
SEARCH CONVENIENCE AND SATISFACTION OF CUSTOMERS OF INDEPENDENT PETROLEUM PRODUCT MARKETERS IN PORT HARCOURT

OWUSO, Stephen Monima
Department of Marketing
Faculty of Management Sciences
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
stephen.owuso1@ust.edu.ng

EBENUWA, Augustina
Department of Marketing
Faculty of Management and Social Sciences
Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between search convenience and satisfaction of customers of independent petroleum product marketers in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey. The population of the study comprised 450 registered independent petroleum marketers in Rivers State. A sample size of 212 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire, while data analysis was done using Spearman's Rank Order correlation. The study found that search convenience relates to satisfaction of customers of independent petroleum product marketers in Port Harcourt. The study therefore concludes that a significant relationship exists between search convenience and customer satisfaction; and recommends that Independent retail Petroleum Marketers in Rivers State should provide adequate information that would inform prospective customer as to what they have to offer as convenient to the customer as possible. Also, that, independent retail petroleum marketers should ensure they site their retail stations at location that would afford customers the best possible access in order to achieve customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer retention, customer satisfaction, repeats purchase, search convenience

INTRODUCTION

The key to success for firms in today's marketplace is a satisfied customership. Literature is replete with empirical evidence that validates this point. Satisfying today's customers is however not so simple. This is because, in addition to being fickle, customers have become more enlightened and sophisticated; they have a broader variety of alternatives; and have the capacity to make informed choices. Indeed, customers have become product savvy, and are attracted only to firms that offer products that suit economic, social and psychological requirements. In addition, Ateke and Daddie (2018) posit that today's consumers crave convenience due to the finiteness of time available to them and the fast-paced lifestyles of contemporary times.

Darlington (2020) avers that consumers demand for convenience at all times is increasing due to advances in technology, competitions and the society at large. Popal and Bodi (2015) report that customers' happiness with an initial encounter with a firm and its products predicts future purchases intentions, brand loyalty and positive-word-of-mouth. Consumers' willingness to patronize a firm may be influenced by the firm's marketing effort or brand evangelism.

However, a customer's return to a firm for further business is influenced by their level of happiness with the initial encounter. Customers are curious and would engage in search for product(s) that match their quality and standard expectations. Customers will shift their business to competing firms if a firm or its products fall short of their expectations; and one of the parameters increasing being to measure quality is convenience – consumption experience that “satisfies immediate requirements and releases time or energy or both for alternative uses” (Ateke & Daddie, 2018). In this study, particular focus is given to search convenience.

Prior studies on search convenience exist. Tang et al. (2017) report that firms can achieve customer loyalty and patronage by offering convenient service; while Darlington (2020) contend that a significant relationship exists between convenience of transactions and patronage of deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. Ateke and Daddie on their part report that retail convenience results in customer expansion. In the study of Ezenta and Osagie (2020), it was established that a positive correlation exists between service conveniences and patronage of government owned hospitals; while Adenekan (2021) found that a positive relationship between e-retail convenience and customer loyalty among e-consumers.

A large number of studies that have tried to link convenience to different marketing outcomes exist. Prior studies have tried to connect convenience to satisfaction and loyalty (Adenekan, 2021); customer patronage (Ezenta and Osagie (2020); customer expansion (Ateke & Daddie, 2018), among others. However, there is dearth of recent studies that have examined the impacts of search convenience on customer satisfaction. Search convenience is also suspected to impact overall service quality and customer loyalty. This study therefore, opts to contribute to literature by examining the interaction between search convenience and satisfaction of customers of independent petroleum product marketers in Port Harcourt. The conceptual framework in fig 1 summarizes the direction of the study.

