

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dimensions of Service Delivery and Customer Patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo Metropolis

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of service delivery dimensions on customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. It adopted, service responsiveness, service reliability and service empathy as proxies of the independent variables (service delivery dimensions) and customer patronage was used as dependent variable. Descriptive survey research design was adopted and the population of the study followed the 2015 estimated (413,381 people) as the population of Uyo metropolis. Taro Yamane formula was used to realize a sample size of 400. However, 369 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved from the passenger of (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis who were the respondents of the study. Questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. Demographic data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Model was used as the data analysis technique to test the three hypotheses. In order to actualize the objectives, the hypotheses were tested and major findings revealed that; there were positive and significant relationships between all the three proxies of services delivery dimensions (service responsiveness, service reliability, and service empathy), and customers' patronage of AKTC in Uyo metropolis. In conclusion, there is a relationship between service delivery and customers' patronage of AKTC in Uyo metropolis. The researchers recommend that customer service providers at AKTC should develop empathic customer service strategies that will delight special customers. Furthermore, they opined that the management of the company should supervise the customer service personnel closely so that anyone who does not have good customer relationship skills is taken off from that department.

Keywords: Service Delivery, Customer Patronage, Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC), Uyo Metropolis.

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INTRODUCTION

The success and longevity of any firm, especially one in the transportation sector, depends on customers' patronage. It is one of the crucial indicators used to gauge loyalty. Sequel of this, it is an important component of company strategic planning. Customers' patronage is like a blissful feeling after service is rendered successfully.

Customers have certain expectations about how well services would function before making a decision. Customers might be considered happy and pleased if the service fulfills or surpasses their expectations (Honorato, 2016).

On the other side, it might be claimed that people are unsatisfied when actual performance does not live up to or is inferior to their expectations. Businesses are aware that although one happy customer will tell five people about their opinions of their goods and services, one unhappy customer will tell ten people about their negative experiences, which will damage their reputation with both current and potential consumers (Akpan and Uford, 2023).

Furthermore, one of the main economic contributors is transportation. Therefore, manufacturers, suppliers, industrial users, and individual commuters, transport aids in

bridging the gap. Hence, without a transport management system, the entire economy will experience stagnation (Adeniran, 2018). By definition, transportation is the process of delivering products and services to a specified location via pipeline, air, water, and land. The movement of people and products from one place to another is how Nwachukwu (2014) described transportation.

Therefore, protection of passengers from harm and other hazards while they are in the facilities of service providers and while being transported to their final destinations is referred to as the condition of passenger safety. Consequently, every passenger needs smooth transportation, skilled driving, and timely service which have an impact on their degree of patronage (Nwachukwu, 2014).

Nevertheless, most businesses in Nigeria's public road transport industry frequently neglect to include these service quality aspects in their delivery procedures, which puts customers through a great deal of pain and other unpleasant travel experiences. Customers gradually assess the value that service providers contribute quality service delivery to their offerings. The five aspects of service; tangibility, reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness are highly connected with customers' patronage and make a significant contribution to it (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Hence, the researchers' interest is to investigate both concept in the Nigerian context and using AKTC.

Statement of the Problem

The productivity of the service sector fuels the economic expansion of the majority of industrialised nations. The Nigerian transport industry is service-oriented; however, this sub-sector of services is affected by issues including poor roads, insufficient deployments of buses or trucks, absence of an interstate transportation connection and so on.

The lack of properly skilled transport managers and planners, capital restructuring delays, significant problems with institutional changes, and inadequate traffic rules are further factors that affect transportation. Consequently, there is need to assess these variables and their impacts on customers' patronage.

From the forgoing, most passengers have switched to doing business with a competitor as a result of poor customer experience. This is due to the fact that customer expectations of service fell short of the actual service they received. Therefore, they are likely to share their tragic experiences following their encounter with that particular organization to people around them.

This lack of professional service managers, is one of the biggest challenges Nigerian transportation companies face. Sequel to the above, and based on the fact that all the researchers are part of the AKTC's customer base, their collective interest was aroused to examining the relationship between AKTC service delivery, being the closest most structured transport company within Akwa Ibom State, and its customers' patronage within Uyo metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to access service delivery and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. Specific objectives include.

- To examine the relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.
- To examine the impact of service reliability on customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.
- To examine the extent to which service empathy affect customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

Statement of Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Service Delivery

Service is frequently viewed as beneficial to the customer. It entails being accommodating to the point where you are willing to provide anything and is always polite. Customers' expectations start to rise at this point since the business frequently makes promises that are too good to be true and claims to provide a service to a particular extent.

When customers' expectations don't match what can or will be provided, the service is poor, and the client is unsatisfied. A service may also be defined as a type of economic activity that is intangible and doesn't entail storing the goods that are purchased or changing ownership (Etuk, Uford and Udonde, 2018).

According to a business dictionary, when you perform a worthwhile activity, action, or effort to fulfill a customer's wants or demands, you have rendered a service. Service delivery is the process of giving clients a service. Moreover, from the viewpoint of the business, Rashid, Ngalawa and Colona (2016) describe service characteristics as.

- Services are variable/ heterogeneous unlike a product; a service varies in the way it can be offered. A product can be offered in the same standard and with the same attributes but this is not the same for a product since services are produced and consumed there and then and it is quite complex to deliver at the same standards due to uncontrollable irregularities.
- Services are intangible; this means that they cannot be touched, they can only be felt and the feeling is usually judged as patronage or dissatisfaction.
- Services have a short span that is perishable. We can only measure them after they are used; this leads to scarcity since the demand is mostly higher than the supply.

Concept of Customers' Patronage

Customers' patronage has been a subject of great interest for organizations and several researchers because customers are key stakeholders in organizations and their patronage is a priority for sustainable growth (Abel, 2013).

