectives, viz;

- i) Improving customer retention and
- ii) Improving the share of customers.

The objectives of relationship marketing vary with marketing situation and product life cycle. For a new product, the objective, of course is to establish the relationship. For a

mature product, i.e. a product leader or follower, different sets of objectives are needed to maintain a relationship.

b. Customer Trust

Customer trust is the faith a consumer has in a company. It shows confidence in a company's commitment to delivering on its promises and doing what's right for the customer. Morgan argue that trust is the biggest failure in the relationship between consumers and marketers . With trust in the company or brand, there are indications that customers will recommend to other customers. This belief comes from experience and hope for future behavior. Trust and commitment have an influence in creating value for customers. And trust can have an important role in building successful marketing relationships to get high customer loyalty

c. Customer Reciprocity

The Reciprocity Principle is a compelling psychological and social phenomenon applied in marketing to evoke a sense of obligation in consumers. Essentially, when we receive something — a gift, a favor, or a kind gesture — we naturally feel compelled to return the favor.. This act of giving evokes a certain obligation to return the favor and restore balance

d. Bonding

Customer bonding is, just as the term implies, the process through which a company or organization makes connections with its customers. The goal of customer bonding is to develop a relationship and sense of community, including the customers so that they: Feel welcomed. By engaging in customer bonding, companies are able to generate a sense of loyalty and boost revenue. However, along the way, they tend to find that there are a number of other benefits that come from bonding with customers. For example, getting regular customer feedback can help a company improve its products or services, thereby making them more appealing to consumers.

e. Empathy

According to Chen, et al. (2003), empathetic marketing is the practice of putting yourself in your customers' shoes to tailor your marketing to their specific wants and needs. Using empathy in your marketing is customer-centric and involves a deep understanding of who your customer is, their biggest challenges, and what motivates them to take action

2.1.2.Customer Retention

Customer retention is a metric that measures customer loyalty, or the ability for an organization to keep its customers over time. In addition to identifying the number of loyal customers, customer retention can reflect or predict customer satisfaction, repurchase behavior, customer engagement and emotional ties to a brand. Berry, et al. (2013)

While customer relationships typically begin with an initial interaction, customer retention metrics are related to the first purchase made by a customer and include all subsequent interactions. Once customer retention is measured, organizations can use this feedback to perform data analysis on components of customer experience and customer success. For example, if a drop in customer retention is reported, an organization can use this to help identify the root cause and adjust its product offerings. Customer retention is critical because the cost of acquiring new customers is much higher than retaining existing customers. Retained customers are also more likely to engage in word-of-mouth marketing or become brand ambassadors.

Customer retention refers to the ability of a company or product to retain its customers over some specified period. High customer retention means customers of the product or business tend to return to, continue to buy or in some other way not defect to another product or business, or to non-use entirely. Selling organizations generally attempt to reduce customer defections. Customer retention starts with the first contact an organization has with a customer and continues throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship and successful retention efforts take this entire lifecycle into account. A company's ability to attract and retain new customers is related not only to its product or services, but also to the way it services its existing customers, the value the customers actually perceive as a result of utilizing the solutions, and the reputation it creates within and across the marketplace

2.2.Theoretical framework

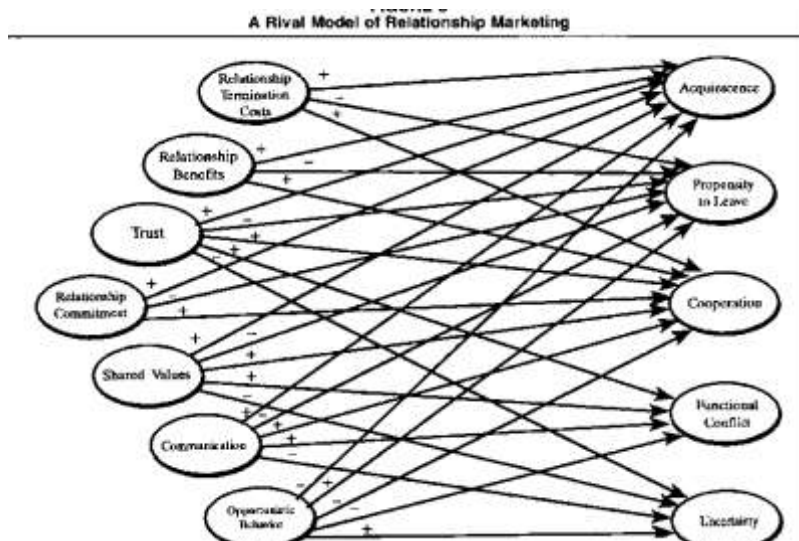
The Commitment-Trust Theory– Propounded by Thorelli (1986)