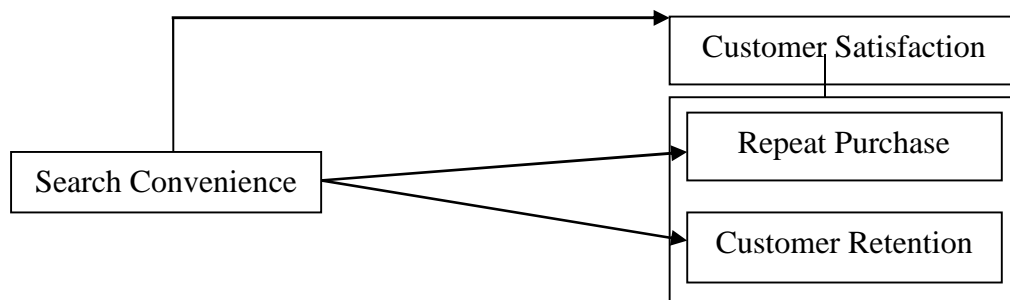


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of search convenience and customer satisfaction

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between search convenience and satisfaction of customers of independent petroleum product marketers in Port Harcourt. The following hypotheses were formulated to provide direction for the study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between search convenience and repeat purchase of customer of independent petroleum product marketers in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between search convenience and retention of customer of independent petroleum product marketers in Port Harcourt.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on the theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA was propounded by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980. The theory has three (3) components: Behavioural Intention (BI), Attitude (A), and Subjective Norms (SN). TRA suggests that a person's behavioural intention depends on their attitude about the behaviour and subjective norms ($BI=A+SN$). Hence, if an individual decides to enact a given behaviour, then it is likely that the person will act it. Service organizations can enhance customers purchase behaviour by creating value in product offerings to meet customers' expectations and satisfy their needs. Ajzen and Fishbein view consumers' purchase intention as an important indicator for predicting consumer behaviour. Patronage intention describes the likelihood that a consumer will be willing to buy a specific product in the future. It is important to note that merchandize value perceptions drive purchase intentions and purchase behaviour.

Concept of Search Convenience

Seider et al. (2017) describe search convenience as the speed and ease with which consumers identify and select products they wish to buy and includes effective interactive customer systems, store design and layout, product displays, store signage, and knowledgeable salespeople. The concept of search convenience is traceable to Copeland's (1923) classification of consumer goods into convenience, shopping, and specialty goods. Search convenience is taken as the savings in time and efforts that consumers spend in purchasing products rather than as a characteristics or an attribute of product itself. A number of studies have investigated convenience as a motive in the areas of electronic banking, online shopping, and product choice in retail (Woodside & Trappey, 2001).

Search convenience is viewed as an important antecedent to consumer behaviour (Chang et al., 2010). Search convenience has become an important product benefit for time constrained consumers and, as such, is increasingly attracting the interest to marketers. To facilitate consumer decision-making, retailers must provide information necessary for consumers to make informed purchase decisions. So, while access convenience reduces the time and effort necessary to reach a retailer, search convenience eases consumers through the shopping process by helping them make their purchase decision. Many turn to the Internet to reduce the effort associated with making a decision. Firms seek to provide consumers with search convenience through store layout and design, website design, navigation, and selection and availability of product formation (Popal & Bedi, 2015).

Customer Satisfaction

Romario and Maseke (2018) described customer satisfaction is a measure on how service provided or supplied by an organization meets or exceeds customers' expectation. Customer satisfaction is important because it provides marketers and business owners with a metric they can use to manage and improve their businesses. Customer satisfaction plays a major role in management and profitability of a company. Most studies that have been done, considers customer satisfaction as an important determinant loyalty in the service sector (Jannat & Ahmed, 2015). It is essential to the competitiveness and improved performance of firms. Satisfied and happy customers are a firm's most important assets because they enhance business growth and profitability (Shen et al., 2000). Dai and Salam (2014), Kaura et al. (2015) and Roy et al. (2016) believe customer satisfaction is a judgment the product performance in relation to customers' expectation. For many businesses customer satisfaction is a yardstick for measuring how well

their product fare in the market. Customer satisfaction also helps the company evaluate customer's purchasing decision. Customer satisfaction is subjective, hence, difficult to measure. In this stud however, repeat purchase and customer retention are used to represent customer satisfaction.

