

**RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND CUSTOMERS'  
RETENTION IN THE NIGERIAN TELECOMMUNICATION  
INDUSTRY: A CUSTOMER-CENTERED APPROACH**

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**ABSTRACT:** The study empirically investigated the effect of relationship marketing on customers' retention in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. The study used relationship marketing proxies vis-à-vis trust, commitment, communication and service quality while customers' retention served as the dependent variable. This led us to formulate four research objectives, four research questions, and four research hypotheses. Primary data via the use of well-structured research questionnaire administration served as the estimation techniques while the data was analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPCM) Coefficient through the instrumentality of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Although, 170 research questions were shared across the field and only 161 was retrieved and used for this study. Findings from the field survey conducted in Warri and Asaba affirmed that trust, commitment, communication, and service quality have a positive high correlation with customers' retention in the Nigerian telecom industry. However, only trust and efficient communication were highly significant using their p-value as an assessor. Hence, the study concludes that a good relationship marketing that meets the expectations of customers can encourage the desire to continue to do transactions, respond to complaints of services, improve a long-term relationship and mutual trust, and keep the communication to flow well. In this light, the study recommends that market makers in the Nigerian telecommunication industry should pay more concentration on problems regarding trust, commitment, communication and service quality.

**Keywords:** Relationship Marketing, Customers' Retention, Nigerian Telecommunication Industry, Customer-Centered Approach

## **INTRODUCTION**

The development of relationship marketing has received a lot of attention in both academy and practice in recent time. Originally, relationship marketing was first conceptualized by Leonard Berry in 1983 wherein he differentiated between relationship and transaction (traditional) marketing. He claimed that traditional marketing is all about product quality centeredness while modern (relationship) marketing is all about customer centeredness. The justification for this is that as the world evolves owing to change in customer taste, globalization alongside the need for companies to stay afloat made these constructs more compelling (Kehinde, Adegbuyi, & Borishae, 2016). More so, even with the advent of relationship marketing, the issue of customer

retention remains unresolved. Again, there is a lack of clear and effective policy on the part of telecommunication companies on dealing with the misuse of telecom facilities since there are no best practices on the construct at present. Moreover, it is difficult to define and measure the returns on relationship marketing. Therefore, this study intends to fill the missing gaps by exploring a working definition of relationship marketing to bring about customers' retention.

Again, despite the overabundance of extant studies on the subject matter both developing and developed countries, only a few studies have focused on the effect of relationship marketing on customer retention using the telecommunication industry as a case study (Yulisetiari, 2016; Nkanata, 2018; Ojiaku, Aghara, & Ezeoke, 2017; Yaw Koi-Akrofi, et al, 2013). However, these studies may not be replicable in the Nigerian context due to the difference in business conditions and regulatory policies. Again, these studies only consider the consumer point of view. Against this shortfall, this study will therefore stand to fill the missing strategic intellectual omission by examining the effect of relationship marketing on customer retention in the Nigerian context. Specifically, the objective of this study is to examine the effect of trust, commitment, communication, and service quality on customer retention in selected telecom companies in Nigeria.

In line with the specific objectives of this paper articulated above, we hypothesize

- H0<sub>1</sub>:** Trust has no strong correlation with customer retention in the Nigerian telecom industry.
- H0<sub>2</sub>:** Commitment has no strong correlation with customer retention in the Nigerian telecom industry.
- H0<sub>3</sub>:** Communication has no strong correlation with customer retention in the Nigerian telecom industry.
- H0<sub>4</sub>:** Service Quality has no strong correlation with customer retention in the Nigerian telecom industry.

Accordingly, this paper is unique in that it provides theory development for academics and practical implication for marketing management. More so, this paper would be significant to academicians, mobile operators, telecom companies and the rest of the service sectors in that it assists them on how they can respond to the variety of relationship marketing strategies being deployed as it is helpful for marketers to understand the effectiveness of relationship marketing tactics from consumer's perspective.

In synopsis, this paper covered five (5) sections to the inclusion of introduction, literature reviews, analytical methodology, results and discussions, and conclusions and recommendations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Clarifications/Linkages

The telecom industry is one of the most important industries in the world since it delivers voice communications, data, graphics, and video at ever-increasing speeds. Again, this industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world (Yaw Koi-Akrofi, Koi-Akrofi&Welbeck, 2013). Due to this, customer relationship marketing plays an important role in the telecommunication industry. Hence, relationship marketing and customers' retention are a key issue in the Nigerian telecom industry.