According to the business dictionary, it is a customer's level of acceptance when comparing a product's perceived performance with customers' expectations. It also could be referred to as a fulfilment of an entitlement. While patronage is sometimes associated with performance, it also suggests compensation or substitution whereas performance represents delivering exactly or more than what was promised.

Significant customers' patronage heavily depends on the communications with a customer, the promises made during these conversations as the customer's expectations are generated then and the actions are taken in consistency with those expectations combined to produce a declaration of patronage (Uford, Charles & Etuk, 2022). Therefore these encounters must be managed proactively.

According to Akpan (2023), customers' patronage is a customer's after-purchase judgment on a product or a service performance that can, be measured by assessing customer evaluation of performance on specific attributes while Oliver (1999), explains the concept of customers' patronage as consumer's sense that consumption offers outcomes against a standard of pleasure versus displeasure.

According to Lee, Kim, Yong and Michael (2011) stated that satisfied customers are a great source to increase profitability. That is because satisfied customers are likely to commit to the service organization and have better social interaction with service providers, while dissatisfied customers complain more and repurchase less. Keiningham, Aksoy, Andreassen, Cooil, Wahren, (2006) have also described the above concept in different terms but with the similar meaning, patronage with a service or service provider may be a strong incentive for customers to maintain or increase their current retention rate, dis-patronage with a service or service provider may be a strong incentive to exit from the interaction.

The term customers' patronage is used by organizations to express that the products or services offered either meet or exceed what their customers expect. Uford, Effiong, and Charles (2003) describe customers' patronage as the post-consumption judgment, connected

with the purchase decision and the customer tends to come back again for the purchase.

Moreover, Oliver (1999) argues that customers' patronage is a psychological behaviour in action. Customers' patronage has proven itself to be a progressively important element for a business to succeed and this is arguably more so about the logistics industry.

Serqual Model or Dimensions

Accordingly, Parashuraman, *et al.* (1985) and other authors have made notable contributions to understanding service marketing. There are five customer service characteristics that customers use to evaluate service quality and these are as follows:

Reliability

"A trustworthy product (good) performs what the user wants it to do, when the user wants it to do it," Condra (2001). It is one of the most significant components of operation for customers. Reliability has an impact on trust and the overall impression left in the mind of a customer after service consumption (Abd-El-Salamal, Shawky and El-Nahas, 2013).

Again, it assures the customer of a service provider's ability to consistently provide a perceived quality of service (Etuk, Uford and Udonde, 2023). Buttressing the latter point, Omar, Saadan and Seman (2015) listed the following attributes in the reliability dimension that can make customers recognize the consistency and credibility; accurate delivery service, complete order service, and company being truthful about its offerings.

Singh (2013) refers to three important factors of reliability which include (a) Accessibility (b) Continuity (c) Performance. Accessibility is the most important aspect which means that the service is available whenever it is required and desired. Continuity means that the service continues to be available and up to the required standards. The main tenancy of standards is imperative for adhering to the continuous factor.

If the service is not continuously reliable, there is a chance that customers will not trust its reliability and will switch to other providers. The third factor refers to performance; it includes high-quality delivery

and exceeding the customers' patronage thus gaining their loyalty (Uford and Duh, 2021).

Empathy

In today's service settings, empathy has gained the attention of both service and marketing researchers (Agnihotri and Krush, 2015; Bagozzi, 2006).

In the service literature, empathy is the caring and personalized attention the organization provides for its customers. Such attention results have positive customer emotions toward the service brand (Lee *et al.*, 2011); the sense that it makes the customer feel exceptional and extraordinary (Madumere, Emeti, Agu and Nwaizugbo, 2020). On the contrary, lack of empathy or inability to understand the other's perspective damages any service encounter and results in customer dissatisfaction (Agnihotri and Krush, 2015).

Again, Research confirms that empathy involves cognitive as well as emotional dimensions (Jones and Shandiz, 2015). From a cognitive perspective, empathy is the service employee's potential to take the customer's view through understanding their mind, thoughts, and intentions (Daniels, Glover and Mellor, 2014). Regarding the emotional viewpoint, empathy relates to employees' capability to involve in helpful actions toward customers, such as interpersonal concern and emotional contagion (Mayshak, Sharman, Zinkiewicz and Hayley, 2017).

Philip Kotler and Armstrong, (2013), outlined the attributes of empathy to include the following:

- Giving customers individual attention
- Having the customer's best interest at heart.
- Convenient business hours.
- Employees who deal with customers in a caring fashion
- Employees who understand the needs of their customers.

Empathy brings extra value to the customers and they feel a sense of ownership for the service. In an attempt to develop empathy, personnel of the firm should endeavour to know the names of their customers, their

preferences and needs and take steps to gratify them (Iddrisu, Nooni, Fianko, Mensa, 2015). In the transport firm, therefore, regular customers feel exceptional when they feel recognized by the staff and treated courteously and politely.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness is the determinant that defines the willingness to help customers and provide prompt services. It is the desire and willingness to assist customers and deliver help service. It involves features such as the opening hours of the service provider, the politeness of the employees and the time the customer has to wait in order to get the service. In other words, it describes how quickly and effectively the response to the customer is.

Willingness to help customers is likely to have an important and positive effect on how customers perceive service and Customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company. Mengi, (2009) also found that responsiveness is positively related to service delivery and customers' patronage. It also involves understanding the needs and wants of the customers, convenient operating hours, individual attention given by the staff, attention to problems and customer safety in their transaction.

According to Kotler *et al.*, (2013) Attributes of Responsiveness includes:

- Keeping customers informed as to when services will be performed
- Prompt service to customers.
- Willingness to help customers.
- Readiness to respond to customers' requests.