Repeat purchase: Repeat purchase is the degree to which customers to return for further transactions with a brand after an initial transaction (Lien et al., 2011; Beauchamp, 2010). It describes a situation where a consumer buys the same brand name previously bought on another occasion. Repeat purchase is often a measure of loyalty to a brand by consumers and is often taken into account by marketing research professionals to evaluate a business. Consumer gets brand preference only when that brand lives up to his expectation; and brand preference frequently results in repeats purchase (Srinivasan et al., 2018). Armitage and Conner (2017) argued that the tendency of individuals to repeatedly purchase a particular product can be determined by critically looking at their attitudes towards the product; thus, attitude influence consumption behaviour through intentions.

Customer retention: Since loyal customers are the most important assets of a company. Companies have thus giving increased attention to customer retention (Armitage & Conner, 2015). The fundamental purpose of customer retention efforts is to maintain relationships with customers. Customer retention strategies aims to retain valuable customers by reducing defection rate; while customer development strategy aims to increase the value of those retained customers to the company by exploring cross-selling and up-selling opportunities (Souise & Voss, 2016). Customer retention is the strategic objective of striving to maintain long term relationships with customers. Customer retention is not a new concept, but today's market demands a novel approach to building and maintaining loyalty. An effective customer retention strategy not only retains customer, but also promotes sales of additional products (Babatunde & Kemi, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. This design enables the collection of unbiased data from a study population at a point in time (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The population of the study comprised four hundred and fifty (450) independent retail petroleum product marketers who are registered with the Independent petroleum marketers association (IPMAN). The sample size of the study was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula. This method is adopted to generate an appropriate sample size for the study from which generalization can be made to the entire population because the population is large. Thus, two hundred and twelve (212) independents marketers or their managers constitute the respondents for the study. The respondents include general manager, station managers, station supervisor, deport representative. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation

DATA ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 Questionnaire Analysis

Numbers	Questionnaire	Percentage (%)
No. Sent	212	100%
No. Returned	193	91%
No. Not Returned	19	9%

Source: Field Survey Data (2022)

Table 1 shows that a total of 212 copies of questionnaire were distributed, out of which 193 (91%) were retrieved while 19 (9%) were not retrieved. However, 193 (91%) of the retrieved questionnaire were useful. The 19 (9%) of the not retrieved questionnaire were not correctly or completely filled and were consequently discarded.

Table 2: Description of the degree of Association between Variables

Correlation Coefficient (r)	Description/interpretation
± 0.80 – 1.0	Very Strong
± 0.60 – 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 – 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak

The positive (+) sign in the value of r indicates a direct/positive relationship while negative (-) sign in value of r indicates an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. Therefore, the sign of the r value explains the direction of association or nature of relationship between the variables.

Decision Rule

Reject the null hypothesis (H₀) if $PV < 0.05$ for 2-tailed test and conclude that significant relationship exists.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis on search convenience and repeat purchase

		Correlation		
		Search	Convenience	Repeat Purchase
Spearman's rho	Search Convenience	Correlation	1.000	.574**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Repeat Purchase	N	193	193
		Correlation	.974**	1.000
		Coefficient		
		N	193	193

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

Source: SPSS Output.

Table 3 shows that the Spearman's correlation coefficient ($r = 0.574^{**}$), this value implies a moderate relationship between search convenience and repeat purchase. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient indicates a positive relationship. The probability value is $(0.000) < (0.05)$ level of significance; hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between search convenience and repeat purchase.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis on search convenience and customer retention

		Correlation		
		Search	Convenience	Customer Retention
Spearman's rho	Search	Correlation	1.000	.514**
		Coefficient		
	Convenience	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010
		N	193	193
	Customer Retention	Correlation	.974**	1.000
		Coefficient		
		N	193	193

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

Source: (SPSS Output).