The term relationship marketing is a strategy designed to promote customer retention, interaction and long-term engagement with customers by providing them with information directly suited to their needs and interests and by promoting open communication (Annie, 2013). More so, Kehinde, et'al (2016) and Husnain and Akhtar (2015) define relationship marketing is a form of marketing that evolved from direct response marketing; it emphasizes building longer-term relationships with customers rather than on individual transactions. Relationship marketing involves an understanding of customers' needs and wants through their lifecycle and providing a range of products or services accordingly.

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, businesses following the principles of relationship marketing forge long-lasting bonds with their customers. As a result, customers trust these businesses, and mutual retention helps both parties fulfil their needs. This approach often results in increased word-of-mouth activity, repeat business and a willingness on the customer's part to provide information to the organization. Buyers and sellers in markets achieve mutual benefits through developing relationships (Ojiaku, Aghara, & EzeokeObianuju, 2017)

Based on the foregoing expositions, the overall goals of relationship marketing are to find, attract and win new clients; nurture and retain those the company already has; entice former clients back into the fold, and reduce the costs of marketing and client service. In other words, the benefits of relationship marketing are derived from the continuing patronage of loyal customers who as a partnership are not sensitive to price cut over time (Nkanata, 2018). Compared with traditional marketing, Nkanata (2018) noted that relationship marketing is more concerned about building customer relationships to achieve long-term mutual benefits for all parties involved in the exchanges. Relationship marketing essentially means developing customers as partners, where the approach is different from the traditional transaction. It is presented below:

**Table 1: Relationship marketing versus traditional marketing**

S/N	Relationship Marketing	Traditional Marketing
1	Customer centeredness	Product Quality centeredness
2	Orientation to customer retention	Orientation to single sales
3	Continual customer contact	Episodic customer contact
4	Focus on customer value	Focus on product features

5	Long-term horizon	Short-term horizon
6	High customer-service emphasis	Little emphasis on customer service
7	High commitment to meeting	Limited commitment to meeting
8	Quality concerns all staff members	Quality concerns only production staff

**Source: Adapted from** Nkanata (2018)

Foteaet'al (2011), summarized the followings as key principles of relationship marketing:

**Principle 1: Build a Relationship**

- i. Relationship marketing is the word of mouth business- Always have and will always be
- ii. Focus on building quality relationships with prospects first- find a need and fill it.
- iii. Solve a problem for your prospects and they will be fans for life

**Principle 2: Look for leaders**

- i. Become known as a leader in your field
- ii. Leaders, speak, write, and have a voice
- iii. People like to be around leaders
- iv. People look to leaders for a direction to follow

**Principle 3: The List is the King**

- i. Build a list
- ii. Continually expand your list
- iii. Create a relationship with your list
- iv. Market to and monetize your list.

**Principle 4: Become a Trusted Source of Value**

- i. Your income and your success is directly related to the value you give to prospects and customers
- ii. The scales on which you deliver that value can make you very wealthy
- iii. Commit to continual improvement-you can always get better.

**Principle 5: Solve Problem**

- i. Relationship marketing is a problem-solving business.
- ii. The most profile problem solvers and the highest earners.

**Principle 6: This is a Business Exposure**

- i. Expose people to your products/service/business opportunity daily.
- ii. Talk, invite, and follow up, close. Wash, rinse, repeat.

### **Principle 7: Stand out from the Crowd**

- i. Ask questions and Listen-prescription before a diagnosis is a malpractice.

Kotler (1977) cited in Patrick, Chenuos & Koskei, Kenyoru, & Tuwey (2014) outlined the following as the steps in establishing a relationship marketing program:

- i. Identify the key customer meriting relationship marketing.
- ii. Assign a skilled Relationship Manager to each key customer.
- iii. Develop a clear job description for the Relationship Managers.
- iv. Appoint an overall manager to supervise the relationship manager.

Various components of relationship marketing highlighted by Chakiso (2015) include:

#### **1. Trust**

Chakiso (2015) suggested that for businesses to retain and develop customer retention, they must gain the trust of customers since trust is essential in customer retention. From a Relationship Marketing perspective, trust is defined, the aspect of a business relationship that establishes the level to which each party believe and they can rely on the honesty of the promise offered by the other. Also, it is a vital element of business relationships. In general, it shows that the high degree of trust among buyer and supplier, then there are more chances of continuation or long duration of the relationship among them

The significance of trust in describing customer retention is supported by many authors on two grounds. First, retention gives credence to many service markets. Secondly, trust is to the telecom industry as it helps to build customers' confidence. Hence, we assumed that if customer trust is increased, then customer retention will be retained.

