

Relationship Marketing Orientation and Customer Retention of Five-Star Hotels in Nigeria

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***Abstract:** This study examined relationship marketing orientation and customer retention of five-star hotels in Nigeria. Using descriptive research design through cross-sectional survey approach, data were generated using questionnaire. The population of the study consisted of Forty Seven selected five-star hotels in South-South Nigeria of which Forty were fully sampled using three respondents for each hotel making up a total sample size of 120 participants. The collected data were analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient and the result revealed a strong and positive relationship between relationship marketing orientation components and customer retention measures of referrals, loyalty and repeat purchase intention. Based on the outcome, it was concluded that relationship marketing orientation in terms of communication and commitment all give credence to customer retention in the form of repeat purchase intention, customer loyalty and referrals in the hospitality operations. The study therefore, recommend that management of hotels should ensure that effective communication is maintained between customers and employees as this would encourage continual repeat purchase intention, customer loyalty and referrals. Furthermore, the commitment of customers should be encouraged by means of strengthening the bond between hotel employees and their customers. This relationship would support in enhancing customers lifetime value because it would aid in determining the relationship between the hotel and the future purchasing frequency of customers.*

***Keywords:** Commitment, communication, customer loyalty, referrals, repeat purchase intention*

Introduction

Establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term connections with clients and other stakeholders is central to the philosophy of relationship marketing (Gronroos, 1996). Ndubuisi (2007) maintained that firms can gain customer loyalty and quality sources of marketing intelligence for effective planning and marketing strategy by building marketing relationship with customers. This means that with relationship marketing orientation, firms can gain productive feedback from customers on how best to serve the customers and keep them from defecting to competitors. Ravald and Gronroos (1996) asserted that the primary objective of relationship marketing's is to win consumers' loyalty in order to build and sustain profitable relationships with them over time.

A firm's ability to add value to its products has been shown to increase as its relationship with clients deepens over time (Shani & Chalasani, 1992). Moreover, relationship marketing is widely recognised as a method for enhancing customers' profitability in terms of recruiting and

maintaining consumers, delivering better services for customers, and earning profit in return (Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018). Perhaps relationship marketing orientation could be implemented in several forms such as communication, commitment, service quality, trust, complaint handling and empathy (Banna & Rahman, 2020; Ndubuisi, 2007; Ndudi & Kifordu, 2021; Trenggana & Cahyani, 2018).

However, due to the enormous importance of relationship marketing orientation in promoting customer satisfaction, retention, loyalty and reducing customer defection rate and the rapid adoption of relationship marketing orientation by business organizations in different industries, an increasing number of scholars (Ganaie & Bhat, 2020; Glory, *et al.*, 2021; Ndubuisi, 2007; Ndudi & Kifordu, 2021; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018; Trenggana & Cahyani, 2018) have developed interest in investigating the nexus between affiliation marketing and client maintenance in service industries in developed and developing economies. For example, Ndubuisi (2007) conducted an empirical study to examine the relationship between relationship marketing and customer loyalty in the banking industry in Malaysia.

Relationship marketing tenets including trust, loyalty, dialogue, and resolving conflicts were incorporated by the research. Again, similar studies were conducted in Nigeria within the banking sector (Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018) and telecommunication sector (Glory, *et al.*, 2021; Ndudi & Kifordu, 2021) in order to examine the empirical relationship between relationship marketing and customer retention, using trust, commitment, communication, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, customer care and service quality as components of relationship marketing respectively. Relationship marketing's theoretical components have been shown to correlate considerably with customer retention, as shown in the aforementioned research.