Grandey, Goldberg and Pugh (2011) looks at responsiveness as a central dimension of service the quality which becomes the responsiveness of employees to attend to customers' needs, and requests and help customers promptly.

Assurance

The assurance construct consists of competence (possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service, and courtesy (consideration for the customer's property, clean and neat appearance of public

contact personnel). Credibility and security of the employee and inspire trust and confidence. The Assurance Quality Dimension is related to the attitude, personality, and way of talking of service providers. It can be sales, representatives, or any employee who deals with the customer directly or indirectly. If a company representative fails to comply with customers' expectations and service quality, most probably the client will not return in the future (Richey & Daugherty, 2007).

Service providers are expected to be the experts in the service they're delivering. SERVQUAL research showed it's important to communicate their expertise to customers. If a service provider is highly skilled, but customers don't see that, their confidence in that provider will be lower and their assessment of that provider's service quality will be lower.

Therefore, service providers must communicate their expertise and competencies before they do the work. This can be done in many ways that are repeatedly seen by customers, such as displaying industry certifications on patches, badges or buttons worn by employees including certification logos on emails, letters and reports and putting certifications into posters, newsletters and handouts. By communicating competencies, providers can help manage customer expectations and influence their service quality assessment in advance (Richey & Daugherty, 2007).

Tangibility

In marketing and management principles, services are intangible while goods are tangible in nature. "Tangibility is the degree to which a product or service portrays its clear concrete image and intangibility is lack of physical evidence (Etuk, Uford & Udonde, 2023). Furthermore, it includes equipment, staff, physical facilities, products, and appearance. This evidence provides clear indicators for customers' to determine the service provider's capabilities. Thus, this makes intangibility an important issue to be resolved in order to create the right perception in customers' mind space and sustain it over a period of time.

This requires a transition from intangibility to tangibility. In vain of doing this, most texts in marketing suggest that service

providers should use tangible cues as well as by developing a robust corporate image.

Challenges Faced by Transportation Companies in Service Delivery

Building a Relationship with Customers

According to Zikmund and Babin (2010), an important function that marketing research can perform is the surveillance of the competition posed in the business environment for leads that could indicate a possible business opportunity. In some instances, these forms of research can provide motivation in order to fulfil consumer desires to the benefit of the firm as well as consumers (Zikmund and Babin, 2010).

Furthermore, there are some key areas in which organisations must work towards so as to exceed customer expectations and these are gaining knowledge of the customer base, determining what the customer expectations are, keeping customers informed of the level of service offered, being able to live up to the created expectations and by being consistent rendering a high level of service consistently.

According to Theron, Bothma and du Toit (2003), delivering good customer service entails communicating with customers, welcoming customers when speaking to them, demonstrating effective ability to manage the overall service experience while being able to handle difficult situations with class, displaying the ability to manage a service-driven team and more importantly being able to transform the whole team into a customer service oriented team.

Creating a Customer Retention Programme

According to Harris (2014), developing a customer-retention programme is beneficial in order to retain current customers can be achieved by examining the customer base and what specific needs they have, identifying specific objectives to be realised by the program, creating a manageable program for customer retention as well as creating a culture that stimulates customer interest.

Customers' Patronage in the Transportation Sector

In order to enlighten and empower the transportation customer, transportation authorities have increased their engagement

with the public since the 1970s through public meetings, marketing initiatives, stakeholder involvement, and educational programmes (Machando and Diggines, 2013). This is partly a result of legal disputes over technical techniques for alternate analysis and public pressure for open government decision-making. The customer's perspective and, ultimately, their pleasure, have been raised as a valued indicator of the service provider's success as a result of this period in transport policy (Machando and Diggines, 2013).

There is proof that customer-centred efforts are spreading to other transportation service areas as well. The performance of crucial infrastructure components is one way that the Ministry of Transport, both at the federal and state levels, has actively supported high-quality transport networks (Machando and Diggines, 2013). This idea has developed to now include an agency's primary goals and procedures being measured. Public agencies are turning their attention away from developing their systems and towards maintaining them and the effective use of resources to maximize performance as a result of an ageing transportation infrastructure. Customer happiness is being taken into account when making investment decisions, demonstrating a cultural change towards the transportation sector becoming more of a service than a manufacturing one.

According to some studies, a larger range of agencies and organizations might benefit from using customers' patronage (Yoo and Bai, 2013). Several government agencies have carried out in-depth customer surveys despite their shortcomings to gauge how effectively they are meeting expectations and what customers think of their goods and services. These polls are frequently used in conjunction with PR operations.

Importance of Measuring Customers' Patronage

For service industry organizations are obliged to create strong relationships with their customers. Companies need to conduct research to better understand how to satisfy customers. This can help them understand better whether customers are satisfied with the product price, the product or service quality among others. Measuring customers' patronage enables a company to assess the standard of the existing management

practices and identify the shortcomings for improvement (Su, 2004). Since customers' patronage is considered as one of the factors that determines loyalty (Yoo and Bai, 2013), measurement of customers' patronage is vital for companies to identify whether their customers are satisfied or not and to find ways to satisfy them and increase their loyalty in the long run.

Moreover, the purpose of measuring and managing patronage is to increase customer retention rate and profits and market share (Evangelos and Yannis, 2010). Understanding the factors influencing the fulfillment of consumers can assist business managers to design and deliver proper offers to cater for market needs. Conducting surveys on customer patronage, enables management to determine service areas that need improvement (Su, 2004). According to Evangelos and Yannis (2010), Customers' patronage is considered as the standard of excellence of performance for many businesses. It also helps to identify the potential market opportunities.

