

AFTER-SALES SERVICE AND CUSTOMER RETENTION OF ELECTRONICS OUTLETS IN PORT HARCOURT

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Abstract

This study empirically examined the relationship between After-Sales Services and Customer Retention of Electronics Outlets in Port Harcourt. In the face of the attendant keen competition among electronics outlets in Port Harcourt, there appear instability and downturn in the electronics industry that has lead most electronic outlets struggling to stay afloat or wounding up owing to the prevalent uncertainties in the Nigeria business environment. Drawing on the theory of reasoned action, two research questions and four hypotheses were proposed. A population of 165 electronic outlets was studied. The various analyses were statistically tested using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (SPSS Version 20.0). Our research findings revealed highly significant positive relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. The study therefore concluded that there is a strong relationship between after-sales service and customer retention of electronic firms in Port Harcourt. Recommendation provided that the management of these electronics outlets in Port Harcourt to adopt active and excellent strategies of after-sales service that will help them enhance the expected satisfaction of consumers and thus increase customer retention.

KEYWORDS: *After-Sales Service, Retention, Maintenance, Spare Parts.*

Introduction

Services challenges in today's global economy have assumed a heightened dimension. Quality, price and service are three factors that are critical to the success of any sales effort. Most companies take great care to offer to their customers, products, of great quality, meeting various quality standards (Vitasek, 2005). The price of a product is dictated by the demand for such a quality of the product. As products offered by major players in most industries have become comparable in quality and price, after-sales service is fast becoming an important differentiator. Many definitions have been given for after-sales service by various marketing experts, based on not just what after-sales service means but also what it means to the customer and the company (Gallagher, 2005). According to Adrian et al. (1995) in today's marketing environment, an increasingly important source of competitive advantage is the way we serve customers. In recent years, more and more organizations focus their attention on retaining existing customers rather than attracting new ones. According to Kotler (2002), attracting a

new customer is five times greater than the cost to keep a current customer happy.

Gaiardelli et al. (2007) define after sale service as those activities taking place after the purchase of the product and devoted to supporting customers in the usage and disposal of the goods to make them loyal. After-sales service has become an important marketing tool for the manufacturing industry globally, Nigeria inclusive. A rapidly changing business environment, increased use of technology, higher market competition, and higher potential profits in after sales service has changed the way companies view after sales services (Muhammad et al, 2011). "After-sales services" has been used the most, to describe services that are provided to the customer after the products have been delivered (Vitasek, 2005). It is noteworthy to point out that after-sales plays a key role in supporting marketing activities to enhance customer loyalty, and thus to increase profitability in the long term (Saccani, et. al, 2006).

Customer retention on the other hand is the strategic process to keep or retain the existing customers and not letting to diverge or defect to

other suppliers or organization for business. (Harker, M. J. 2003). It is the propensity for customers to stay with their service providers (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2001). Customer retention has a positive effect on an organization's profitability as it forms the overall attitude of customers towards a service provider (Ozuru & Jonah, 2017). Customers are the reason of what we do as to satisfy them.

In marketing literature, customer retention is relevant and theoretically manifest as it is acknowledged to be a crucial factor for the survival of a firm ((Harker, M. J. 2003)). Similarly, Caruana (2002) argues that, customer retention performs a mediating role between firms and the customers envisage.

Statement of Problem

The advent of technology and globalization has thrown business in Nigeria (particularly in Port Harcourt) into heavy competition. This development has manifested in customers realizing that electronic outlets have fallen short in the aspect of services offered. Furthermore, the capability of most electronic outlets in Port-Harcourt to meet the need of customer agitating for improved service has been questioned. This appears to represent the consequence of poor performance of electronic outlets and it is very important for these organizations to identify best strategies in providing better after-sales services in order to improve customer retention.

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that after-sales services by many organizations in Port Harcourt are beset with a lot of challenges. The quality of services delivered by most of these organizations (electronics outlets in particular) leave much to be desired. After-sales services particularly in electronics organizations have become ever more important in improving customer retention. To this end, the importance of this study is born out of the fact that there is little or no available empirical research work in literature on after-sales services and customer retention of electronics organizations in Port Harcourt. Therefore, to fill this gap in literature and to improve practice, this

study will evaluate the relationship between after-sales services and customer retention of electronics outlets in Port Harcourt.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA is a classic model of persuasion (Sheppard, Hartwick & Warshaw, 1988), which explains the relationship between attitudes and behaviors within human action. It aims at understanding an individual voluntary behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The ideas found within TRA have to do with an individual's basic motivation to performance action (Ibrahim & Vignola, 2005), as a meta-analysis on the application of the theory showed that it can produce good prediction of choices made by an individual when facing several alternatives (Sheppard et al, 1988).