Drawing on the political economy paradigm, Thorelli (1986, p. 38) maintains, "Power is the central concept in net-work analysis" because its "mere existence" can "condition others." In

contrast, keeping in mind that roughly one-third of such ventures as strategic alliances are outright failures (Sherman 1992), we argue that what should be central to understanding relationship marketing is whatever distinguishes productive, effective, relational exchanges from those that are unproductive and ineffective—that is, whatever produces relationship marketing successes instead of failures. Though there are no doubt many contextual factors that contribute to the success or failure of specific relationship marketing efforts, we theorize that the presence of relationship commitment and trust is central to successful relationship marketing, not power and its ability to "condition others." Commitment and trust are "key" because they encourage marketers to (1) work at preserving relationship investments by cooperating with exchange partners, (2) resist attractive short-term alternatives in favor of the expected long-term benefits of staying with existing partners, and (3) view potentially high-risk actions as being prudent because of the belief that their partners will not act opportunistically. Therefore, when both commitment and trust—not just one or the other—are present, they produce outcomes that promote efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness. In short, commitment and trust lead directly to cooperative behaviors that are conducive to relationship marketing success.

A Rival Model of Relationship Marketing. Propounded by Bollen and Long(1992)

An emerging consensus in structural equations modeling is that researchers should compare rival models, not just test a proposed model (Bollen and Long 1992). The model posits that relationship termination costs, relationship benefits, shared values, communication, and opportunistic behavior—all of which have been associated with important outcomes in past research—influence their outcomes only through the key mediating variables of relationship commitment and trust. Because our extremely parsimonious model permits no direct path from any of the five variables to any outcome, it implies a central nomological status for relationship commitment and trust. A non-parsimonious rival view that is equally extreme would be one positing only direct paths from each of the precursors to the outcomes, thereby making relationship commitment and trust nomologically similar to the five antecedents. The rival model (see Figure 2), therefore, allows no indirect effects; in other words, relationship commitment and trust are not allowed to mediate any of the relationships. Although no one has theorized the rival model, it is implied by the numerous discussions and empirical studies that consider relationship termination costs, relationship benefits, shared values, communication, and opportunistic behavior to be "independent variables" directly influencing outcomes. Examples include reciprocity and patronage, empathy and commitment, bonding and loyalty.



Holistic theory – propounded by Ranaweera and Neely (2003)

Holistic theory is a concept that emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all aspects of a system or entity. It suggests that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that understanding the entire system is necessary to comprehend its parts fully.

In marketing, holistic theory is often applied to understanding the complexity of customer behavior and mental processes. Instead of reducing behavior to individual elements or components, holistic theory asserts that behavior is influenced by multiple factors, including biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors.

Holistic psychology views individuals as complex systems with unique experiences, beliefs, and contexts that shape their overall well-being. It emphasizes the importance of considering the whole person, rather than focusing solely on isolated behaviors or symptoms.

In holistic approaches to therapy, practitioners often take a comprehensive view of their clients' lives, considering various aspects such as relationships, lifestyle, beliefs, and environment. By addressing the interconnected nature of these elements, therapists aim to promote healing and growth on a deeper level. Overall, in relation to the study holistic theory highlights the importance of understanding systems as a whole, rather than focusing on isolated parts. It recognizes the complexity and interconnectedness of individuals and systems and seeks to promote a more comprehensive understanding of behavior and well-being. Hotels should look at whole aspect of their customers, in monitoring their behavior generally , business environment and attitude of the organization towards their customers to obtain a holistic result(retention).