According to Zairi (2000) we depend on customers and not the other way around. The author stated that without a customer the company cannot survive and there is no reason for its existence. A company's future and security is in the customers hands. Hence, some researchers considered that customers' patronage is the best way into loyalty. They found that it has a direct relationship with company profitability that is return on investment, or share of market. Satisfied customers are emotionally attached and therefore don't switch easily to competitors' products since they are not certain with the quality (Oliver, 1997).

Empirical Review

Okeke, Titus, Ga, Ezech and Noa, Ugochukwu (2015) in their study were concerned with the relationship between service quality dimensions and consumers' patronage with online banking services of Nigerian banks. Seven service dimensions were included in the study and they are: reliability, assurance, responsiveness, perceived risk, tangibility, security, and price. The study was based on a sample of 400 respondents out of which 258 responded to the questionnaire. The seven service quality variables and the dependent variable were all measured with a number of items each using a seven-point Likert scale.

The analysis was conducted with Multiple Linear Regression analysis (MLR) and the results show that five out of the seven variables: price, security, perceived risk, responsiveness and assurance are significant in enhancing consumers' patronage with online services of Nigerian banks. The other two variables: reliability and tangibility are not significant and require further exploration. The study provides necessary input for bank management to increase customers' involvement through improving service quality; lowering risk; and enhancing the security of operations. Policy implications were highlighted.

Singh (2016) examined, using a case study of Lucknow City, how passengers felt about the public bus system (India) Passenger comfort, passenger safety, enough capacity of public bus transportation services, a clean atmosphere inside buses, exquisite design of buses and bus stations, and service accessibility were the criteria included in the research. Results showed that overall passenger patronage with public transport services in Lucknow City was significantly influenced by passenger comfort, passenger safety, the adequate capacity of public bus transport services, the clean environment inside buses, the elegant design of buses and bus stops and service accessibility.

Oyeobu, Oyebisi, Olateju and Sesede (2014) assessed the effects of Service Quality on the business performance of a Road Transport Company in Nigeria. A review of the literature on Service Quality shows that no study has been carried out on its application in the Nigerian Transport sector hence the need for this Research. To assess the situation questionnaires were administered to customers of ABC Transport Plc within its Amuwo Odofin Terminal, Lagos. A random and convenient sampling technique was used.

The instruments used were questionnaires and personal interviews. The questionnaires were developed by generating 30 items after a thorough understanding of the conceptualization and operationalization of service quality. The Data Analysis method used was descriptive and inferential statistics. Our findings in this study show that there is a strong positive relationship between tangibles, reliability, empathy, and consumer satisfaction. However, the effect of assurance on consumer patronage is very

negligible. There is however a negative relationship between responsiveness and consumer satisfaction. 99% of total success achieved in consumer patronage is accounted for by tangibles, reliability and empathy. It was therefore recommended that staff should take time to assure commuters of their services which will lead to consumer satisfaction. It is recommended that further study should be carried out to measure the effect of responsiveness on consumer satisfaction.

Using survey design, Olatokun and Ojo (2016) assessed the effect of consumers' patronage with mobile telecommunication services in Ibadan, a Nigerian municipality. A structured questionnaire, consisting of SERVQUAL dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility, was used to collect data. A convenience sampling technique was used to select 431 mobile telecommunication users to

measure their patronage level. Collected data were analyzed using frequency and percentage distribution and Logistic Regression was used to determine if there existed any relationship between the SERVQUAL dimensions and customers' satisfaction. Findings revealed Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy to be significant in explaining consumer satisfaction.

The findings may further strengthen the position of the regulatory authorities in developing policies that will address customers' patronage based on defined priorities. This study recommends that mobile operators should improve the quality of mobile services offered to customers in terms of responsiveness, assurance and empathy in order to achieve a high level of consumer patronage and brand loyalty.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