**2. Commitment:** Commitment involves a long-term desire to maintain a valued partnership. That desire causes the business to continually invest in developing and maintaining relationships with its customers through a series of relationship-building activities, thus the business shows its commitment to the customer.

Previous literature highlights two key dimensions of commitment: calculative and affective commitment. Calculative commitment is more economic, depend on reason rely on the benefits of the product. Affective commitment is a hot concept, or more touching, that builds up through the personal involvement of the customer with a firm, which leads towards a high level of trust and commitment (Grewal and Levy, 2014). Just like trust, commitment is constantly used in the majority of customer relationship studies and discuss that this dimension is essential in building long-term relationships between the customer and an important indicator of relationship performance (Abdullah and Kanyan, 2013).

In the most telecom industry, customers pay before acquiring the service, that's why open communication service is vital and leads to fewer problems and increase customer expectation

favourably. Hence, open communication among partners' is very important for long-lasting relationship and commitment.

**3. Communication:** Communication is the act of conveying meanings from one party or group to another through the use of mutually understood sign, symbols, and semiotic rules. The main steps inherent to all forms of communication are the formation of communicative motivation or reason; message composition, as well as message encoding (Wikipedia, 2020).

Husnain and Akhtar (2015), define communication as an important element in relationship marketing since it can create shared values that could build trust, as well as, customer retention.

Sales and communication are essential elements of transaction marketing. We have to adjust the customer's communication desires or needs and start on the communication cycle all over again. This is relationship marketing is at its best". From relationship marketing, perspective marketing communication is an effort to develop a two-way or sometimes even a multi-way communication procedure.

All activities are not directly two-way communication but communication efforts should result in a response of some nature that continue and develop the interaction. If relationship marketing is to be effective, there should be an alignment among all marketing communication messages is required for continuance and improvements of long term mutually satisfying relationships with customers and stakeholders.

#### **4. Service Quality**

Service quality (SQ) is a comparison of perceived expectations (E) of a service with perceived performance (P), giving rise to the equation  $SQ=P-E$ . The famous measurement model of service quality is SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman, Zeithamal and Berry (1988), who measured the difference between customer expectations and perceptions by five determinants as follows:

- i. **Tangibles:** Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, employees and communication materials from a service company.
- ii. **Reliability:** A service company's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- iii. **Assurance:** Employees' knowledge and behaviour about courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence.
- iv. **Responsiveness:** A service company is willing to help customers and provide punctual services.
- v. **Empathy:** A service company provides care and individualized attention to its customers, as well as having convenient operating hours

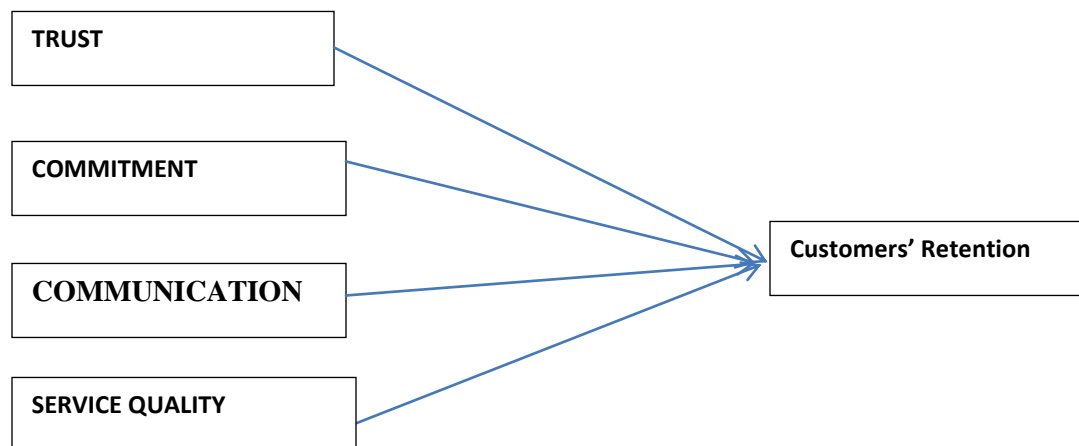
Accordingly, a business with high service quality will meet or exceed customer expectations whilst remaining economically competitive. Evidence from empirical studies suggests that improved service quality increases profitability and long term economic competitiveness. Improvements to service quality may be achieved by improving operational processes;

identifying problems quickly and systematically; establishing valid and reliable service performance measures and measuring customer satisfaction and another performance outcome.

