

SPONSORSHIP MARKETING AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF BETTING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to examine the relationship between sponsorship marketing and customer patronage in Nigerian betting firms. Customer patronage was measured using three key indicators: customer retention, repeat purchases, and sales volume. The study population comprised 42 betting firms in Rivers State, with one manager from each firm selected as a respondent. These managers were chosen for their intellectual and official capacity to provide accurate and relevant data. Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to test the hypotheses, and the results revealed a significant and positive correlation between sponsorship marketing and customer patronage. Based on these findings, the study concluded that sponsorship marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing customer patronage within the betting industry in Nigeria. Consequently, it is recommended that the management of betting firms focus on promoting and strengthening their sponsorship marketing strategies to boost customer retention, increase repeat purchases, and enhance overall sales performance.

Keywords: Sponsorship marketing, customer patronage, customer retention, repeat purchases, sales volume.

Introduction

The Nigerian sports betting and gaming industry has experienced significant growth over the past few decades. This rapid development can largely be attributed to the increasing participation of youth, greater access to the internet, widespread use of mobile phones, and the proliferation of internet-enabled devices. However, given the industry's rapid expansion and Nigeria's already high poverty rates, it is crucial for the government to take steps to safeguard the future of its youth. Proper regulation of the sports betting and gaming industry is essential, as checks and balances must be in place to prevent potential harm. This is particularly important because a growing number of young people view sports betting as their "way out" of hardship, often leading to desperation, debt, and even illegal activities. To ensure responsible growth and protect vulnerable individuals, obtaining a gaming license in Nigeria requires approval from multiple regulatory bodies. Key operators in this process include the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC), the Special Control Unit against Money Laundering (SCUML), and the National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP). These organizations play a critical role in maintaining the integrity of the industry and ensuring that it operates within legal and ethical boundaries.).

Certain operators must get a Capital Importation Certificate and coordinate with the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) to acquire a Tax Identification Number and register for Value Added Tax (VAT). Operators must assure compliance with legal regulations concerning the games they provide. The premier digital sports brand has announced unprecedented traffic in Nigeria for April 2016, marking a second straight month, attributed to the nation's fervent passion for football. Nigerians' passion for football resulted in 5.7 million unique visitors to ESPN's digital platforms in April, totaling 16 million visits and over 133.7 million minutes spent, surpassing the prior records of 4.9 million unique users, 14.6 million visits, and 110 million minutes established in March (Bankole, 2016).

The rising expenses associated with athletic events have redirected commercial attention towards sponsorship. Advancements in communication technology and intense competition have compelled firms to seek alternate methods for advertising their enterprises. Large enterprises, along with small to medium-sized enterprises experiencing rapid growth, must employ innovative methodologies and strategies (Czuchry et al., 2009). Wonglimpiyara (2018) contended that the utilisation of dynamic tools as facilitators of innovation can significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of burgeoning businesses. The advantages that corporations get have significantly amplified their sponsorship of sporting events, particularly during the last three decades (Singh and Bhatia, 2015). The expansion of sponsorship as a marketing instrument is remarkable. Yupin and Goldfarb (2015) assert that the escalation of sponsorship spending throughout the years indicates that corporations see sponsoring different sports events as sound investments. Faed et al. (2012) assert that a diverse array of sports sponsors has evolved, including government entities, non-profit groups, and corporate enterprises. The Olympic Partner Program garnered USD 957 million from sponsors in 2012.

Companies that now support sporting events do so in accordance with their capabilities and standing. The spectrum of sponsees include elite sports groups and individual sportsmen of lesser status. Sponsorships may be directed towards seasonal contests, minor sporting events, or local tournaments. Sponsorship of international sporting events offers opportunity for the worldwide promotion of firms' goods and services. Koronios et al. (2016) posited that sponsorship has emerged as a prevalent instrument for marketing communication in the business sector and has become integral to the marketing strategy of every organization. Organizations spend substantial resources to marketing communication and promotional endeavours. The impact of sponsorship on the marketing of sporting events is significant, as it guarantees enhanced profits from this business strategy (Doshybekov et al., 2016). Researchers and marketing professionals have sought to examine the factors that directly or indirectly influence client patronage (Etuk, Usani, Sampson & Udoh, 2021). Many firms participate in detrimental competition to secure consumer loyalty, using various tactics in the belief that such strategies would enable them to outmanoeuvre their rivals. Certain sales managers pursue the acquisition of new consumers without first establishing the appropriate positioning of the product they provide (Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, & Udey-Mgbado, 2023)