Several studies (Glory, *et al.*, 2021; Ndudi & Kifordu, 2021; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018) have been conducted on the relationship between relationship marketing orientation and customer retention in the banking and telecommunication industries in Nigeria, but it seems there is dearth of empirical evidence by previous studies on how relationship marketing orientation relates with customer retention in hotels in Nigeria. In addition, empirical evidence found in marketing literature (Glory, *et al.*, 2021; Ndubuisi, 2007; Ndudi & Kifordu, 2021; Ojiaku, *et al.*, 2017; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018; Trenggana & Cahyani, 2018) had explored relationship marketing orientation using commitment, communication, cooperation, delightful, trust, service quality, reliability, customer satisfaction, assurance, responsiveness, customer care and complaint handling as its dimensions, but only very few studies (Banna & Rahman, 2020; Ganaie & Bhat, 2020; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018) had examined other components like empathy and customization. More so, none of these studies have linked relationship marketing orientation with referral, loyalty and repeat purchase intentions as measures of customer retention in a single framework like the one adopted in this study, though they have been adopted separately in other studies. This study is clearly departing from past studies by intellectually addressing these identified research gaps in literature.

The central idea in this relationship marketing is to keep the customer at the middle of the business circle by creating and maintaining strong and profitable relationship with the customers (Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018; Trenggana & Cahyani, 2018). Therefore, it seems that relationship marketing should be aligned with customer retention to enable the organization achieve its predetermined goals and objectives. Though empirical studies (Glory *et al.*, 2021; Ndudi & Kifordu, 2021; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018) have shown this link in the banking and telecommunication sectors, however very few

empirical studies have been carried out in the hospitality industry like Hotels in some part of the nation (Nigeria). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between relationship marketing orientation and customer retention of five-star hotels in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship Marketing Theory

Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) are cited as the authors of the relationship management theory that serves as a cornerstone of this investigation. Scholars were shown to have opposed attempts to apply B2B and services-industry expertise to the consumer market prior to 1995. The conceptual framework for theory building in the domain put forth by (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995) in their article is useful for furthering the theory of relationship marketing. Thus, understanding where knowledge came from is crucial for moving forward in the field. An examination of the basis on theological and epistemological assumption regarding connection contained in existing literature may be aided by using the model developed by Sheth and Parvatiyar.

In life all exchanges either in business or private lives involves relationships. Relationship marketing is simply a coordinated effort in identifying marketing and building up network with individual consumers on other partners and to continuously strengthen the network for the common benefit of the parties through interaction, individualised and added value contacts over the long-term (Shrivatava & Kale, 2003; Kotler & Keller, 2013). However, as time passes, a consumer's preference for a certain brand, product, or service dwindles; and unless customers are driven to narrow their options, they are unlikely to do so. Therefore, connection theory needs to include the different marketplaces from both the consumer and company sides. Theorizing about consumer markets from their point of view requires further research. Relationship marketing is predicated on the recognition that customers in the marketing value chain prefer fewer brand options and are willing to argue their devotion to the companies or brands that provide them. In order to maximize the efficiency and efficacy of the connection, the parties involved should minimize their options and work to build a lasting bond with one another. Relationship marketing, according to Seth and Parvatiyah (1995), necessitates consideration of customers' mental and social states.

Relationship Marketing Orientation

Relationship Marketing Orientation is one of the oldest approaches to marketing, yet remains one of the least understood concept in terms of practice (Frank, 2010). Gruen (1997) noted that business philosophy has shifted from marketing orientation to relationship marketing orientation. The concept is aimed at building long-term business relationship that evolves into trusting and mutually beneficial relationships with valued customers (Woo, *et al.*, 2001). The reason being that several academic scholars have devoted quite a considerable amount of time and effort to criticize and attack the traditional marketing mix theory because success does not come solely from the manipulation of marketing mix elements but by building a long-term relationship between buyer and seller (Ford, *et al.*, 2004; Frank, 2010). The subject of relationship marketing orientation has generated a lot of scholarly concern due to its increasing focus on customer retention and satisfaction rather than sales transaction (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2014; Johanesova & Vanova, 2020).