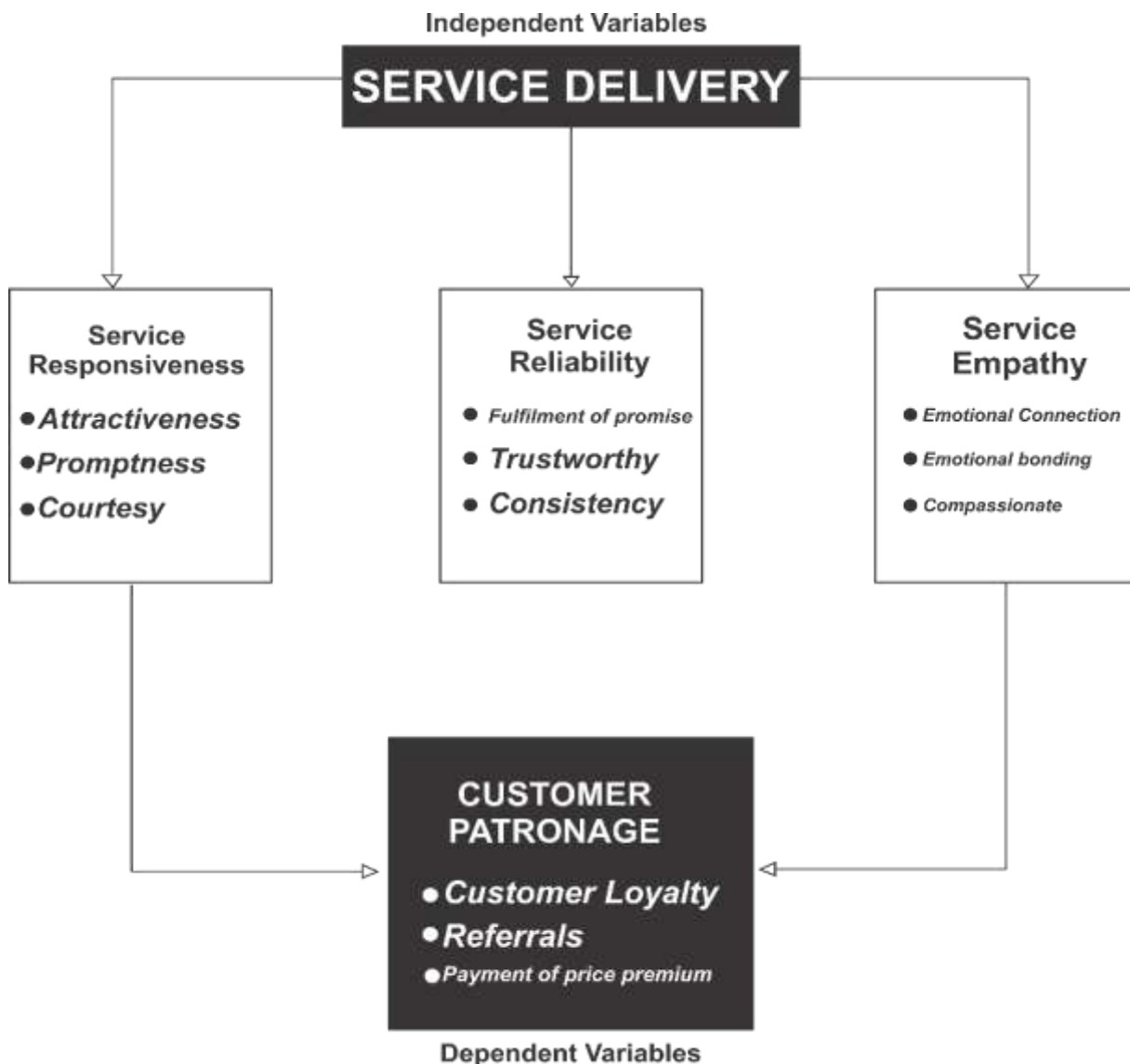


Figure 1: Researchers' Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Research design according to Uford (2017) refers to the overall plan and structure for conducting a research study, outlining the methods, procedures and strategies to address the research questions or objectives. This study used the descriptive research design, with a survey method of data gathering.

Population of the Study

The research's population consisted of Akwa Ibom State Transportation Company (AKTC) passengers, and in order to statistically support and direct the study, the 2015 projected census figure of Uyo L.G.A., which was 413,381, was used as the population of the study. This figure was gotten from Akwa Ibom state Ministry of Economic Development, Uyo, Akwa Ibom.

Sampling Technique

For the investigation, a convenience sampling technique approach was employed. The approach was chosen to allow the researcher to pick and choose which respondents to interview at a time that is convenient for respondents.

Sample Size / Sampling Procedures

For this study, 400 respondents were used as the sample size. Sample size is the number of the sub-unit of population in which a researcher intends to draw inference on the entire population of the study. Using the sample size determination method developed by Taro Yamane (1967), the number of customers' to be administered with questionnaire was calculated as follows:

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where: **n** = Sample Size; **N** = Population Size (413,381)

e = Margin of Error (5%)

1 = Theoretical Constant

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Therefore; } n &= \frac{413,381}{1 + 413,381(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{413,381}{1 + 413,381(0.0025)} \\ &= \frac{413,381}{1 + 1033.5} \\ &= \frac{413,381}{1034.5} \\ &= 399.59 \quad \mathbf{n = 400.} \end{aligned}$$

Sources of Data

In order to collect relevant data for the effective execution of the research inquiry, both primary and secondary data were used in this study. The primary data were collected manually from respondents using structured questionnaires. Secondary data were collected using other information on the web.

Method of Data Collection

The research instrument used in the collection of data for this study is the questionnaire. In a bid to get the precise opinion, the questionnaire was designed in a way that enabled respondents to choose the most appropriate option out of the alternative questions. The questionnaire was arranged in two sections; the first briefly captured the socio-demographic information of the respondents while the second part focused on questions bordering on the subject matter which is service delivery and customers' patronage of AKTC Uyo.

Furthermore, the questionnaire is structured to ensure anonymity of personal information of respondents and to enhance the data collection of vital information from the respondents. The scaling is as follows: 4 = Strongly Agree (SA), 3 = Agree (A), 2 = Disagree (D), 1 = strongly Disagree (SD). The respondents are expected to fill the questionnaires by ticking the option they believe are closer to their opinion.

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential analytical tools were used to analyze as well as test the generated primary data. The descriptive methods of analysis were tables, frequencies, and simple percentage. Basically, these descriptive tools were used in analyzing data relating to demographic information of the respondents.

Accordingly, the null hypotheses earlier formulated for this study were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis. The use of PPMC was informed on the basis that the researcher analyzed the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables. Both descriptive and inferential methods of data analyses used in this study were carried out

with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

Questionnaire Administration

Table 1 Questionnaire administration

Respondents	No. of distributed questionnaire	%	No. of returned questionnaire	%
Passengers	400	100.0	369	92.3
Total		100		

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 explained questionnaire administration among passengers of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis in order to examine the effect of service delivery on customers' patronage. From the Table above, a total of 400 copies questionnaire was administered but, 369 copies of the questionnaire was properly filled and returned to the researcher,

signifying that 31 copies of the questionnaire lost in the process. Hence, 369 (92.3%) constituted the sample size of the study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Effect of Service Responsiveness on Customers' Patronage

Table 2: Effect of service responsiveness on customers' patronage

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Total
Employees of AKTC are always willing to help customers at all time.	143 38.8%	126 34.2%	79 21.4%	21 5.5%	3.05	369 100
Employees gives prompt response to customers' complaints.	160 43.4%	122 33.1%	58 16.7%	29 7.8%	3.11	369 100
Employees are polite when dealing with customers.	124 33.6%	151 40.9%	70 19.0%	24 6.5%	3.01	369 100
AKTC employees are timely in providing required information to their customers	172 46.6%	117 31.7%	51 13.8%	29 7.9%	3.17	369 100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 addressed the effect of services responsiveness on customers' patronage. The results showed that, 46.6 % of the respondents strongly agreed that, AKTC employees are timely in providing required information to their customers. This was followed by 43.4% of the respondents who strongly agreed that, employee's gives prompt response to customers' complaints.