Despite the evolving objectives of sponsorship, researchers have sought to elucidate the reasons for the increasing investment of organizations in sponsorships (Singh, Bhardwaj & Sudan, 2019). Mansourpour

(2007) asserts that sponsorship marketing organizations pursue several objectives, including enhancing public awareness, increasing organizational reputation, influencing youth, improving corporate image, fostering satisfaction, and securing media coverage, which are identified as the primary corporate goals. Industry operators believe that the rising number of internet customers will correlate with an increase in gaming users, perhaps necessitating mergers and acquisitions among fragmented small firms in the sector. The expanding Nigerian gaming sector is characterised by fragmentation, including several minor participants. As user behaviour evolves and expenditure requirements rise, the sector may be compelled to consolidate, reflecting worldwide trends.

Various academic studies have concentrated on the influence of distinct elements of sponsorship marketing tactics on client patronage (Adiele, Grend & Chinedu, 2015; Bennett, 1999; Mansourpour, 2007; Meenaghan, 1998). Literature is replete with research attempting to connect elements of sponsorship marketing methods to client patronage. Adiele, Grend, and Chinedu (2015) examined physical evidence and customer patronage; Bennett (1999) assessed sports sponsorship, spectator recall, and false consensus; Hock (1998) evaluated sponsorship management; Mansourpour (2007) explored the utilisation of sports sponsorship as a marketing instrument; and Meenaghan (1998) investigated contemporary developments and future trajectories in sponsorship. Nevertheless, none of these research tried to establish a connection between sponsored marketing methods and client patronage. Hence, the focus of the current study is to review literature to determine the relationship between sponsorship marketing strategies and customer patronage of betting firms in Nigeria, using customer retention, repeat purchase and sales volume as metrics of customer patronage. This is depicted in our conceptual framework.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation/Exchange theory

Exchange theory posits that one of the foremost theoretical perspectives on sports sponsorship is provided by exchange theory (Reams et al., 2015). Exchange theory comprises two fundamental principles: the first posits that sponsorship entails the exchange of assets between two entities, while the second asserts that the goods traded must possess equivalent worth. Consequently, reciprocal exchanges occur concurrently, resulting in mutual benefits for both sides. Amoako et al. (2012) assert that the sponsee provides advantages to the sponsor by augmenting brand awareness and improving brand image, which correlate with heightened sales. The sponsor derives advantages from income and additional services (Chirilă and Chirilă, 2016). Investing in sports sponsorships not only amplifies brand visibility for corporations but also aids sports organizations in cultivating talent (Renard and Sitz, 2011). Singh and Bhatia (2015) assert that by engaging in sports sponsorships, companies enhance their brand visibility and elevate their brand reputation among team fans. Conversely, the use of sponsorship also enhances sporting events. Both parties engaged in a potential sports sponsorship may do a cost-benefit analysis prior to reaching a conclusive conclusion (Singh and Bhatia, 2015), which might enhance their relationship and facilitate the maintenance of their sponsorship agreement.