Furthermore, marketers hold firmly that customers' retention is one of the most vital drivers of long term economic performance of any human endeavour because it results in increased market share (Oliver, 2017). Abtin and Pouramiri (2016) & Chakiso (2015) see customers' retention as the greatest asset of every human endeavour.

Abtin and Pouramiri (2016) defined customers' retention as a "deeply held commitment to rebury or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts have the potential to cause switching behaviour". From the customers' perspective, retention is a positive attitude and behaviour related to the level of re-purchasing commitment to a brand in the future. This further revealed that to retain a particular/group of customers, every company/firm must build trust and commitment, put in place an efficient communication system and also provide quality service delivery (Hayes, 2018).

**Figure 1: Relationship Marketing and Customer Retention**



**Source: Conceptual Model, 2020**

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This research work is based on the Social Exchange Theory (SXT). This theory explains the relationship between relationship marketing, customer retention, customer satisfaction. More so, this theory attempts to explain the nature of the relationships between service quality, perceived value, satisfaction and retention. The theoretical model adopted for this study was derived from the social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), which posits that all human relationships are formed by the use of cost-benefit analysis and comparisons of alternatives.



Homans (1958) suggested that when an individual perceived that the cost of a relationship outweighs the perceived benefits, then the person will choose to leave the relationship. The theory further states that persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them.

Social exchange theory indicates that individuals are willing to maintain relationships because of the expectation that to do so will be rewarding. Social Exchange Theory has served as a theoretical foundation to explain different situations in business practices. It has contributed to the study of organization-stakeholder relationships and relationship marketing.

### **Empirical Studies/Research Gaps**

This section review existing literature about the subject matter. Also, it will ground the conceptualization of the same, critique the literature and show the gaps between the studies reviewed and the current study.

Daniel et'al (2018), examined the effect of relationship marketing on customer loyalty in the Nigerian banking industry using the primary data approach. The data were collected through the questionnaire method using the 5-point Likert scale from 1200 respondents. Results show that relationship marketing proxies (trust, commitment, and service quality) are significant and have a positive impact on both customer retention and loyalty.

Egilla (2018) examined the role of customer relationship management (CRM) on generating customer satisfaction and loyalty and its impact on port performance. Increased globalization has seen ports taking up new roles as dynamic business networks. Data is collected through survey questionnaires from KPA employees and customers. Regression analysis using SPSS is used to analyze the relationship between the variables. The results indicate a significant positive relationship between CRM and customer loyalty following customers' satisfaction; a significant positive impact of customer satisfaction to customer loyalty; a significant positive impact of customer loyalty on port performance; and a positive impact of employee's engagement and port's objectives on successful CRM implementation. However, the impact of customer satisfaction on performance was rejected in this study. Therefore, this study suggests that KPA implement CRM which will enable the port to enhance its quality of services and customer value to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Nkanata (2018) examined the effect of customer relationship marketing on organizational performance in the crop protection industry, with a case study of Realism Company. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was 185 employees from which a sample size of 55 respondents was selected using the stratified sampling technique. From the findings, customer relationship process, customer loyalty and brand value were found to have a positive and significant influence on organizational performance.

Barit, Marasigan, and Alusen (2018) examined the effect of relationship marketing on customer loyalty among the clients of CebuanaLhuillier - AC Alabang. The study was based on a



structured questionnaire with 100 respondents. The study concludes that relationship marketing and customer loyalty are directly related and are significant.

Yulisetiari (2016) analyzed the effect of relationship marketing on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty on franchised in East Java using the Path Analysis technique. 100 respondents were involved. The study shows that relationship marketing affects customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty positively and significantly.

Ojiaku, Aghara, & Ezeoke (2017) studied the effect of relationship marketing (customer trust, satisfaction and commitment) on customers' loyalty. The study used 354 customers of pension firms in Anambra state. Using the multivariate analysis, the study reported relationship marketing increases customers' loyalty.

Kehinde *et al.* (2016), in a study on relationship-marketing and sales performance in Ogun State found that they are positively related and that such a relationship is significant.

Again, Tahmasbizadeh, Hadavand and Manesh (2016) in a study on relationship-marketing and customers' loyalty in Tehran found that they are positively related and that such a relationship is significant. Meanwhile, 384 questionnaires are distributed throughout the province.