More so, 38.8% of the respondents who agreed that, the employees of AKTC are always willing to help customers at all time. In addition, 33.6% of the respondents who agreed that, employees are polite when

dealing with customers. However, 21.4% of the customers disagreed that the employees of AKTC are always willing to help customers at all time. From the result, four (4) out of four (4) statements had a mean value greater than 2.5, and none of the statement had a mean value less than 2.5. Based on the decision rule that a mean value > 2.5 is accepted while a mean value < 2.5 is rejected, the researcher concluded that services responsiveness strongly affect customers' patronage of AKTC in Uyo metropolis.

Effect of Service Reliability on Customers' Patronage

Table 3: Effect of service reliability on customers' patronage

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Total
AKTC always try not to cancel their schedule for journey	172 46.6%	117 31.7%	52 14.1%	28 7.6%	3.17	369 100
AKTC always keep to their departure schedule	131 35.5%	74 20.1%	118 32.0%	46 12.4%	2.78	369 100
AKTC services is considered safe	164 44.4%	87 23.6%	71 19.2%	47 12.8%	2.99	369 100
AKTC update customers of any sudden changes to schedule	207 56.1%	110 29.8%	36 9.8%	16 4.3%	3.37	369 100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 shows that, 56.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that, AKTC update customers of any sudden changes to schedule. Followed by 46.6% of the respondents strongly agree that AKTC always try not to cancel their schedule for journey. In addition, 44.4% and 35.5% of the respondent strongly agree that, AKTC services is considered safe; and AKTC always keep to their departure schedule. However, 32.0%% of the respondents opposed the majority and disagree that AKTC always keep to their departure schedule.

The condition of the mean value decision rule is that, a mean value > 2.5 was accepted while a mean < 2.5 was rejected. From the result, four research statement (3.17, 2.78, 2.99 and 3.37) were above 2.5 benchmark and none statement was not above 2.5 decision rule. From the result, the researcher affirmed that, majority of the passengers of AKTC confirmed that service reliability affect customers' patronage in Uyo, metropolis.

Effect of service Empathy on Customers' Patronage

Table 4: Effect of service empathy on customers' patronage

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Total
AKTC staff and management listens to customers' suggestion for improvement.	129 35.0%	100 27.1%	84 22.8%	56 11.1%	2.81	369 100
The management and its employees pay attention to customers perception and feelings for their offers	150 40.6%	104 28.2%	77 20.9%	38 10.3%	2.99	369 100
AKTC operates a flexible and convenient hours schedule for their customers	181 49.1%	130 35.2%	37 10.0%	21 5.7%	3.27	369 100
AKTC has 24/7 customer contact line (s)	91 24.7%	70 19.0%	122 33.1%	86 23.3%	2.45	369 100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Effect of service empathy on customers' patronage of AKTC was addressed in Table 4. The result reveals that, 49.1% of the respondents strongly agree that AKTC operates a flexible and convenient hours schedule for their customers. This was followed by 40.6% of the respondents who strongly agreed that, the management and its employees pay attention to customer's perception and feelings for their offers.

More so, 35.0% of the respondents agreed that the management and its employees pay attention to customers' perception and feelings for their offers. It is only 33.1% of the respondents who disagreed that, AKTC has

24/7 customer contact line (s). Invariably, 23.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed that, AKTC has 24/7 customer contact line (s). From the result, three (3) out of four (4) statements had a mean value greater than 2.5, and none of the statement had a mean value less than 2.5.

Based on the decision rule that a mean value > 2.5 is accepted while a mean value < 2.5 is rejected, the researcher concluded that majority of the AKTC passengers strongly states that service empathy affect customers' patronage.

Level of Customers' Patronage

Table 5: Level of Customers' patronage

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Total
Do you patronize AKTC every time you have need to travel	214 58.0%	130 35.2%	21 5.7%	4 1.1%	3.50	369 100
AKTC employees' prompt response to every complaint motivate you to patronize the company	191 51.7%	143 38.8%	23 6.2%	12 3.3%	3.39	369 100
AKTC ability to keep to their traveling schedule motivates you to patronize the company	202 54.7%	115 31.2%	32 8.7%	20 5.4%	3.35	369 100

AKTC attention to customers' perception and feelings motivate you to patronize the company	157 42.6%	123 33.3%	57 15.4%	32 8.7%	3.09	369 100
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Source: Field Survey, 2023

From the result in Table 5, 58.0% of the respondent strongly agreed that, they patronize AKTC every time they have need to travel. This was followed by 54.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that, AKTC ability to keep to their traveling schedule motivates them to patronize the company.

More so, 51.7% of the respondents agreed that AKTC employees' prompt response to every complaint motivate them to patronize the company and 42.6% of the respondents agreed that AKTC attention to customers' perception and feelings motivate them to patronize the company. However, 15.4% of the respondents disagreed that, AKTC

attention to customers' perception and feelings motivate you to patronize the company. From the result, four (4) out of four (4) statements had a mean value greater than 2.5, and none of the statement had a mean value less than 2.5. Based on the decision rule that a mean value > 2.5 is accepted while a mean value < 2.5 is rejected, the researcher concluded that Customers' patronage level in Uyo metropolis is very high.