TRA also recognized that there are situations (or factors) that limit the influence of attitude on behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). For example, for the purpose of this study, if a person's attitude leads him to want to patronize a particular hospital but perceives no customer support services in the hospital, the lack of support services will prevent the person's attitude from causing him to go to the hospital. The application of the theory to this study is worthwhile, as it explains that a person's intention to perform a behavior is the main predictor of whether or not he actually performs that behavior (Ibrahim & Vignali, 2005).

Literature Review

After-Sales Services

During the twentieth century, the core differentiating factor for an organization is the development of quality products. But, due to continuous advancement in technology and dynamism in consumer tastes and preferences, after-sales service has now become the most important factor to differentiate one firm from the other (Jean-Pierre & Eric, 2016). After-sales service that is outstanding according to them drives customer value, customer delight and loyalty. After-sales service is defined as those activities taking place after the purchase of the

product and devoted to supporting customers in the usage and disposal of the goods to make them loyal. Ghirardelli et al. (2007).

In order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage by the electronics outlets, after-sales service should be their new orientation which all and sundry in the organization should focus on. This in fact; has the ability to build a long-term relationship between the company, its offerings and the customers. After-sales service deals with exceeding customers' expectations, surprising and delighting the customers by going above and beyond customer service standards, it can also mean treating the customer the way and more than you would want to be treated in a long run. It can also be defined as meeting and exceeding what customers expects from the provider through maintenance service, installation, warranty, inspection and sales of spare parts (Homberrg et al., 2009). The power of after-sales service cannot be quantified, its impact is numerous. Electronics outlets in Port Harcourt must focus on after-sales service, because, it has the ability to make or mare the organization's fortune. According to Rigopoulos, et al. (2008) after-sales services are often referred to as "product support activities", meaning all activities that support the product-centric transaction. After-sales service is defined as a service that has been given to the customer after the products have been delivered Vitasek (2005). According to research, after-sale service is found to drive customer satisfaction and retention, which result in helping firms (such as the Electronics organizations) to achieve improved sales and profitability (Homberrg et al., 2009). However, it is observed that some organizations find it difficult to provide quality service that leads to excellent after-sales service of an organization (Lance, 2012).

After-sales service has become an important marketing tool for the manufacturing industry globally, Nigeria inclusive. A rapidly changing business environment, increased use of technology, higher market competition, and higher potential profits in after sales service has changed the way companies view after sales services

(Muhammad et al, 2011). It is no longer treated as a cost center, but instead, has become a major profit source with profitability ranging up to 45% of corporate revenues for many business environments (Saccani, et al., 2007). After-sales service involves a continuous interaction between the service provider and the customer throughout the post-purchase product life cycle. At the time the product is sold to the customer, this interaction is formalized by a mutually agreed warranty or service contract. The exact terms of the warranty or service contract, the characteristics of the customer base, and the nature of the sold product influence the after sales service strategy of the service provider (Cohen et al., 2006; Oliva and Kallenberg, 2003) as cited in Muhammed, et al (2011). It is noteworthy to point out that after-sales service plays a key role in supporting marketing activities to enhance customer loyalty, and thus to increase profitability in the long term (Saccani, et. al, 2006). According to Alexander et al., (2002) profit margins can be generated higher by delivering the after sale service compared to product sale without it. It may generate at least three times turnover of the original purchase during a given product lifecycle. After sale services represent one of the few constant connections those customers have with a brand (Gallagher et al. 2005), while Lewis et al. (2004) pointed out how it is affected by and affects the brand image of a firm. Gallagher et al. (2005) point to after-sales as a way to recover profits lost due to the fierce competition on sales prices of original equipment, representing at the same time "one of the few constant connections that customers have with a brand". After-sales is thus a potential source of competitive advantage for the firm (Armistead and Clark, 1992; Goffin, 1999). Vitasek (2005) described after-sales service as a service that has been given to the customer after the products have been delivered. The same services are sometimes called "fields services", when they are organized in the main characteristics that are located at a customers' site (Simmons, 2001). According to Irini D. R. (2008) installation and delivery are the keys to the after-sales service that have an influence to the customer. Buyers of

product want assurance that the product will perform satisfactorily over its useful life when operated properly. This is achieved through post-sale support such as installation, warranties, extended warranties, maintenance service contracts, provision of spares, training programs, product upgrades and etc. (Murthy D.N.P. et. al, 2004).