Table 4 shows that the Spearman's correlation coefficient (r) = 0.514**, this value implies a moderate relationship between search convenience and customer retention. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient indicates a positive relationship. The probability value is (0.010) > (0.05) level of significance; hence the researcher accepts the null hypothesis and concludes that there is no significant relationship between search convenience and customer retention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The revelations from the study shows that search convenience have a moderate and positive relationship with repeat purchase. This means that, to secure repeat purchase of customers, firms must provide search convenience. We observe that filling station is better sited at location where it will not be difficult for customer to locate and access. Also, our study found that search convenience has a moderate relationship with customer retention. Based on the findings of this study that search convenience is positively and moderately related to repeat purchase which is consistent with results of similar studies, we conclude that search convenience is essential to securing satisfaction of customer of Independent Petroleum Product Marketers in River State. However, we did not find search convenient to be significantly related to customer retention as customers of filling stations do not necessarily need to search for a filling station in order to buy fuel or other petroleum product. The study recommends that Independent retail Petroleum Marketers in Rivers State should provide adequate information that would inform prospective customer as to what they have to offer as convenient to the customer as possible. Also, that, independent retail petroleum marketers should ensure that they site their retail stations at locations that would afford customers the best possible access in order to achieve customer satisfaction.

REFERENCES

- Adenekan, T. A. (2021). E-retail convenience and customer loyalty among customers of Jumia in Nigeria. *Global Scientific Journals*, 9(4), 674-688.
- Armitage, C. J., & Conner, M. (2015). Efficacy of a minimal intervention to reduce fat intake. *Social Science and Medicine*, 52, 1517-1524.

- Ateke, B. W., & Daddie, M. M. (2018). Retail convenience and customer expansion: The experience of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. *International Journal of Marketing Research and Management*, 8(4), 19-28.
- Babatunde, T., & Kemi, B. (2018). Bank service delivery and customers' satisfaction in Nigerian banks.
- Beauchamp, M. B. (2010). Perceptions of retail convenience for in-store and online shoppers. *The Marketing Management Journal*, 20(1), 49-65.
- Brockner, J., Higgins, E. T., & Low, M. B. (2014). Regulatory focus theory and the entrepreneurial process. *Journal of business venturing*, 19(2), 203-220.
- Dai, H., & Salam, A. F. (2014). Does service convenience matter? An empirical assessment of service quality, service convenience and exchange relationship in electronic mediated environment. *Electronic Markets*, 24(4), 269-284.
- Darlington, C. C. (2020). Transaction convenience and customer patronage of deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. *International Journal of Business & Entrepreneurship Research*, 13(1), 64-78.
- Ezenta, o. n., & Osagie, I. u. (2020). Service convenience and customer patronage of government owned hospitals in Abia State, Nigeria. *British Journal of Marketing Studies*, 8(5), 65-83.
- Jannat, M., & Ahmed, I. (2015) Factors influencing customer satisfaction of mobile banking services: A study on second - generation banks.
- Kaura, V., Durga Prasad, C. S., & Sharma, S. (2015). Service quality, service convenience, price and fairness, customer loyalty, and the mediating role of customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 33(4).
- Popal, R., & Bedi, S. S. (2015). Impact of hospital services on outpatient satisfaction. *International journal of research in business management*, 2(4), 37-44.
- Seiders, K., Berry, L. L., & Gresham, L. G. (2017). Attention, retailers! How convenient is your convenience strategy? *Sloan Management Review*, 41(3), 79-89.
- Romario, G., & Maseke, B. F (2018). The impact of mobile banking on customer satisfaction: Commercial Banks of Namibia.
- Shen, X. X., Tan, K. C., & Xie, M. (2000). An integrated approach to innovative product development using Kano's model and QFD. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 3(2), 91-99.
- Souse, R., & Voss, C. (2016). Service quality in multi-channel services employing virtual channels. *Journal of service research*, 8(4), 356-371.
- Srinivasan, S., Anderson, R., & Ponnayolu, K. (2018). Customer loyalty in e-commerce: an exploration of its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Retailing*, 78, 41-50