Conversion theory – Propounded by Richard (1996)

Conversion theory is a concept in psychology that refers to the process by which individuals change or adopt new beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. This theory is often applied in the study of religious conversion, where individuals may undergo a significant transformation in their beliefs and practices.

Conversion theory posits that conversion is a multi-stage process that involves various psychological, social, and environmental

factors. This process typically includes stages such as pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

Some key factors that may influence the likelihood of conversion include social influence, cognitive dissonance, emotional experiences, and personal motivation. Additionally, the individual's background, personality traits, and social support system can also play a significant role in the conversion process.

Relating to the study, conversion theory provides insight into how individuals may undergo significant changes in their beliefs and behaviors, and helps marketers and researchers understand the various factors that contribute to such transformations. Thus, firms ought to know the various factors affecting the well being of their customer to achieve retention.

2.3. Empirical Review

Researchers have conducted research on customer retention in which several researchers use trust, communication, and conflict handling factors. Researcher Cohen et al (2017) examines the influence of marketing relationship on retention in Nigeria hotels. Survey research design was used for data collection, linear regression analysis was employed. The result obtained showed that trust and commitment affect customer retention .

Benneth (2020) in an empirical investigation, examined the effect of customer relationship marketing on customer retention in the Nigerian banking sector with particular focus on Guaranty Trust bank plc Lagos. The study surveyed 400 respondents. Spearman rank correlation with the aid of statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 were employed to test the hypotheses. The results of the analysis showed that customer relationship marketing indices of conflict handling and trust had positive influence on customer retention.

Bose, (2002) examined customer relationship marketing and customer retention assessment from Nigeria's insurance industry in Lagos. The population was 35 insurance companies that were randomly selected from the directors of member company. Multiple regression was employed to test the hypotheses. The study found that customer relationship marketing indices (value offer) positively influence

customer retention in the Nigeria's insurance industry and helps in creating values for insurance populace in Nigeria

Digare, Linus & Caleb (2018) in their empirical evidence, wrote on the effect of relationship marketing on customer retention and loyalty in Nigeria money deposit banks. The study population was one thousand two hundred (1200) respondents. The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression from the findings of the study value offer and trust have positive impact on both customer retention and loyalty.

Gyasi and Beauty (2012) examined the impact of customer relationship marketing on customer retention: the perspectives of customers of access bank Ghana. The population of the study was two hundred (200) respondents. SPSS version 21 was employed for hypotheses testing and the findings of the research showed that there exist a positive relationship between customer relationship marketing and customer retention. Also trust was the variable that influenced customer retention.

Olufeme and Godbless(2016) in their empirical evidences investigated the impact of customer relationship marketing on customer retention in Nigeria. Survey research design was employed for gathering of data, four hundred and twenty (420) respondents were used for the study. Multiple regression was used for the analysis. The result established a positive significant relationship between customer, relationship marketing and customer retention. Also, customer relationship marketing in the banking industry is imperative for capital adequacy, earnings, profitability and liquidity.

Chen et al. (2017) reveal that the attributes of price and discount, personal selling and customer relationship have significant impact on likelihood of customer retention, satisfactory price and discounts are a necessary attribute to support the likelihood of customer retention, and satisfactory personal selling is the most important attribute for increasing the likelihood of customer retention.

Chang & Zhang (2016) found that an offline (retail-store) channel can be used to migrate customers from an inactive state to an active state, effectively serving the purpose of —education‖ or —revival,‖ whereas an online channel is most effective in keeping the

existing active customers active, thus serving the purpose of —retention‖. Vogel & Paul (2015) show that channel-based price differentiation positively affects customers through perceived value but harms retention through price unfairness and limited self-determination. The result showed that there is a strong relationship between switching costs and customer retention behavior, service plan complexity, reflecting price and wireless service usage, and handset sophistication can increase switching costs, which are positively related to customer retention behavior

Tamuliene & Gabryte (2014) showed that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between factors identified in the theoretical model: customer satisfaction, relationship quality, switching costs and customer retention. Customer satisfaction has a significant effect on customer retention.

Osakwe & Anaza (2018) also extend past findings by theoretically integrating firm size as a segmentation tool used to further evaluate the role of marketing resources on organizational performance and confirm that enterprise size is a significant moderator when explaining the relationship between customer retention orientation and e-brand promotion.