Maintenance Service

Maintenance, repair and overhaul involves fixing any sort of mechanical, plumbing or electrical device should it become out of order or broken (known as repair, unscheduled, or casualty maintenance) and it also includes performing routine actions which keep the device in working order (known as scheduled maintenance) or prevent trouble from arising (www.wikipedia.com). Maintenance service includes janitorial services, painting contractors who paint the buildings, plumbing services, heating and air conditioning services (Amue, 2012). As in any business, the maintenance business should have its own mission that reflects how the business will address the needs of its customers (Oberg, 2000). Viardot (2014) opined that maintenance service have strong impact on customers satisfaction and consequently on the repurchase rate of a product because a customer who is experiencing a problem with an after-sales product will tend to switch to another product.

Sales of Spare Parts

Spare parts distribution is responsible for inventory management, customer order management and delivery of spare parts (Saccani et al., 2007). Installation equipment's are made up of several component parts. These parts are sold separately as spare parts so as to affect repairs and change worn out or faulty component parts of the installation machines. And due to the fact that installation machines are high involvement goods and are used up over a very long period of time, changes in most of its component parts are inevitable over time. Important to know is that spare parts are not intermediate or final products to be sold to a customer (Kennedy et al, 2002).

Spare parts distribution provides crucial functions for the customers throughout consumption of the product (Gopalakrishnan & Banerji, 2004). The provider usually aims to reach a particular turnover ratio and at the same time meet the demand of many customers with different and large number of spare parts. The management has to decide on what kind of level they want to distribute their spare parts, central warehouse, stockiest, regional warehouses, field warehouses, retail outlets and dealers (Erika, Khulan and Ting, 2013). It is said that pricing spare parts is one of the most complex problems when it comes to industrial goods. The main purpose with spare parts distribution is to ensure the right availability of spare parts at the right time for the buyer's needs, meanwhile and lowest possible investments from the sellers' side (Erika, Khulan and Ting, 2013). The purpose is also to reach maximum level of satisfaction; this can be accomplished by stable and steady spare parts distribution.

An additional purpose for holding spare parts inventory is to provide timely repairs to customers' equipment (Hopp et al., 1999). Furthermore, spare parts inventory are held as protection against extended equipment down-time (Kennedy et al, 2002). Obsolescence can be a problem as the machines for which the spare parts were designed for become obsolete or replaced. It is difficult to determine how many units of a spare part for an obsolescent machine to stock, and it may be difficult to replace a part that is not in stock any longer (Erika, Khulan and Ting, 2013). There are also consequences of unplanned repairs, these consequences are production loss with significant cost, it is suggested that a kind of safety stock is crucial (Erika, Khulan and Ting, 2013). The electronics industry is one where delivering spare parts quickly is a key aspect of their after-sales services (Cohen & Lee, 1990).

Customer Retention

It is popularly said that customers are kings in any transaction or exchange oriented environment. And so, the king deserves constant satisfaction

from its subordinates. It is on this note; it becomes important that service organizations such as electronics outlets in Port Harcourt, to device strategies to best satisfy their highly populated customers. Retaining a customer from the writer's perspective, is not an easy task, it demands consistency in quality service offering, appraisal of the present strategies in adoption, and continuously re-strategize in order to dish out new strategies to consolidate on the existing ones.

According to Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) retention is an overall attitude towards a service provider or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers expect and what they actually receive regarding the fulfillment of a need. Kotler (2000) also defined retention as a person's feelings of pleasure, excitement, delight or disappointment which results from comparing a service perceived performance to his or her expectations. He further suggested that marketers should be concerned with approaches to best satisfy and retain customers in order to enhance profit level and remain a competing force in their industry of operations.