Magasi (2015) explored CRM and its influence on customer retentions in the bank found that satisfied customers will not always enter into a long-term relationship with the firm. The study however concluded that a long-term customer-organization relationship is crucial in creating longer-term customer retention. The study used multiple regression analysis on data collected using questionnaires. It concentrated on customers' trust, commitment, satisfaction and relationship influence customers' retention. The study however did not include brand value and customer relationship processes but only focused on customer loyalty. CRM might only work if the three tenets are used together and not separately. This study focused on the three tenets together.

Alibhai and Ogollah (2015) examined the influence of customer relationship marketing strategies on the performance of synthetic hair manufacturers in Kenya found CRM strategies having a positive relationship with performance. It was found to positively influence performance. Employee involvement in CRM boosts their morale and improves the firm's performance.

Husnain and Akhtar (2015) examined the relationship between marketing strategy and customer loyalty of the retail bank sector in Pakistan. A questionnaire derived from previous studies and relevant literature was completed by 100 university students having accounts in different banks and Convenience sampling used. Multiple regression analysis assessed the impact on customer loyalty of four key constructs of relationship marketing (Trust, Commitment, Communication and conflict handling). Results indicate that four variables have a significant effect and predict a good proportion of variance in customer loyalty. It is reasonable to conclude, on this evidence, that customer loyalty can be created, reinforced and retained by marketing plans aimed at building trust, demonstrating a commitment to service, communicating with customers in a timely, reliable and proactive fashion, and handling conflict efficiently.

Following the empirical studies reviewed above, it is glaring that much works have been conducted on the subject matter both in developed and developing economies. However, the following gaps were noticed:

- i. To date, researchers have not come to a unanimous conclusion as to the effect of relationship marketing on customer loyalty. This present study shed more light on the subject matter.
- ii. This study presented more up-to-date, comprehensive, and useful information on the subject matter since previous research works ended in 2019. This study will extend its scope to 2020.
- iii. Unlike prior studies, the current studies used to trust, commitment, communication, and service quality to proxy relationship marketing.

### **ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY**

The researcher employed a descriptive survey research design. This design involves asking a large group of respondents' questions about a particular issue (Osuala, 2005). Also, this design was most appropriate and suitable for the study since the questionnaire was the major research instrument. Given this, the study population for this research covers all the staff and of MTN, GLO, and Airtel that is centred in Warri and Asaba Metropolis. Specifically, the sample of this study comprised 170 users of MTN, GLO, and Airtel that are centred in Warri and Asaba Metropolis, Delta State. The staffs were sampled using a random sampling technique.

To ensure that the research instrument is valid, relevant criticisms, comments and inputs such as the restructuring of items, inclusion of relevant items and general editorial work by the editors were taken into consideration. More so, the test re-test reliability technique was also employed to test for reliability of the research instruments. Accordingly, the reliability test using the Cronbach alpha test stood at 96.1% suggesting that the research instruments are reliable.

Logically, to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two variables X and Y is estimated by the simple correlation coefficient denoted by r. This r is referred to as Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (PPCC) or simply the sample correlation coefficient and is given by the formula:

$$r = \frac{\sum (X - \bar{X})(Y - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum (X - \bar{X})^2 \sum (Y - \bar{Y})^2}} \quad \dots \quad \dots \quad \dots \quad \dots \quad \dots \quad (1)$$

- Where
- r = Pearson's correlation coefficient
  - X = Weight attached to each responses
  - Y = Frequency of response
  - ∑ = Summation sign

$$\bar{X} = \text{Mean of X}$$

$$\bar{Y} = \text{Mean of Y}$$

**Decision rule:**

- ◆ The r may assume any value ranging from -1 to 1 depending on the direction and strength of the relationship.
- ◆ If  $r = 0$ , then there is no relationship (Orthogonal)
- ◆ The closer r is to 1, the stronger is the positive correlation while the closer r is to 0, the weaker the correlation.

However, to avoid calculation errors and also to test the statistical relationship between relationship marketing and customers' loyalty, the PPCC was run on Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Questionnaire Retrieval Analysis**

A total of 170 responses were received, 9 were detected to be incomplete or with errors. Correct and defect-free responses summed up to 161 and formed the basis for this analysis.