The Concept of Sponsorship Marketing

Sponsorship marketing pertains to the sponsorship of a firm's marketing activity. Sponsorship marketing involves the involvement or support of many initiatives, including the sponsorship of sports and cultural events (Hutchinson et al., 2016). Sponsorship marketing may significantly benefit both the sports industry and society, thereby becoming a crucial element of firms' promotional strategies. Sponsorship marketing is expected to provide both immediate and long-term benefits to the sponsoring organization (Singh, Bhardwaj & Sudan, 2019). Sponsorship marketing objectives can include enhancing consumer brand awareness (Bennett, 1999). Sports represent a voluntary sector in which enterprises are eager to engage. Gardner and Shuman (1988) assert that sponsorship serves as an interest in causes or outcomes that assist business objectives, such as enhancing company image or achieving marketing goals like increasing brand awareness. Sponsoring enterprises must cultivate a robust relationship with their viewers (Tsiotsou et al., 2014). The efficacy of sports events is contingent upon the robustness of the connection between sponsors and sports organizations (Nufer and Bühler, 2010; Renard and Sitz, 2011). Sponsorship marketing is defined as "the provision of support, either financial or in kind, to an activity by a business entity to attain business objectives" (Meenaghan 1983 as referenced in Singh, Bhardwaj & Sudan, 2019). Bunch (2000), as referenced by Singh, Bhardwaj, and Sudan (2019), asserts that sponsorship marketing is defined as "a monetary or in-kind payment made for a property (typically a sport, entertainment, non-profit event, or organization) in exchange for access to the commercial potential associated with that property." Sponsorship marketing increasingly seeks to penetrate consumer behaviour, as evidenced by the substantial growth in sports sponsorship-related marketing initiatives over recent years, where logo-adorned athletes' jerseys and race cars have effectively transformed into mobile billboards (Hock, 1998; Singh, Bhardwaj & Sudan, 2019). Sponsorship marketing constitutes a co-marketing alliance and a strategic relationship between sports groups and corporations.

Yupin and Goldfarb (2015) posited that the growing significance of sponsorship marketing has prompted scholars to explore its efficacy as a promotional instrument. Smith (2008) asserts that sports sponsorship has significantly grown in recent years. Numerous varieties of gaming organizations and individuals may get assistance, including individual athletes, clubs and organizations, events, associations, alliances, competitions, venues, and special instances (Singh, Bhardwaj & Sudan, 2019). It is implicit that several players and games get sponsorship from different organizations, and strategic partnerships are also established for these games.

Sponsorship marketing aims to enhance brand awareness or transform an existing brand by associating a product or brand with the attributes of a sports team, event, or noteworthy individuals (Marshall & Cook, 1992 as quoted in Singh, Bhardwaj & Sudan, 2019). Meenaghan (1998), as referenced by Singh, Bhardwaj, and Sudan (2019), asserts that sponsorship marketing encompasses brands' involvement in activities aimed at achieving corporate or marketing objectives, enhancing corporate reputation, or augmenting brand equity. Interestingly, sponsorship of games has evolved into a well-established strategic tool for enhancing brand awareness, brand image, and corporate identity (Gupta, 2003) as noted

in Singh, Bhardwaj, and Sudan (2019). Sponsorship marketing may aid in achieving the product goals of small businesses.

The Concept of Customer Patronage

Customer patronage has several indicators. Customer patronage is defined as a synthesis of psychological elements that affect purchasing behaviour, which consumers see as significant criteria for selecting a business to patronise (Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, & Udey-Mgbado, 2023). Customer patronage and loyalty are used interchangeably since customer patronage precedes loyalty (Adiele, Grend, & Chinedu, 2015). Consumer patronage may be analysed from three viewpoints: unplanned purchasing, somewhat planned purchasing, and fully planned purchasing. Engel et al. (1995). Unplanned buying refers to purchases made by the consumer without prior intention; partially planned buying involves purchases that are only partially premeditated, while fully planned buying denotes the acquisition of items that the consumer has explicitly intended to purchase. Customer patronage is believed to result from several personal and societal causes.

Patronage is the result of an intense desire to commit to an organization based on its service quality or perceived service attributes (Adiele, Grend, & Chinedu, 2015). Research indicates that "media, product, and brand-related factors contribute to customer patronage" (Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, & Udey-Mgbado, 2023). The degree to which a consumer utilises a firm's services is contingent upon their perception of the firm's servicescape and the alignment of the firm's condition with their own identity (Adiele, Grend, & Chinedu, 2015). Implicit in this is that the consumer choose the brand that aligns with their personality and wants, rather than just the goods available in the market. Scholars have assessed consumer patronage via numerous aspects, including shop traffic flow, willingness, word of mouth, repeat purchases, customer retention, customer referrals, and customer happiness (Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, & Udey-Mgbado, 2023).

Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, and Udey-Mgbado (2023) assert that organizations are consistently compelled to devise innovations that enhance consumer engagement. Customer patronage denotes customers who purchase things for personal use or utilisation (Etuk, Usani, Sampson & Udoh 2021). Consequently, consumer patronage necessitates loyalty to a firm's goods or service excellence. Customer patronage refers to the behaviour of consistently frequenting a certain store or institution (Jaja, 2019). Customer patronage denotes a profound dedication to acquiring a company's goods above those of its competitors (Patrick, Afolabi, Emmanuel & Monsurat 2019).

Measures of Customer Patronage

Akani, Ehio, and Onyegbule (2023) examined brand recognition and client patronage, with the research segmented into customer retention and repeat purchases. Adiele, Grend, and Chinedu (2015) investigated the correlation between physical evidence and consumer patronage. Empirical research of the Nigerian banking industry used client retention, repeat purchases, and sales volume as metrics of consumer patronage. This research used the metrics of customer retention and repeat purchases from Akani, Ehio, and Onyegbule (2023), as well as sales volume from Adiele, Grend, and Chinedu (2015).

Customer Retention

Customer retention is the marketing objective of dissuading consumers from switching to competitors (Ramakrishnan, 2006). As stated by Akani, Ehio, and Onyegbule (2023), customer retention pertains to the inclination of consumers to remain loyal to a business and to favour its products over those of competitors. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) observed that a pleased consumer would be thrilled and will attract two more customers to patronise the company. Conversely, if a client is dissatisfied with the organization, they will inform friends, associates, and loved ones about the organization's shortcomings, potentially resulting in the loss of 10 consumers. Marketing managers develop appropriate service enhancement strategies despite constrained resources, and with successful implementation of these enhancements, user retention may increase in the foreseeable future (Hung, Doi & Inoi, 2020). The advantages of client retention manifest in three essential business aspects: enhanced income, reduced customer acquisition expenses, and heightened referrals.

Sharmeela-Banu, Gengeswari, and Padmashantini (2013) assert that retained consumers exhibit more loyalty due to the incentives or value provided to them. Mostert, Meyer, and Ransburg (2009) describe customer retention as the strategies organizations use to maintain relationships with current customers to ensure ongoing commercial transactions. Customer retention enhances marketing efficiency by lowering the expenses associated with acquiring new clients (Honts & Hanson, 2011). The significance of client retention for organizations cannot be exaggerated (Akani, Ehio & Onyegbule, 2023). Due to escalating customer acquisition expenses, firms must use creative strategies and proactively engage in client retention. The knowledge and significance of client retention are very vital for organizations. Particularly in current period marked by intense rivalry and discerning consumers who base their choices to remain or switch on logical and emotional factors (Langat, Bonuke, & Kibet, 2021). Customer retention allows the marketing organization to endure intense competition while realising substantial savings from maintaining current clients (Akani & Okwandu, 2022).

Repeat Purchase

A customer who repeatedly purchases the same products and services usually does so due to a positive experience or elevated expectations. Furthermore, recurring purchases are regarded as the most crucial factor in enhancing organizational profitability (Reichheld, 1996). Recurrent purchases or shown desire in more acquisitions signify consumer satisfaction (Lam et al., 2004 quoted in Akani, Ehio & Onyegbule, 2023). Alshurideh (2014) asserts that repeat purchases are significantly influenced positively by factors such as utilitarian and informational reinforcements, behavioural context, and learning history, whereas utilitarian and informational punishments adversely impact repeat purchase behaviour. According to Akani, Ehio, and Onyegbule (2023), repeat buy refers to the probability that a customer would engage in more transactions with a certain service provider based on their present conditions and expected future occurrences.

Sales Volume

The word sales encompass all actions related to the transaction of a product or service to a customer or company (Fonkeng, 2021). Sales Volume quantifies the quantity, often in cartons or crates, of a product

sold at a certain moment (Abiodun, 2011). This is often used with items, but it may also be employed inside a service organization. Sales volume denotes the company's sales necessary to guarantee productivity (Williams, 2003). For organizations, sales include more than just transactions; the core of regular client patronage indicates that an increase in sales volume would eventually and substantially influence the company's profitability (Adiele & Gabriel, 2013). Pander (1998) defines sales volume as the quantity of things sold by a firm. The objective of all marketing initiatives is to enhance market share (volume) by providing goods and services that fulfil consumer desires over the long term (Okwandu & Akenbor, 2005). Nwokah (2015) asserts that sales growth (volume) serves as a robust indicator of marketing and, therefore, company success.