Test of hypothesis 1: Ho₁: there is no significant relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

Table 6: Pearson moment correlation coefficient analysis of the relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis

Correlations			
		Customer patronage	Service responsiveness
customer patronage	Pearson Correlation	1	.960**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	369	369
service responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.960**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	369	369

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(**=5%) denotes significance of coefficient; df = 368, Dependent Variable: customer patronage, Predictors: (Constant), service responsiveness

Source: Field Survey, 2023 (Version 22 of SPSS computation)

Table 6 presents the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient matrix indicating the relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The result shows that, there is positive and significant relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The result revealed that, increase in responsiveness of service leads to increase in customers' patronage of AKTC by 0.960.

This implies that, 96.0% increase in customers' patronage of AKTC is influenced by service responsiveness within the particular period, holding other variables constant. In effect, there is a relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo

metropolis. The result agrees with the findings of Cheserek, Kimwolo and Cherop (2015) who conducted a study on effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in commercial banks in Kenya. The five dimensions of service quality by Parasurama et al., 1985 (SERVQUAL) such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance were considered as the vile for this study.

Result of the study showed that reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy significantly and positively influenced customer attitudes in terms of satisfaction but tangibility had no significant influence on satisfaction level of customers in commercial Banks in Kenya.

Test of hypothesis 2: Ho₂: there is no significant relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa

Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

Table 7: Pearson moment correlation coefficient analysis of the relationship between Service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis

Correlations			
		Customer patronage	Service reliability
customer patronage	Pearson Correlation	1	.599**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	369	369
service reliability	Pearson Correlation	.599**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	369	369

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(** = 5%) denotes significance of coefficient; df = 368, Dependent Variable: customer patronage, Predictors: (Constant), service reliability

Source: Field Survey, 2023 (Version 22 of SPSS computation)

Table 7 shows the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient result on the relationship between Service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The matrix result revealed that, positive and significant relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

The statistical result showed that, a unit increase in service reliability leads to 0.599 unit increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company. This implies that, 59.9% increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company is attributed to service reliability within the particular period, holding other variables constant. In effect, there is a positive relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company. The result agrees with the findings of Akroush (2008) who conducted

an empirical study in the banking sector of Jordan and found that there was a positive and significant relationship between the functional quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy and banks financial and nonfinancial performance.

Anjalika and Priyanath (2018) explored the effect of service quality of commercial banks on customer satisfaction in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from 141 customers who maintain both public and private bank accounts in the Gampaha district. Results revealed a significant positive relationship between tangible and customer satisfaction as well as responsiveness and customer satisfaction of both public and private banks.

Test of hypothesis 3: Ho₃: there is no significant relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

Table 8: Pearson moment correlation coefficient analysis of the relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis

Correlations			
		Customer patronage	Empathy
Customerpatronage	Pearson Correlation	1	.740**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	369	369
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	.740**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	369	369

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(** = 5%) denotes significance of coefficient; df = 369, Dependent Variable: customerpatronage, Predictors: (Constant), empathy

Source: Field Survey, 2023 (Version 22 of SPSS computation)

The relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom

Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis was analyzed in Table 8 with

Pearson moment correlation coefficient model. The statistical coefficient of 0.740 was observed from the result, this signifies that, a unit increase in service empathy leads to 0.740 unit increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo.

Thus, 74.0% increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo is attributed to wind posting within the particular period, holding other variables constant. In effect, there is a positive relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The result aligns with the findings of Esmaeilpour, Mohamadi and Rajabi (2016) who examined how the elements of service quality influence the brand value in the cheap food industry.

The clients of cheap food industry (Restaurant Raphael) in Boushehr comprise the measurable populace of this exploration. Given that the measurable populace is boundless, through inspecting 390 surveys were circulated, gathered and investigated. For investigating the information, the auxiliary conditions displaying was utilized by help of the product savvy PLS.

The outcomes show that the whole elements of service nature of model SERVQUAL (tangible factors of services, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) have a positive and noteworthy effect on the brand value. Iddrisua, Noonib, Fiankoc and Mensah (2015) explored the connection between service quality and client loyalty in the Cellular business of Ghana.

The discoveries uncovered that service quality factors, for example, tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy affect client faithfulness through consumer loyalty. The outcome further uncovered consumer loyalty has an immediate relationship with client unwaveringness.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study examined the effect of service delivery on customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. In order to actualize the objectives, the hypotheses were tested and the results are discussed as follows:

The result shows that, there is positive and significant relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The result revealed that, increase in responsiveness of service leads to increase in customers' patronage of AKTC by 0.960.

This implies that, 96.0% increase in customers' patronage of AKTC is influenced by service responsiveness within the particular period, holding other variables constant. In effect, there is a relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The result agrees with the findings of Cheserek, Kimwolo and Cherop (2015) who conducted a study on effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in commercial banks in Kenya.

The five dimensions of service quality by Parasurama *et al.*, 1985 (SERVQUAL) such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance were considered as the vile for this study. Result of the study showed that reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy significantly and positively influenced customer attitudes in terms of satisfaction but tangibility had no significant influence on satisfaction level of customers in commercial Banks in Kenya.

The matrix result revealed that, positive and significant relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The statistical result shows that, a unit increase in service reliability leads to 0.599 unit increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company.

This implies that, 59.9% increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company is attributed to service reliability within the particular period, holding other variables constant. In effect, there is a positive relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company. The result agrees with the findings of Akroush (2008) who conducted an empirical study in the banking sector of Jordan and found that there was a positive and significant relationship between the functional quality dimensions (tangibles, reliability,

responsiveness, assurance and empathy and banks financial and nonfinancial performance (Okpo, 2020; Okpo and Emenyi, 2023). Anjalika and Priyanath (2018) explored the effect of service quality of commercial banks on customer satisfaction in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from 141 customers who maintain both public and private bank accounts in the Gampaha district. Results revealed a significant positive relationship between tangible and customer satisfaction as well as responsiveness and customer satisfaction of both public and private banks.