**Table 2: Questionnaire Retrieval Analysis**

Questionnaire Distributed and Retrieved	Score Card	Percentage %()
Numbers of Questionnaire Retrieved	161	94.71
Numbers of Questionnaire Not Retrieved	9	5.29
<b>Numbers of Questionnaire Distributed</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey (2020)**

**Demographic Description of Respondents:** In administering the questionnaire particular attention was paid to the respondents' responses to minimize the missing values, the practices where people refuse to respond to questions because they do not understand a phrase or the intention of a question. This was greatly achieved as the results suggest that there was less incidence of missing values. Here, we categorized the demographic characteristics of respondents based on Gender and Occupational analysis. The results are presented and explained in table 3 below:

**Table 3: Demographic Description of Respondents**

Demographic Description		Frequency (F)	Percentage ()
Gender	Male	99	61.49
	Female	62	38.51

	<b>Total Numbers of Responses</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age Bracket</b>	21 – 30	67	41.61
	31 – 40	43	26.71
	41 – 50	25	15.53
	51 – 60	26	16.15
	<b>Total Numbers of Responses</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	78	48.45
	Married	67	41.61
	Not Specified	16	9.94
	<b>Total Numbers of Responses</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Educational Status</b>	O' Level	29	18.01
	NCE/OND	31	19.25
	HND/BSc.	39	24.22
	Postgraduate	62	38.51
	<b>Total Numbers of Responses</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Period of Network Usage</b>	01 – 5 years	67	41.61
	06 – 10 years	53	32.92
	11 – 15 years	36	22.36
	20 – above	5	3.11
	<b>Total Numbers of Responses</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Job Description</b>	Artisan	8	4.97
	Business	18	17.39
	Clergy	6	3.73
	Armed Forces	13	9.32
	Medical	9	5.59
	Sports	6	3.73
	Student	21	28.57
	Teaching	15	11.18
	Transport	17	15.53
	<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Study (2020)**

The field survey revealed that the respondents had more males than females. Since there is no national data on the gender distribution of line usage in the country, the above conclusion may not be very appropriate.

Concerning the respondents' age bracket, the majority of the line users are aged between 21-30 years since it accounted for 41.61 of the total numbers of responses while the least are aged between 51-60 years as it accounted for 16.15 of the total numbers of responses. This suggests that the younger generation have more flare for lines and different networks than the older generation. This further revealed that the higher the age, the lower the demand for telecom products.

Again, the majority of the line users are single ladies and guys since it accounted for 48.45 of the total numbers of responses. Again, married persons were ranked the second group of line users as it accounted for 41.61 of the total numbers of respondents. Meanwhile, the rest of 9.94 fell in the unspecified group.

Furthermore, the majority of the line users are postgraduate students since it accounted for 38.51 of the total numbers of responses. Again, HND/BSc. was ranked the second group of line users as it accounted for 24.21 of the total numbers of respondents. Meanwhile, the rest 919.25 and 18.01 fell under those that are NCE/OND and O' Level holders. This suggests that the higher one go the higher the n=demand for telecommunication products.

Additionally, the field survey evidence that the line users have been using a particular network for the past 01-5 years since it accounted for 41.61 of the total numbers of responses. Meanwhile, the rest 32.92 of the total numbers of responses have been using a particular network for 6-10 years.

Lastly, the majority of the line users are students since it accounted for 21 (28.57) of the total numbers of responses. Again, businessmen and women were ranked the second group of line users as it accounted for 17.39 of the total numbers of respondents. More so, transport workers were ranked the third group of line users.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involved various ways through which information gathered from the field and other sources were put together in a meaningful way for easy comprehension. Below is the detailed analysis of the responses:

**Table 4: Response to Research Question One:**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percentage (F)</b>	<b>Valid Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Strongly Agreed (SA)	85	52.80	52.80	52.80
Agreed (A)	58	36.02	36.02	88.82
Undecided (U)	9	5.59	5.59	94.41
Strongly Disagree (SD)	7	4.35	4.35	98.76
Disagreed (D)	2	1.24	1.24	100.00
<b>Total (Σ)</b>	161	100.00	100.00	

**Source: SPSS Version 23.0 (2020)**

Table 4 above advanced that trust affects customers 'loyalty. This is because the majority of the respondents reaffirmed this assertion.

**Table 5: Response to Research Question Two:**

Responses	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Agreed (SA)	56	34.78	34.78	34.78
Agreed (A)	92	57.14	57.14	91.93
Undecided (U)	8	4.97	4.97	96.89
Strongly Disagree (SD)	4	2.48	2.48	99.38
Disagreed (D)	1	0.62	0.62	100.00
<b>Total (Σ)</b>	161	100.00	100.00	

**Source: SPSS 23.0 (2020)**

Table 5 above advanced that customers' commitment affects customers' loyalty. This is because the majority of the respondents reaffirmed this assertion.