2.4.Summary of and gap in the literature

The adoption of practices and strategies aimed at strengthening relationship with customers to enhance retention has been recognized by five-star hotels in Imo state. However, not much may have been done regarding the application of customer relationship marketing in this sector, to ascertain whether such practices and strategies will achieve the overall goals of strengthening relationship/retention as observed from the studies reviewed. Having noticed this gap, the researcher intends to reduce such through this study by examining the relationship marketing and customer retention.

Methodology

3.1.Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design to ascertain the structure of the study problem and its objectives, as it also offers a quick, accurate and efficient way of securing information from a segment of people.

3.2.Sources of Data

The study exclusively used primary source(questionnaire) to generate its data that were used to analyze and achieve the objectives of the study

3.3.Population, Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

There are numerous customers of Five-Star hotels in Owerri. The researcher was not privy to know exactly the number of customers within the studied area, thus the population of the customers was not quiet ascertain. However, the researcher made use of Wapole 1974 sampling technique to achieve a sample size of 286 customers out of the five randomly selected Five –Star Hotels .

3.4.Instrumentation

The researcher used a structured questionnaire to extract response from the respondents. The researcher administered 286 copies of the questionnaire by personal contact with the customers and collected them back immediately after completion. The essence of collecting it immediately was to avoid losing any copy of the instrument and ensuring that the questionnaire is properly filled and ready to be used for analysis. This method of administration is expected to give a high return rate

3.4.Validity of the Instrument

To ascertain the authenticity of the research instrument, two copies of the instrument was made available to two experts in the department of Marketing and one expert from the department of Measurement and Evaluation Imo State University for their inputs. Their inputs was incorporated in the questionnaire before the copies of the questionnaire were administered on respondents.

3.5.Reliability of the Instrument

Cronbach Alpha method was used to ascertain the reliability status of the research instrument. Twenty copies of the questionnaire was administered to 20 customers Five-Star Hotels using a test-retest method. The data obtained was used to compute for reliability.

3.6.Method of Data Analysis

Personal data of respondents was analyzed using frequency count and simple percentages. A simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the first, third and fourth hypotheses and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was adopted to test the second hypotheses. All hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

3.7.Test of Hypothesis

The test of hypotheses was done hypothesis by hypothesis; in order to test the hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows;

consumer empathy, relational trust, relationship bond, relationship reciprocity. This can be expressed in the form of an equation as follows:

$y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4)$ equation 1

Where

y = Customer Retention

x₁ = Relational Trust

x₂ = Empathy

x₃ = Relationship Bond

x₄ = Relationship Reciprocity

Therefore; $y = a_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + b_4x_4 + e_t$ equation (2)

Where,

y = Customer Retention

a₀ = Intercept (Constant)

b₁ = Level of influence of relational trust on citizenship behavior of Nigeria Bottling company customers

b₂ = Level of influence of empathy on customer commitment

b₃ = Level of influence of relationship Bond on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state

B₄ = Level of relationship Reciprocity on customers' patronage behaviour

e_t = Error term

The above estimated equation is a linear function which was used in testing the model separately and jointly.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, a presentation and analysis of data collected from the field is done. The analysis formed the basis for addressing the research questions as well as accepting or rejecting the hypotheses of the study, thus in this chapter, data presentation and analysis,

interpretation, test of hypotheses and discussion of findings are presented.

4.1.Data Presentation**Table 1: Questionnaire Administration and Response rate**

Consumers of Five-Star Hotels in Owerri West Axis	No.of Questionnaire Administered	No. of Questionnaire correctly filled and retrieved	Percentage %
Protea Hotel	71	60	92
Diamond Castle Hotels	72	72	100
Aify Queenest Hotel	72	72	100
6A Resort Ltd	71	60	92
Total	286	264	96