Relationship marketing orientation becomes an essential strategic tool for companies in today's dynamic market in which customer preference and needs are changing rapidly (Nasir, 2015). The concept is aimed at creating a strong and even emotional branded customer relationship that lead

to continued business, free mouth to mouth advertising and customer information that can generate lead (Johanesova & Vanova, 2020). Relationship marketing orientation concept has been viewed differently by scholars because it differs from other forms of marketing in that it recognizes the long term value of customer relationships that extends communication beyond intrusive advertising and sales promotional messages (Okwara & Iwuoha, 2019). The term relationship marketing was first coined by Berry 1983 in the context of services marketing (Peter, 2018) because it lays the foundation for long term interchange between the customer and the firm which creates a more effective method of interacting (Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018). Doyle and Stern (2006) defines relationship marketing as a long term continuous series of transactions between parties which occurs when each trusts the other to deal fairly, reliably and helpfully.

Mwangi (2013) conceptualized relationship marketing as a form of marketing developed from direct response marketing campaigns which emphasizes customer retention and satisfaction, rather than a dominant focus on sales transactions. Nkanata (2018) viewed relationship marketing as the process of forming bonds with customers by meeting their needs and honouring commitments rather than chasing short-term profits. Johanesova and Vanova (2020) sees it as an aspect of the customer relationship management that focuses on customer loyalty and long term customer engagement rather than on short term goal such as customer acquisition and individual sales. Glory, *et al.*, (2021) perceived relationship marketing as entailing the establishment of a long-term relationships with customers. Shirley (2017) argued that instead of attempting to achieve a single one-time purchase by customers, relationship marketing promotes customer retention by offering high quality and valuable products and services.

However, based on these preceding views relationship marketing orientation has therefore emerged as a popular new paradigm due to the shift in focus from customer acquisition to customer retention. And due to the increased competition, today's organizations are beginning to understand the value that customers rather than the value the products generate for them are central to their survival in business. Relationship marketing orientation therefore attempts to create a more holistic, personalized brand experience to create stronger customer ties since it aid in understanding customers' needs that can lead to customer loyalty and cost reduction for organizations.

Customer Retention

The fundamental key to customer retention lies in the maintenance of relationship with value added to customer by reducing their defection rate (Nasir, 2015). Thus customer retention remains a marketing strategy used to provide several marketing benefits that enable loyal customers to increase their spending at an increasing rate. The concept as perceived in the marketing literature is the continuity of business relations between the individual and the organization thus exceed giving the customer what they expect (Ibojo, 2015). This is about exceeding customers' expectation in order to making them become loyal advocates to the firm's brands. However, understanding customers' retention not only from the number of consumers organizations owned but also from the point of view of the consumer (Trenggana & Cahyani, 2018) becomes necessary for organization to survive. Thus (Dyah, *et al.*, 2021) adduced that organizations need to find alternative means of differentiating their products and services if customer retention is to be actualized because loyal customers are reflections of their intention on repeat purchase behaviour. The idea hinges on the fact that customers' level of retention dictates the extent to which organizations achieve their objectives (Ibojo, 2015) because the goal of every organization is to

create and keep customers (Trenggana & Cahyani, 2018). The concept as viewed by (Ramakrishnan, 2006) is a marketing oriented goal that prevents customers from competitors. Asagba, *et al.*, (2019) perceived “customer retention” as strategic action plans geared towards creating value for customers by encouraging them to be loyal with the firm over time.