The statistical coefficient of 0.740 was observed from the result, this signifies that, a unit increase in service empathy leads to 0.740 unit increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo. Thus, 74.0% increase in customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo is attributed to wind posting within the particular period, holding other variables constant. In effect, there is a positive relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

The result aligns with the findings of Esmaeilpour, Mohamadi and Rajabi (2016) who examined how the elements of service quality influence the brand value in the cheap food industry. The clients of cheap food industry (Restaurant Raphael) in Boushehr comprise the measurable populace of this exploration. Given that the measurable populace is boundless, through inspecting 390 surveys were circulated, gathered and investigated.

For investigating the information, the auxiliary conditions displaying was utilized by help of the product savvy PLS. The outcomes show that the whole elements of service nature of model SERVQUAL (tangible factors of services, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) have a positive and noteworthy effect on the brand value. Iddrisua, Noonib, Fiankoc and Mensah (2015) explored the connection between service quality and client loyalty in the Cellular business of Ghana. The discoveries uncovered that service quality factors, for example, tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and

empathy affect client faithfulness through consumer loyalty. The outcome further uncovered consumer loyalty has an immediate relationship with client unwaveringness.

CONCLUDING REMARK

The study examined the effect of service delivery on customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. In this study, service responsiveness, service reliability and service empathy were used as independent variables and customer patronage was used as dependent variable. Descriptive survey research design was adopted and the population of the study covered 2015 estimated population (413,381) of Uyo.

Taro Yamane formula was used to realize 400 as sample size. However, 369 copies of the questionnaire was retrieved from the passenger of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis who were the respondents of the study. Questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient model. In order to actualize the objectives, the hypotheses were tested and the results are discussed as follows:

Major findings revealed by the study are discussed as follows: The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that: From the results, 55.3% of the respondents were males as against 44.7% who were females. 29.5% of the sampled passengers were within 30 – 39 years of age. This was followed by 27.4% of the respondents who were between 20 - 29 years of age in addition, 40.7% of the respondents were certified B.Sc. holders; followed by diploma certificate holders constituting 34.4% of the respondents.

57.9% of the respondents were singles as against 33.1% of the respondents who were married. 85.9% of the respondents were Christians. 23.8% and 19.0% of the AKTC consumers earns within ₦51,000 – ₦100,000 and ₦101,000 – ₦200,000 per month. This was followed by 17.6% and 16.3% whose financial income per month ranges within ₦201,000 – ₦300,000 and ₦301,000 and above respectively.

The results showed that, 46.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that, AKTC employees are timely in providing required information to their customers. 56.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that, AKTC update customers of any sudden changes to schedule. 49.1% of the respondents strongly agree that AKTC operates a flexible and convenient hours schedule for their customers. 58.0% of the respondent strongly agreed that, they patronize AKTC every time they have need to travel.

The empirical result revealed that, there is positive and significant relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage. And, there is positive and significant relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage. Also, there is positive and significant relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

In conclusion, the interaction or the relationship between customers and service organizations induce perceptions of customers' service patronage. Furthermore, the attitudes of service providers mostly serve as a quality indicator for customers. This is because, customer service delivery revolves around identifying the needs of customers and meeting those needs beyond their expectation within the shortest possible time.

However, in most of transportation firms in Nigeria, customer experience with services appears to be depreciating as a result of inability to offer excellent service, maintain cordial relationship with their customers, prompt-sales follow-up and reliable service delivery.

On this basis, this study examined the effect of service delivery on customers' patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. The result revealed that, there is positive and significant relationship between service responsiveness and customers' patronage.

And, there is positive and significant relationship between service reliability and customers' patronage. Also, there is positive and significant relationship between service empathy and customers' patronage of Akwa

Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis. In conclusion, there is a relationship between service delivery and customer patronage of Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) in Uyo metropolis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical findings, the researcher recommends the following.

- Customer service providers at Akwa Ibom Transport Company should develop empathic customer service strategies that will delight special customers. And management should supervise the customer service personnel closely so that anyone who does not have good customer relations is taken from that department.
- In order for Akwa Ibom Transport Company to always stay ahead of the other transport firms, there is the need to constantly carry out research on service dimensions and customer's taste in order to develop corresponding products to suit these tastes.
- Akwa Ibom Transport Company should be more proactive in their approach in providing qualitative services to their customers at affordable rate. This will be feasible if they become more "strategic" financial discipline-wise, and should focus on: client relationship; innovative service delivery systems that are convenient to consumers; and most cost-efficient to the firm.
- An aggressive approach that involves holistic marketing or holistic marketing practices should be encouraged by banks, if consumers' satisfaction would be attained. This will help the studied firm in being responsive to customer services at all time.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Future researcher on the topic could concentrate on factors affecting customer service delivery in transportation firms. The internal and external factors should be duly addressed in further studies. Secondly, customer retention strategy among transportation firms should be given a due consideration in further studies. In further studies, other marketing performance indices should capture other than using customer patronage only.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In carrying out this research, the researchers were faced with many problems. The main problem encountered by the researchers; was meeting with respondents, at a convenient opportunity. Also, data collection methods were one of the problem encountered which could be subject to biases and inaccuracies.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Despite these limitations, this study contributed to the literature on service delivery and as well serves as a source of reference to future scholars who may be interested in this area of research, given the dearth of research on service delivery and customers' patronage of AKTC. This study contributed to knowledge by showing that quality service delivery with; responsiveness, reliability and empathy, plays a fundamental role in enhancing customers' patronage.

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