The identification of appropriate target audiences, brand positioning, accurate pricing, and selection of proper distribution channels are marketing methods that significantly influence product sales (Havaladar & Vasant 2007). Fonkeng (2021) asserts that to attain increased sales volume, the experiences and attitudes of the company's marketing personnel significantly influence customer acquisition, alongside the development of innovative sponsorship marketing strategies and promotional concepts, supported by rigorous market research and a commitment to staying informed about current market trends and specialised expertise (Havaladar & Vasant 2007). The product's pricing is a significant internal element influencing sales volume. It signifies the compensation a corporation receives. The seller must understand the product's elasticity to determine an appropriate pricing. An elastic product will respond either favourably or unfavourably to minimal price fluctuations, hence influencing demand correspondingly (Fonkeng, 2021). Sales volume plays a crucial part in bridging the gap between prospective customers' wants and the goods or services that the organization provides to meet those needs. Below is study variables/conceptual framework:

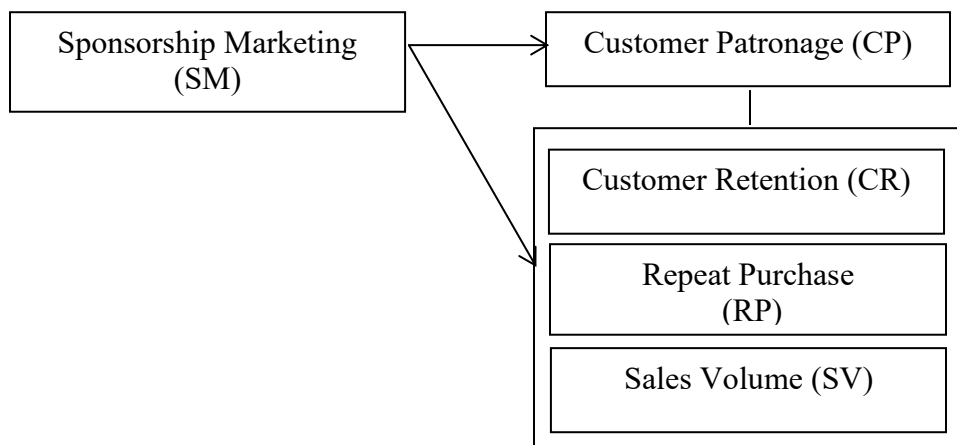


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between sponsorship marketing strategies and customer patronage of betting firms in Rivers State.

Source: The measures of customer patronage adapted from Akani, Ehio & Onyegbule (2023). Adiele, Grend. & Chinedu (2015).

Sponsorship Marketing and Customer Patronage

Brand awareness and client loyalty to deposit money banks were studied by Akani, Ehio, and Onyegbule (2023). The purpose of this research was to examine the connection between Port Harcourt deposit money banks' brand awareness and client loyalty. The findings demonstrated a favourable and statistically significant correlation between brand recognition and consumer patronage as measured by retention and repeat purchases. There is an implication that customers' familiarity with the brand influences their choice of Port Harcourt deposit money bank. The effect of sports sponsorship on consumer perception of a brand was also studied by Aissa and Matar (2016). Proof from Algeria. Brand value characteristics (customer trends, brand image, and mark loyalty) are the focus of this research, which seeks to investigate the impact of sports sponsorship on these dimensions. In Algeria, 345 individual surveys were dispersed using a non-random method. Any other sort of sampling is considered non-random. These approaches are often used since they are quick, easy, and do not need a sample frame. The findings revealed that sports sponsors have a notable effect on consumer trends in terms of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Furthermore, sports sponsors also affect the reputation of the event's brand. Brand loyalty for sports event sponsors was also shown to be influenced by sports sponsors, according to the research. However, when it comes to the variations in sample responses, the findings indicate that the trends sample differs across demographic and functional variables such as age, sex, education level, occupation, and tradertype in regards to the influence of sports sponsors' brand value dimensions, such as consumer attitudes towards the brand, brand image, and loyalty to the mark.