**Table 6: Response to Research Question Three:**

Responses	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Agreed (SA)	61	37.89	37.89	37.89
Agreed (A)	59	36.65	36.65	74.53
Undecided (U)	13	8.07	8.07	82.61
Strongly Disagree (SD)	26	16.15	16.15	98.76
Disagreed (D)	2	1.24	1.24	100.00
<b>Total (Σ)</b>	161	100.00	100.00	

**Source: SPSS Version 23.0 (2020)**

Table 6 above advanced that customers' communication affects customers' loyalty. This is because the majority of the respondents reaffirmed this assertion.

**Table 7: Responses to Research Question Four**

Responses	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Agreed (SA)	66	40.99	40.99	40.99
Agreed (A)	56	34.78	34.78	75.78
Undecided (U)	4	2.48	2.48	78.26
Strongly Disagree (SD)	27	16.77	16.77	95.03
Disagreed (D)	8	4.97	4.97	100.00

<b>Total (<math>\Sigma</math>)</b>	161	100.00	100.00	
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**Source: SPSS Version 23.0 (2020)**

Table 7 above advanced that effective communication affects customers 'loyalty. This is because the majority of the respondents reaffirmed this assertion.

### **Hypotheses Testing**

To test the hypotheses formulated in the earlier chapter (chapter one), this section was therefore dedicated to the test of hypotheses and data analysis. Thus, each hypothesis is presented below:

<b>Testable Form</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient (r)</b>	<b>P-value</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
$H_{01}: TRST \neq CURT$	.922	.026	Reject $H_{01}$
$H_{02}: COMT \neq CURT$	.777	.122	Accept $H_{02}$
$H_{03}: COMN \neq CURT$	.892	.042	Reject $H_{03}$
$H_{04}: SEQR \neq CURT$	.821	.088	Accept $H_{04}$

**Note:** TRST= Trust; CURT= Customers' Retention; COMT= Commitment; COMN= Communication; SERQ=Service Quality

**Source: SPSS Version 23.0 (2020)**

### **Discussion of Findings**

This paper examined the correlation between relationship marketing and customer loyalty in the Nigerian telecom industry using a trust, commitment, communication, and service quality as the relationship marketing proxies. Succinctly, the following inferences were gathered:

#### **Trust and Customers' Retention in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry**

The  $H_{01}$  evidenced that trust has a positive, strong and high statistical significant effect on customers' retention. This is because the correlation coefficient (r) was estimated at .922 (92.2%) and that its p-value estimated at .026 was less than a 5% significant level. This implies that that trust is a major determinant of customers' retention. This further suggests that if managers must build loyal customers, they must ensure that their customers first of all; build trust in their products. The policy implication of this finding is that, for firms in the Nigerian telecommunication industry to gain a strategic advantage and survive in today's increasingly competitive environment, they should employ innovative relational marketing tactics to get trust from its customer. Accordingly, this result is in tandem with the findings of Nkanata (2018); Barit, et al (2018); Ojiaku, Aghara, & Ezeoke (2017); Annie (2013); Waiganjo (2012); Raza and Rehman (2012) but contradicts the findings of Yulisetiari (2016)



### **Commitment and Customers' Retention in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry**

The H<sub>0</sub> evidenced that commitment has a positive and strong correlation with customers' retention in terms of direction and strength of linearity in that its correlation coefficient (r) was estimated at .777 (77.7%). This suggests that the higher the level of customers commitment, the higher the level of their retention vice versa. The policy implication here is that, for firms in the Nigerian telecommunication industry to remain afloat, as well as seek their customers' retention, they must ensure that they get customers' commitment. However, a commitment was not statistically significant as it reported a low p-value (.122) which was higher than the benchmark 5% significant level. This suggests that at the moment, commitment being one of the relationship marketing proxies was not significant enough to determine the level of customers' retention in the Nigerian telecom industry. Accordingly, this result is in tandem with the findings of Daniel, et al (2018); Egilla (2018); Nkanata (2018); Barit, et al (2018); Ojiaku, Aghara, & Ezeoke (2017); Annie (2013); but contradicts the findings of Yulisetiarini (2016); Velnampy and Sivesan (2012).