As indicated on Table 1, a total of two hundred and eighty six (286) copies of questionnaire were administered within three weeks, to customers of the selected Five-Star hotels in Owerri Imo state, two hundred and sixty four (264) copies were retrieved and found useful. This represents a response rate

of 96 percent . This was considered adequate based on the sample size chosen for this study. These data were coded and analyzed using statistical for social sciences (SPSS version 22).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender		
	Male		54.1
	Female		45.9
	Total	264	100
2	Ages (years)		
	Under 20		8.1
	20-30		44.3
	31-40		26.8
	41-50		15.4
	51-60		5.4
	Total	264	100
3	Marital Status		
	Single		50.00
	Married		46.8
	Divorced	12	3.2
	Total	264	100
4	Education		
	SSCE		25.1
	OND		18.9
	HND/B.Sc		38.7
	MSc/MBA		14.3
	Ph.D		3.0

	Total	264	100
5	Occupation		
	Students		39.73
	Businessmen		20.54
	Public servant		24.59
	Professionals		15.14
	Total	264	100
6	Years of Patronage		
	1-5		37.6
	6-10		35.4
	11-15		17.0
	16-20		7.6
	21-25		2.4
	Total	264	100

Table 2 shows that 54.1 percent of the respondents were males while 45.9 percent were females. Thirty (30) respondents representing 8.1 percent were under 20 years of age, one hundred and thirty four (134) respondents representing 44.3 percent were in the age range between 20 and 30 years. Also, fifty four (54) respondents accounting for 26.8 percent were in the age bracket of 31 to 40 years while forty six (46) respondents representing 15.4 percent belong to the age range between 41 and 50 years and above.

Table 2 also shows that 50 percent of the respondents were single, 46.8 were married while 3.2 percent of the respondents were divorced.

Table 2 equally indicates that 25.1 percent of the respondents were holders of SSCE, 18.9 percent had OND while 38.7 percent of the respondents were holders of HND and B.Sc. similarly, 14.3 percent and 3 percent of our respondents were holders of MSc/MBA and Ph.D respectively.

In the same vein, Table 2 reveals that 39.73 percent of our respondents were students, 20-

54 percent were businessmen while 24.59 percent and 15.14 percent were civil servants and professionals respectively.

Table 2 further disclosed that 37.6 percent of respondents has spent between one (1) and five (5) years with these hotels, 35.4 percent has been with these hotels between 6 and 10 years while 17 percent of the respondents has maintain accounts with these hotels for a period of time ranging from 11 to 15 years.

Also, 7.6 percent of respondents have spent between 16 and 20 years with these hotels while 2.4 percent has been in a relationship with these hotels for a period ranging between 21 and 25 years.

4.2. Test of Hypotheses Hypothesis One

Ho₁: There is no significant effect of trust on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.

Table 3: Result of PPMC correlation between customers trust and customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state

	Customer Trust	Customer Retention
Customer Trust- Pearson Correlation	1	.424**
Sig. (2 - tailed)		.000
N	264	264
Customers Retention	.424**	1
Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000	
N	264	264

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 -tailed)

Table 3 shows a correlation (r) value of 0.424 which means that the independent variable is positively correlated with customer retention of Five-Star hotels. Because of the positive value of r, direction is the same, that is, as one increases, so also does the other. With a p-value of .000 which is less than the level of significance of 0.05 (2-tailed, the null

hypothesis is rejected. The result indicates that there is a positive significant effect of customer trust on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: There is no significant effect of empathy on customers' commitment on Five-Star hotels in Imo State

Table 4: Result of PPMC correlation between empathy and customers' commitment

	Empathy	Customers' Commitment
Empathy- Pearson Correlation	1	.523**
Sig. (2 - tailed)		.000
N	264	264
Customer Commitment	.523**	1
Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000	
N	264	264

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 -tailed)

The correlation (r) value of 0.523 was obtained as shown in table 4. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the level of significance of 0.05, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is a positive significant effect of empathy on customers' commitment Five-star hotels in Imo State. This result implies that the higher the

company's empathy the higher the customer commitment.

Hypothesis Three

Ho₃: Bonding with the customers has no influence on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.

Table 5: Result of PPMC correlation between bonding with the customers and customer loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers

	Bonding with the customers	Customers' loyalty
Bonding- Pearson Correlation	1	.370**
Sig. (2 - tailed)		.000
N	264	264
Customers' loyalty	.370**	1
Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000	
N	264	264

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 -tailed)

Table 5 shows a correlation (r) value of 0.370 obtained as shown indicates a positive rank

correlation between bonding with the customers and customers' loyalty of Five – Star hotels in Imo State. Direction is the same, as increase in bonding with customers

increases customers' loyalty. However, since the p-value of .000 is less than the level of significance of 0.05. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant influence of bonding with the customers and customer loyalty.