(Etuk, Usani, Sampson and Udoh 2021) looked studied how the size of cosmetic product packaging affected the purchase behaviour of female Uyo University students. Female students at Nigeria's University of Uyo were the subjects of this research on the effect of cosmetic product package dimensions on purchase behaviour. The study looked at the cosmetics consumption habits of Nigerian women students at the University of Uyo and how several factors including package colour, branding, and materials affected those habits. The study used a survey research approach and a basic random selection of 250 respondents. Primary data collection was chosen by the researchers. A well-structured questionnaire was used to gather the main data. We used basic linear regression analysis to evaluate three hypotheses. The study's results showed that cosmetic product patronage among female students at the University of Uyo is positively affected by package parameters such as colour, labelling, and packaging materials. In addition, Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, and Udey-Mgbado (2023) looked at the relationship between petroleum product brand perception and consumer spending in the Calabar metropolitan area. The impact of consumers' perceptions of certain gas stations' brands (their identification, awareness, and reputation) on their spending habits was the focus of this research, which took place in the Calabar Metropolis. A cross-sectional survey was used to gather data for the study, which followed a survey research design. The research used a sample size of 143 participants. The development, validation, and reliability testing of a 5-point structured Likert questionnaire were carried out utilising a test-retest approach. Using multiple regression analysis, the data that was obtained was examined. The research found that consumers' patronage of gasoline filling stations in Calabar Metropolis is positively impacted by brand identification, brand awareness, and brand repute.

Physical evidence and client patronage: An empirical study of the Nigerian banking industry was investigated by Adiele, Grend, and Chinedu (2015). In particular, the research looked at how tangible proof affected the business of publicly traded banks in Nigeria's south-south zone. Research for the project relied on fourteen banks listed on the Nigeria Stock Exchange. The study took into account both the business level and the unit of analysis for senior managers. We also surveyed customers of the selected banks. Our study's respondents were 42 managers and 7 consumers who were chosen at random. The research variables were described descriptively, and the different hypotheses were tested inferentially using the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient. Researchers looked at the correlation between physical evidence and consumer spending with the use of Pearson's partial correlation to see how much organizational elements mediated the link. Physical evidence and consumer patronage are strongly and significantly correlated, according to the research. Findings from the research highlight the importance of well-designed workplace ambiance, physical architecture, and indicators in influencing sales, profit, and customer retention. Also, in 2014, Tamuliene and Gabryte looked at a case study of mobile phone companies in Lithuania to see what characteristics affected customer retention. Although several studies have looked at customers' propensity to make repeat purchases, experts still can't agree on what influences customer retention or how to measure it. A theoretical model of customer retention was developed and tested in the practice of Lithuanian mobile operators as part of the research. There is a favourable link between the factors, according to the empirical investigation. We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

- H01:** Sponsorship marketing does not significantly relate with customer retention of gaming firms in Rivers State
- H02:** Sponsorship marketing does not significantly relate with repeat purchase of gaming firms in Rivers State
- H03:** Sponsorship marketing does not significantly relate with sales volume of gaming firms in Rivers State

Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design, which allowed for the collection of data through the use of questionnaires. The study focused on examining the relationship between sponsorship marketing and customer patronage in betting firms across Nigeria. The target population consisted of forty two (42) betting firms in Rivers State. One manager from each of the 42 betting firms in Rivers State was selected as respondents, based on their intellectual and official capacity to provide accurate and relevant data for the study. Primary data were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire, which was structured in a multiple-choice format and included a 5-point Likert scale. This format was chosen to ensure that the questions were easily understood by the respondents. The questionnaire was validated using content validity techniques, and its reliability was confirmed through Data analysis was conducted using inferential statistical techniques with SPSS version 25.0. The analysis was performed at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficients and p-values were calculated to determine the nature and direction of the relationships between variables, as well as to test the stated hypotheses.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Correlation Matrix for Sponsorship Marketing and Measures of Customer Patronage

			Sponsorship Marketing	Customer Retention	Repeat Purchase	Sales Volume
Spearman's rho	Sponsorship Marketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.813**	.863**	.774**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	42	42	42	42
	Customer Retention	Correlation Coefficient	.813**	1.000	.807**	.805**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	42	42	42	42
	Repeat Purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.863**	.807**	1.000	.922**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	42	42	42	42
	Sales Volume	Correlation Coefficient	.774**	.805**	.922**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	42	42	42	42