### **Communication and Customers' Retention in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry**

In this study, the result of the fourth hypothesis testing reveals that communication exerts a positively strong and high statistical significant effect on customers' retention. This is because the correlation coefficient (r) was estimated at .821 (82.21) and that its p-value estimated at .042 was less than a 5% significant level. Premised on this, we can confidently say that efficient communication is a major determinant of customers' retention. This further suggests that the higher the level of customers commitment, the higher the level of their retention vice versa. The policy implication here is that, for firms in the Nigerian telecommunication industry to remain afloat, as well as seek their customers' retention, they must ensure that there is efficient communication in place. Accordingly, this is in line with the findings of Yulisetiarini (2016); Velnampy and Sivesan (2012) but contradicts the findings of Daniel, et al (2018); Egilla (2018); Nkanata (2018); Barit, et al (2018).

### **Service Quality and Customers' Retention in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry**

This study provides significant evidence on the role of effective communication in sustaining customer retention. The last H<sub>0</sub> reveals that service quality exerts a positive strong correlation with customers' retention. Consequently, the key message for the Nigerian telecommunication industry is to get their service right, meet the very essential customer need, use active listening then act upon it, manage the corporate brand reputation effectively, and use social networks better. By meeting these basic requirements optimally, the company could expect their service quality that leads to customer retention.

Furthermore, this study proves that to build successful long-term partnerships, customers look for a firm that is more than a normal firm, a partner who is also interested in their general well-being than purely in what can be sold to them. Loyal customers stay longer with firms that treat them well. The facts show that today customers have become more knowledgeable, sophisticated and assertive, with an increasing demand for tailor-made and innovative products and services.

They are no longer interested in buying off-the-shelf solutions, but demand remedies that fit their business models and plans. Therefore, to ensure they are steadily ready, firms in the Nigerian telecommunication industry must have strong relationships with their evolving customers. However, the present service quality is not satisfactory as reported by the low p-value estimated at .088. This is in line with the findings of Yulisetiari (2016); Velnampy and Sivesan (2012) but contradicts the findings of Daniel, et al (2018); Egilla (2018); Nkanata (2018); Barit, et al (2018).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The vast body of literature on relationship marketing is often suggesting that it is a solution in all conditions for customers where such a relationship strategy is looking suitable. This study has confirmed that measurement of the “underpinnings” of relationship marketing can forecast customer retention, at least in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. Variables used to measure relationship marketing include trust, commitment, communication, and service quality. This led us to formulate four research objectives, four research questions, and four research hypotheses. Accordingly, findings from the field survey conducted in Warri and Asaba affirmed that trust, commitment, communication, and service quality have a positive high correlation with customers' retention in the Nigerian telecom industry. However, only trust and efficient communication were highly significant using their p-value as an assessor. Hence, the study concludes that a good relationship marketing that meets the expectations of customers can encourage the desire to continue to do transactions, respond to complaints of services, improve a long-term relationship and mutual trust, and keep the communication to flow well. This eventually will generate customer retention towards franchised retails. In this light, the study recommends that:

1. Market makers in the Nigerian telecom industry should pay more attention to problems regarding trust, commitment, communication and service quality.
2. Both marketers and customer attendants in the Nigerian telecom industry must make sure that customers feel safe and sound, that they see minimal risk and are happy with the relationship.
3. Customers should be given useful, precise and personalized sort of information as these attitudes boost customers' satisfaction, trust and retention, to large extent.
4. Managers in the Nigerian telecom industry must ensure that they guard against the negative effect of information asymmetry. Hence, they must be straightforward, open-minded and truthful.
5. Managers and supervisors need to provide ongoing, real-time feedback and coaching on their customer-service skills.

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APPENDIX

REGRESSION OUTPUT

RELIABILITY TEST

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

**Case Processing Summary**

		N	%
Cases	Valid	5	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	5	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.961	4

**Correlations**

		CULT	TRST	COMT	COMN	SERQ
CULT	Pearson Correlation	1	.922*	.777	.892*	.821
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.026	.122	.042	.088
	N	161	161	161	161	161
TRST	Pearson Correlation	.922*	1	.836	.935*	.942*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026		.078	.020	.017
	N	161	161	161	161	161
COMT	Pearson Correlation	.777	.836	1	.897*	.847
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.122	.078		.039	.070
	N	161	161	161	161	161
COMN	Pearson Correlation	.892*	.935*	.897*	1	.975**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	.020	.039		.005
	N	161	161	161	161	161
SERQ	Pearson Correlation	.821	.942*	.847	.975**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.088	.017	.070	.005	
	N	161	161	161	161	161

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

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