Customer retention is the effort a business makes to keep its current clientele and attract new ones, as described by Yilmaz and Ferman (2017). Customer retention according to Glory, *et al.*, (2021) is the extent to which customers are devoted to a company’s products or services and how strong their tendency to select one brand over the competitors. Sajeeb (2020) define customer retention as a means of increasing the long term relationship with customers. This definition holds the view that retaining old customers becomes more beneficial and comfortable for organizations than finding new customers (O’Connell & Keenan, 1990; Reichheld & Kenny, 1990) and as such organizations need to create, sustain, and improve customers relationship in order to achieve both parties aims (Lu & Seock, 2008). Perhaps, the reason (Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018) put in that customers satisfaction and loyalty remains a fundamental issue for organizations to retain their customers since longer relationship gradually translate into repeat purchase which is in the interest of the firms because it is more profitable to service returning customers than to attract and serve new customer. Nevertheless, the growing competition has made organizations to vie for customers’ loyalty in order to maintain their own competitive edge over rival so as to be able to survive and be successful (Frank, 2010) in their operation. Thus, the study adopts repeat purchase intention, customer loyalty and referrals as measures to operationalize customers’ retention and these are presented and discussed below!

Repeat Purchase Intention

Repeat purchase is attributed to the dependable support that is worn out of clients' fulfilment with a particular item from a similar association (Godswill & Miyene, 2020). The concept as related to customer retention is the administration and or buying of an item by a consumer of a similar brand. Thus, customer repurchase intention is a strategic tool for business survival (Adefulu, *et al.*, 2020). Customer repeat purchase has been conceptualized in some studies based on two aspects namely the intention to re-buy (repurchase) and the intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth and recommendation (Phuong & Dat, 2017) which is referrals. The intention to repeat purchase is of significant value in marketing as it is critical for business success and profitability (Abdul, *et al.*, 2014). Repeat purchase is the likelihood that a customer will make a purchase from the same seller in the future (Adefulu, *et al.*, 2020).

Loyalty

Loyal customers are the most significant assets of any organization because it has been increasingly recognized in recent years as the most vital part of business that is giving critical attention to develop customer retention and loyalty programs (Nasir, 2015). The concept loyalty is a cumulative construct that includes both the act of consuming (action loyalty) and expected consumption (future repurchasing) in terms of recent loyalty framework (Oliver, 1999; Naderian & Baharun, 2013). The term loyalty according to Naderian and Baharun (2013) is customers’ tendency towards a service hence it is a particular behaviour such as repurchase or switching intention. Oliver (1997) defined loyalty as the behavioural response expressed over time and this response is deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future. Putra (2018) define loyalty as a deep commitment to subscribe or buy back an item or service consistently in the future.

Referral

Customer referrals generate continuous revenue stream for servicing organizations hence, knowing what drives customer loyalty is important for hospitality firms financial sustainability. However, referral is the demonstration of guiding somebody to a better place or individual for help, activity or data with more information or force (Cambridge English Word reference, nd). Customer referrals are one of the most remarkable selling and marketing apparatuses accessible (Godswill & Miyene, 2020) that increases engagement in order to gain loyal customers and speed brand awareness. Thus, the concept has become a popular means of acquiring customers (Philipp, *et al.*, 2011). And as a marketing concept, referral is commonly used by large and wide variety of firms as an influencer and advocates to customers (Barry, 2015) since it seeks our current customers that can provide referrals with high life value marketing programs to augment traditional promotions.

Hypothetical Development

Communication and Customer Retention

Customer retention cannot be effectively achieved without communication, hence staying in touch with valuable customers require providing them with timely information about the changes in services that could help in resolving customers discontentment that might affect their purchase behaviour (Treggana & Cahyani, 2018). Rajah and Al-Islami (2014) argued that communication is the back-and-forth transmission of information between a business organization and its customers in order to achieve established business objectives. The seamless flow of communication between a service provider and service consumers provides the mechanism for the service provider to understand customers' needs and to satisfy them effectively, thereby improving customer retention (Glory, *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the success of communication can be affected by several things including the clarity of ideas to be delivered in common perception between the sender of the information, proper communication channels and the absence of information (Treggana & Cahyani, 2018). Despite these claims, communication helps customers to build trust, loyalty and satisfaction that eventually lead to customer retention (Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018; Treggana & Cahyani, 2018) because it provide assistance to the customers in order to make informed buying decision regarding their needs as well as affecting their loyalty. Lindberg-Repo and Gronroos (1999) argued that the longer relationship a firm holds with its customers, the more word-of-mouth these customers are able to give to the firm in order to create more customers for the organization. This implies that as organizations maintains long-term relationship with customers by sharing relevant and timely information; such satisfied customers would help the company in their attempt to generate new business through word-of-mouth such as referrals thus, the hypothetical statement below:

H₀₁: Communication does not correlate with customer retention in the form of customer loyalty, referrals and repeat purchase intention.