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

Source: SPSS Output, 25.0 (2024)

The results reveal a strong positive relationship between sponsorship marketing and key indicators of customer patronage in betting firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, as indicated by the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficients (rho): the correlation coefficient (rho) is .813, indicating a very strong positive relationship between sponsorship marketing and customer retention. This suggests that as sponsorship marketing practices increase, so does customer retention. The relationship is statistically significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). The correlation coefficient (rho) is .863, showing a very strong positive relationship between sponsorship marketing and Repeat Purchase. This implies that enhanced sponsorship marketing is associated with increased profit levels. This relationship is also statistically significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). The correlation coefficient (rho) is .774, indicating a strong positive relationship between sponsorship marketing and sales volume. This suggests that higher sales volumes are associated with the practice of sponsorship marketing. The relationship is statistically significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). In summary, the findings confirm significant positive relationships between sponsorship marketing and customer patronage of betting firms in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate a robust positive correlation between sponsorship marketing and critical metrics of customer patronage in betting firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, as evidenced by the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of .813, signifying a very strong positive association between sponsorship marketing and customer retention. This indicates that an increase in sponsored marketing strategies correlates with enhanced client retention. The connection is statistically significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). The correlation value (rho) is 0.863, indicating a robust positive association between

sponsorship marketing and profit level. This indicates that improved sponsorship marketing correlates with elevated profit margins. This association is statistically significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). The correlation value (ρ) is 0.774, suggesting a robust positive association between sponsorship marketing and sales volume. This indicates that increased sales volumes correlate with the use of sponsorship marketing. The connection is statistically significant ($p=0.000 < 0.05$). The findings of this study align with the research conducted by Akani, Ehio, and Onyegbule (2023), which examined brand identification and consumer patronage of deposit money institutions. The findings indicated that brand awareness has a favourable and statistically significant correlation with client patronage, shown via repeat purchases and customer retention. Brand recognition is implicitly connected to consumer patronage of deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. Aissa and Matar (2016) examined the influence of sport sponsorship on brand value. Data from Algeria. The results indicated that variations exist in the sample trends regarding the influence of sports sponsors' brand value dimensions (consumer attitudes towards the brand, brand image, and brand loyalty) based on demographic and functional variables (age, gender, educational attainment, occupation, and type of trade). Etuk, Usani, Sampson, and Udoh (2021) examined the impact of container dimensions on the use of cosmetic items among female students at the University of Uyo. The study's results indicated a favourable impact of package dimensions (colour, labelling, and materials) on the consumption of cosmetic items among female students at the University of Uyo. Additionally, Anyadighibe, Ezekiel, Awara, and Udey-Mgbado (2023) examined the relationship between brand image and client patronage of petroleum products in the Calabar metropolitan. The research demonstrated that brand identification, awareness, and reputation positively affect consumer patronage of gasoline filling stations in Calabar Metropolis. Additionally, Adiele, Grend, and Chinedu (2015) investigated the relationship between physical evidence and client patronage in an empirical study of the Nigerian banking industry. The research demonstrated a robust, positive, and substantial link between physical evidence and client patronage. The research demonstrated that effective design of workplace ambience, physical architecture, and signage greatly influences sales volume, profit margin, and customer retention. Tamuliene and Gabryte (2014) investigate the determinants of client retention in the context of Lithuanian mobile providers. The research developed a theoretical model of customer retention and validated it within the practices of mobile operators in Lithuania. The empirical study findings indicated a statistically significant positive association between the variables.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the relationship between sponsorship marketing and customer patronage in Nigerian betting firms. The study demonstrates that there is a significant and strong positive relationship between sponsorship marketing and key indicators of customer patronage such as customer retention, profit levels, and sales volume. Based on the findings of this study, concluded that sponsorship marketing relate with customer patronage of betting firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The following recommendations were made.

1. Based on the findings the study, recommends that betting firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, should allocate more resources to sponsorship marketing initiatives to improve their customer patronage.
2. Management of betting firms in should leverage on sponsorship marketing and enhance their customer patronage.

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