Customer retention according to Angelova (2011) is defined as the outcome felt by those that have experienced a company's performance that have fulfilled their expectations. In the same vein, it is defined as a summary of psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience (Oliver, 1981).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction according to Emrah (2010) is defined as the degree to which a customer perceives that an individual, firm or organization has effectively provided a product or service that meets the customer's needs in the context in which the customer is aware of and/or using the product or service. In the same vein, it is defined as customer's overall evaluation of the date (Anders, Michael & Inger (2005). Accordingly, customer satisfaction acts positively to the retention of customers in the midst of numerous

products and services. Ingrid (2004), defined customer satisfaction as a feeling which results from a process of evaluating what was received against that expected, the purchase decision itself and/or the fulfillment of needs/want. Ingrid definition shows that there must be need or expectation which is from customer, and development, products and services that must be used to remedy those expectations of customers.

However, customer satisfaction should be a living orientation according to the researcher, provided there is desire for success. Customers of electronics outlets are skeptical of poor after-sales services, and demand assurance of satisfaction from the organizations, which may serve as satisfaction to some customers hence; satisfaction depends on individual customer's interpretation and evaluation. The above assertion could be one of the ways to satisfy customers.

Parker & Mathews (2001) defined customer satisfaction to mean a post choice evaluation concerning a specific purchase decision. According to them, customers look forward toward their values (needs and ways) and the products and services that can be evaluated with regards to their values. Kotler (2003) posit that satisfaction depicts a consumer's feeling of pleasure or displeasure that emanates from the comparison about product's perceived performance relative to his/her expectation. It is customer's expectation that leads to satisfaction, no expectation; nothing is there to be satisfied. Customer satisfaction is defined as the customer's overall evaluation of the performance of an offering to date. Accordingly, overall customer satisfaction has a significant and strong influence on customer's loyalty intention given wide number of products and services (Gustafsson, et al., 2005).

Customer Advocacy

There are several definitions of customer advocacy. Early scholars defined it as an oral person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as a non-commercial communication, concerning a brand, a product or a service.

Customer advocacy (word of mouth) is defined as a consumer to consumer communication about goods and services. It is a powerful persuasive force, particularly in the diffusion of information about new product, service or organization (Dean and Lang, 2008). Customer advocacy is more effective than newspaper and magazine advertising. Customer advocacy has been shown to be more powerful than printed information, primarily, because customer advocacy is considered to be more credible. Another reason for the power of customer advocacy is that customer advocacy is always relevant and timely. It is driven by customers need and it grows exponentially. For example it tells an experience to five people; they tell it to five more, who tells it

to five more after that (Cengiz and Yayla, 2007). Customer advocacy (word of mouth) can be described in terms of direction, valence and volume. Its direction can be input into the decision on making process, or output of the purchase process. Its valence can be positive or negative. Its volume relates to the number of people to which the message is relayed (Stokes and Lonax, 2002). Two persons suggested that customer satisfaction is an important determinant of positive word of mouth (Liang and Wang, 2007). Customer advocacy (word of mouth) has a strong influence on consumer's choice, so that companies have a good opportunity to increase their market share by developing positive word of mouth (Liang and Wang, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