Commitment and Customer Retention

The level of customers' retention dictates to some extent the level of achievement of organization objectives, hence if customers fail to patronize or repeat purchase of the product of such organization, definitely their sales and productivity will drop and this will adversely affects the entire performance of the organization (Ibojo, 2015). Nevertheless, customers' commitment remains a significant determinant in the strength of marketing relationship that is useful in

measuring the likelihood of customer loyalty that support in predicting future purchase frequency (Egan, 2004; Gundlach, *et al.*, 1995) in the organization. The reason had been that customers' retention yields commercial benefits since firms try to enhance customers lifetime value (Nasir, 2015). This value becomes vital because it supports in determining the relationship between the organization and the future purchasing frequency of customers. Perhaps, the reason Kim, Han and Lee (2001) in their study came up with the findings that commitment is positively related with repeat purchase.

Although, several studies had found that commitment is significantly related to customer retention strategies of loyalty, referral, satisfaction, repeat purchase intention and word of mouth (Glory, *et al.*, 2021; Igbai, *et al.*, 2020; Kamnzzaman & Abedin, 2015; Kim, *et al.*, 2001; Ndubuisi, 2007; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018). Nasir (2015) noted that loyalty accounts for valuable amount of firm's profit therefore, organizations should not risk losing their customers by ignoring their complaints because customer loyalty is positively related to customer satisfaction. A happy customer consistently favour the brands that meet their needs (Alhassan & Yousuf, 2012) thereby remain dedicated to patronizing the brand or firm over others and do not display visible willingness to begin business relations with alternative brands (Glory, *et al.*, 2021). Hence, Trenggana and Cahyani (2018) hold strongly that commitment has significant effect on customer retention. Ndudi and Kifordu (2021) also affirmed this claims that for firms in the Nigerian telecommunication industry to remain afloat by maintaining their customers' retention, they must ensure that they get customers' commitment to their organization hence, the hypothetical statement below:

H₀₂: Commitment does not correlate with customer retention in the form of customer loyalty, referrals and repeat purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the quantitative approach in data collection via the use of cross sectional survey research design and the population was drawn from five star hotels in south-south, Nigeria using simple random sampling technique and the Krejcie Morgan table to select one hundred and twenty managers across the forty selected hotels. The data collected were analyzed using the Spearman Ranked Order correlation coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	50	41.7%
Female	70	58.3%
Age bracket		
18-25 years	5	4.2%
26-35 years	11	9.2%
36-45 years	50	41.7%
46-55 years	44	36.7%
56 and above years	10	8.3%
Educational Level		
PhD	20	16.7%
Master's degree	11	9.2%
Bachelor's degree	53	74.2%
HND	20	30.0%
OND/NCE	6	5.0%
SSCE	10	8.3%
Marital Status		
Single	3	2.5%
Married	69	57.5%
Divorce	30	25.0%
Widow	18	15.0%

As shown in the table, fifty (50) respondents are male which represents 41.7% of the total respondents, while seventy (70) of the respondents are female, which represents 58.3% of the total respondents. On educational level, the summary of responses, shows that 16.7% of the total participants had Ph.D Degree, 9.2% had Masters Degree, 44.2% had B.Sc. Degree, 16.7% had HND Degree, 5.0% had OND/NCE and 8.3% had secondary school certificate. Also, the age bracket shows that 4.2% of the respondents have attained the age of 18-25 years, 9.2% are within the ages of 26-35 years, 41.7% falls between 36-45 years, 36.7% falls between 46-55 years and 8.3% falls between 56 years and above. Finally, the marital status revealed that 2.5% are single, 57.5 are married, 25.0 are divorced, and 15.0 have lost a spouse through death.