Hypothesis Four

	Reciprocity	Patronage behavior
Reciprocity-Pearson Correlation	1	.424**
Sig. (2 - tailed)		.000
N	264	264
Patronage Behavior	.424**	1
Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000	
N	264	264

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 -tailed)

Table 6 shows a correlation (r) value of 0.424 which means that the independent variable is positively correlated with patronage behavior of customers. Because of the positive value of r, direction is the same, that is, as one increases, so also does the other. With a p-value of .000 which is less than the level of significance of 0.05 (2-tailed, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result indicates that there is a positive significant effect of relationship reciprocity and patronage behavior of customer of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state. The result implies that the higher the company's reciprocity to customers' need, the higher the customers' patronage on their service.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings are as follows:

The study revealed that there is a correlation (r) value of 0.424 which means that the independent variable (trust) is positively correlated with customer retention of Five-Star hotels. Because of the positive value of r, direction is the same, that is, as one increases, so also does the other. The strong found a strong significant relationship between empathy and customer commitment with a correlation (r) value of 0.523 as obtained in table 4.

As shown from the result of hypothesis three, the study revealed a strong significant

Ho₄: There is no significant effect of relationship reciprocity on the patronage behaviour of customers of Five-Star Hotels in Imo State.

Table 6 Result of PPMC correlation between relationship reciprocity and patronage behavior of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers

relationship between bonding and customer loyalty, a correlation (r) value of 0.370 obtained as shown indicates a positive rank correlation between bonding with the customers and customers' loyalty of Five – Star hotels in Imo State. In hypothesis four, there is a positive relationship between reciprocity and patronage behavior of customers of five-Star hotels in Imo state as it shows a correlation (r) value of 0.42

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Summary of Findings

In this study, an investigation on the effect of relationship marketing on customer retention, a case of Five-Star Hotels in Imo State was undertaken. Four concepts of relationship was outlined namely; trust, bond, empathy and reciprocity as the focus of the study. Questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection.

Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested using simple regression and Pearson Moment correlation analyses. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the four hypotheses tested were as follows.

The first null hypotheses stated that there is no significant effect of customers trust on citizenship behavior of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers. The result of the correlation showed a coefficient, r of 0.0424

between customers trust on citizenship behavior of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers. The result indicates a significant positive influence of customer trust on citizenship behavior of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state customers.

The second null hypothesis stated that there is no significant effect of empathy on customers' commitment of Five-Star hotels. From the result analysis of simple correlation test gave a coefficient of 0.523 which indicates that there is a significant effect of empathy on customers' commitment of Five-Star hotels.

The third null hypothesis stated that bonding with the customers has no influence on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state. The result of the analysis showed a coefficient of 0.370 indicating bonding to have a significant effect on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.

The fourth null hypothesis stated that there is no significant effect of relationship reciprocity on the patronage behavior of customers of Five-Star hotels. Finding showed coefficient of 0.424 which is a confirmation of a significant effect of relationship reciprocity on the patronage behavior of customers of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.

5.2. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is obvious that trust, bond, empathy and reciprocity relationship strategies have played significant roles in improving customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.

The empirical results of the study clearly underscore the following;

- i. there is significant positive influence of trust on customer retention of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state .
- ii. it was established that there is a significant effect of empathy on customers' commitment of Five-Star hotels.
- iii. it was seen that bonding have a significant effect on customers' loyalty of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state.
- iv. there was a confirmation of a significant effect of relationship reciprocity on the patronage behavior of customers of Five-Star Hotels in Imo state

5.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

management of these hotels should place more emphasis on reciprocity dimension of relationship marketing as it covers the bilateral contingency, interdependence for mutual benefit and equity of exchanged value aspects of social action between two individuals

Management also should sustain their efforts in providing effective and efficient means to meet the changing needs of their customers Also they should minimize service failures in order to boost customer confidence and satisfaction which is a trust booster.

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