Hypothetical Testing

H₀₁: Communication does not correlate with customer retention in the form of customer loyalty, referrals and repeat purchase intention.

Correlations

		Communication	Referrals	Loyalty	Repeat purchase	
Spearman's rho	Communication	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.442**	.334**	.353**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Referrals	Correlation Coefficient	.442**	1.000	.311**	.561**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Loyalty	Correlation Coefficient	.334**	.311**	1.000	.567**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Repeat purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.353**	.561**	.567**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	120	120	120	120

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

The first hypothesis was tested, and the results indicated a somewhat significant relationship between communication and repeat purchase at five-star hotels in Nigeria's South-South Region. A correlation coefficient of .353** and $p = .000$ was obtained. Since, the value falls between 0.30 to .49, it is interpreted as moderate relationship. Hence, there is a positive, moderate relationship between communication and repeat purchase intention.

Second hypothesis on communication and customer loyalty of five-stars hotels in South-South Region of Nigeria. A correlation coefficient of .334** and $p = .000$ was obtained. Since, the value falls between 0.30 to 0.49, it is interpreted as moderate relationship. Hence, there is a positive, moderate relationship between communication and customer loyalty of five-star hotels in south-south geopolitical zone.

Communication and referrals of five-stars hotels in South-South Region of Nigeria. A correlation coefficient of .442** and $p = .000$ was obtained. Since, the value falls between 0.30 to 0.49, it is interpreted as moderate relationship. Hence, there is a positive, moderate relationship between communication and referrals of five-star hotels in south-south geopolitical zone.

H₀2: Commitment does not correlate with customer retention in the form of customer loyalty, referrals and repeat purchase intention.

Correlations

			Commitment	Referrals	Loyalty	Repeat purchase
Spearman's rho	Commitment	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.658**	.542**	.585**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Referrals	Correlation Coefficient	.658**	1.000	.665**	.593**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Loyalty	Correlation Coefficient	.542**	.665**	1.000	.593**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Repeat purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.585**	.593**	.567**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	120	120	120	120

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

The results on commitment and referrals showed .658** correlation with a significance level of p =.000. The range of validity for this value of 0.50–1.0 suggests a high degree of correlation. Commitment and word-of-mouth recommendations go hand in hand.

The result, from the correlation between commitment and customer loyalty of five-star hotels in South-South Geopolitical zone. A correlation coefficient of .542** and p =.000 was obtained. Since, the value falls between 0.50 to 1.0, it is interpreted as strong relationship. Hence, there is a positive strong relationship between commitment and customer loyalty.

The findings for commitment and repeat purchase showed a coefficient value of .585** correlation at a significance level of.000. As a result, repeat purchase predicts whether or not a customer would make a second purchase.

DISCUSSIONS

Communication and Customer Retention

The result revealed that there is positive strong significant relationship between communication and customer retention in the form of referrals. This means that communication could influence customers' referral in five-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This finding is in relation with that of Lindberg-Repo and Gronroos (1999) that the longer the relationship with customers, the more word-of-mouth referrals these customers are able to give to create more customers for the company. This implies that as the company maintains long-term relationship with customers by sharing relevant and timely information; such satisfied customers would help the company in their attempt to generate new business through word-of-mouth referrals.

The result revealed that there is positive moderate significant relationship between communication and customer retention in the form of loyalty. This means that communication is associated with customer loyalty of five-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with prior studies (Kamnzaman & Abedin, 2015; Ndubuisi, 2007; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018) that communication is a predictor of customer loyalty. As such, Treggana and Cahyani (2018) earlier maintained that communication is very important in building relationship with customers because it provide assistance to the customers to make informed buying decision regarding their needs as well as affecting their loyalty.

The result shows that there is correlation between communication and customer retention in the form of repeat purchase intent. A positive moderately significant correlation was found between open lines of communication and the likelihood of repeat purchases. This means that communication could influence customers' repeat purchase intention in five-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with earlier submission of Adefulu, *et al.*, (2020) that communications as a component of relationship marketing orientation practice affect customer repurchase intentions of online retail firms in Lagos, Nigeria. This is also in line with the suggestion made by Trenggana and Cahyani (2018) that communication is important because it helps the retailer to stay closely in touch with valuable customers by providing relevant and timely information about changes in services and proactively help to resolve customers' discontent that might affect their repeat purchase decisions. In line with this thought, Dichter (1989) maintain that communication helps customers build trust and satisfaction and eventually has a positive effect on repeat purchase.

Commitment and Customer Retention

The bivariate result on the relationship between commitment and customer retention in terms of referrals revealed that commitment influence customer referrals in five-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This finding is in line with that of Kim, *et al.*, (2001) that commitment is a predictor of customer word-of-mouth referrals. Again, the finding also corroborated with that of Glory, *et al.*, (2021) that affiliation marketing is a predictor of client retention in terms of repeat purchase, satisfaction and word-of-mouth. Indeed, when employees are committed in providing quality services in order to enhance customer satisfaction, the customer will definitely reciprocate by advocating through word-of-mouth referrals in an attempt to create more customers for the company

The result revealed that there is positive significant relationship between commitment and customer loyalty. The implication is that commitment influence customer loyalty in five-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This finding contradict that of Ojiaku, *et al.*, (2017) that relationship commitment does not correlate with customer loyalty with pension service firms in South-East, Nigeria. However, the result is consistent with other research showing that dedication has a major impact on customer loyalty (Glory, *et al.*, 2021; Igbai, *et al.*, 2020; Kamnzzaman & Abedin, 2015; Ndubuisi, 2007; Ogbechi, *et al.*, 2018). In addition to that, the finding of Kim, *et al.*, (2001) also corroborated with the finding that affective commitment has a great impact on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Given this, Cater and Cater (2010) argued that commitment generates good intents to continue and enhance commercial relationships and influences customers to remain loyal. Furthermore, the hypothetical testing on the correlations between commitment and repeat purchase intention was not supported. This means that commitment has an effect on repeat purchase intentions in five-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with Kim, *et al.*, (2001) that commitment is positively related with repeat purchase. Similarly, this finding is also reinforced by Trenggana and Cahyani (2018) that commitment is a predictor of customer retention. Thus, commitment is important determinant of relationship marketing and likely to predicting future purchase frequency.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Given rise to the fact that relationship marketing orientation is an ideological and philosophical conception designed to leverage firm's profitability through customer retention, the empirical investigation revealed that relationship marketing orientation in terms of communication and commitment all give credence to customer retention in the form of repeat purchase intention, customer loyalty and referrals in the hospitality operations. This insight clearly asserts that customer retention is a function of customer satisfaction thus, the outcome indicated a strong and positive relationship between the variables. Based on this, the paper recommends that:

1. Hotel management should ensure that effective communication is maintained between customers and employees as this would encourage continual repeat purchase intention.
2. They should encourage make effort to regularly share timely and relevant information regarding their services to customers as this would aid in generating new business through referrals and word of mouth advertisement.
3. Customers' commitment should be encouraged by means of strengthening the bond between hotel employees and their customers. This relationship would support in enhancing customers lifetime value because it would aid in determining the relationship between the hotel and the future purchasing frequency of customers.
4. Loyalty accounts for valuable amount of firm's profit therefore, hotels should endeavour to ensure customers commitment by listening and proffering solutions to their complaints as this would create an enabling environment where customers can openly express their challenges that would aid the hotel to attain it desired objectives.

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