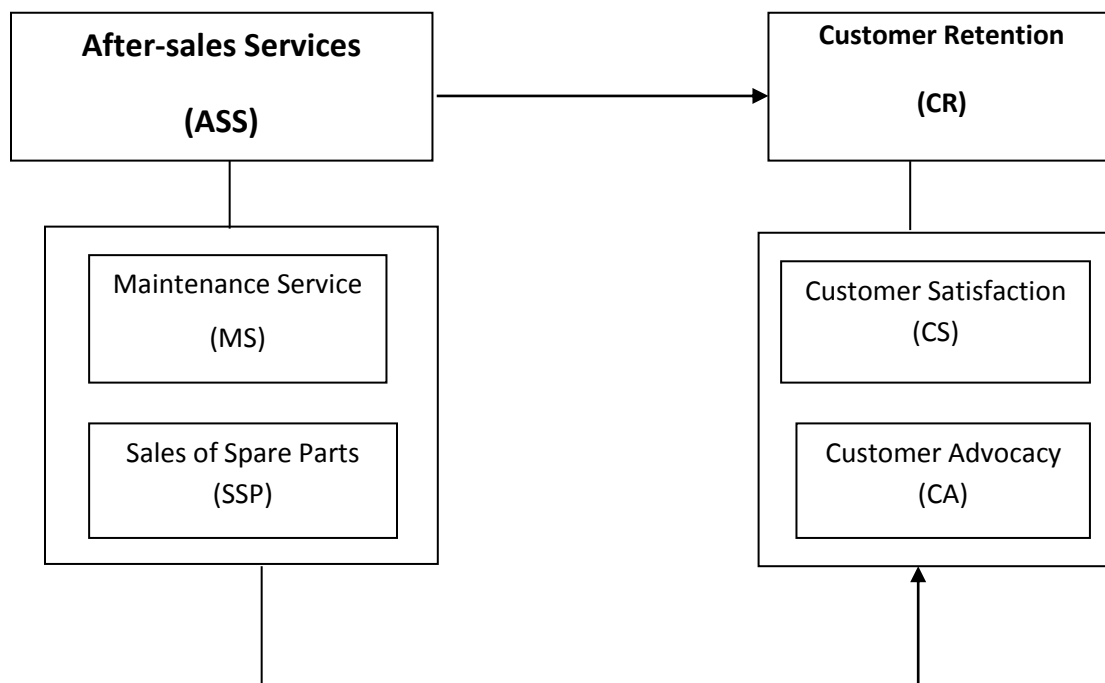


Fig 1: Conceptual framework of after-sales services and customer Retention of electronics outlets in Port Harcourt.

Source: Researcher's Desk, (2018)

Methodology

The population of this study consists of all the registered Electronics outlets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. An accessible population of electronics outlets located in the major towns of

the State under review; totaling two hundred and eighty-eight (288). Using the Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table (1970) a sample size of one hundred and sixty five (165) electronics outlets were selected. This was

proportionally distributed among six towns. We are inclined to ascertain the relevance of after-sales service on customer retention with particular reference to electronics outlet sas listed in the 2013/2014 yellow pages books. We made use of the spearman rank order correlation coefficient tool sequel to the nature of our study as explicated by the stated hypotheses and research questions. A five point liker-scale measurement was used in the structured questionnaire, in order to determine the level of relationship that exists between variables. The data generated from the questionnaire were cleaned, coded and entered

into the editor of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Sales Supervisors, Marketing Managers, and Human resource personnel from each firm of the one hundred and sixty five (165) constitute our respondents.

Data Analyses Technique

The hypotheses arrived at were statistically tested in this section using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (SPSS Version 20.0). The result of the statistical testing was used to either accept or reject the null hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significant.

Table 3.1 Reliability Analysis Scale (Alpha)

| S/N | Variables | No. of Items | Cranach's Alpha |
|-----|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Maintenance Service | 5 | 0.709 |
| 2 | Sales of Spare Parts | 5 | 0.832 |
| 3 | Customer Satisfaction | 5 | 0.794 |
| 4 | Customer Advocacy | 5 | 0.764 |

Source: SPSS (Version 20.0) appendix

The above table revealed that all our variables are reliable as shown by the computed alpha coefficient using SPSS.

Research Hypothesis One

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between maintenance service and customer satisfaction of electronics outlets in Port Harcourt.

Statistical Analysis for Hypothesis One

Correlations

| | | | Maintenance Service | Customer Satisfaction |
|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Maintenance Service | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .955 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .044 |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |
| | Customer Satisfaction | Correlation Coefficient | .955 | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .044 | . |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |

Source: SPSS version 20.0 Output

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.955$) between Maintenance Service and Customer Satisfaction is very strong and positive.

The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.91$) indicates that 91% of Customer Satisfaction can be explained by Maintenance Service. The significant value of 0.044 ($p < 0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on

that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between maintenance service and customer satisfaction of electronics outlets in Port Harcourt.

Research Hypothesis Two

Ho2: relationship between maintenance service and customer advocacy

Statistical Analysis for Hypothesis Two

| | | | Maintenance Service | Customer Advocacy |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Maintenance Service | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .962 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .038 |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |
| | Customer Advocacy | Correlation Coefficient | .962 | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .038 | . |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |

Source: SPSS version 20.0 Output

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.962$) between Maintenance Service and Customer Advocacy is very strong and positive.

The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.925$) indicated that 92.2% of sales volume can be explained by service expertise. The significant value of 0.038 ($p < 0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between maintenance service and customer advocacy.

Research Hypothesis Three

Ho3: relationship between service expertise and profitability

Statistical Analysis for Hypothesis Three

| | | | Sales of Spare Parts | Customer Satisfaction |
|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Sales of Spare Parts | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .965 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .041 |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |
| | Customer Satisfaction | Correlation Coefficient | .965 | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .041 | . |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |

Source: SPSS Version 20.0 Output

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.965$) between Sales of Spare Parts and customer satisfaction is very strong and positive.

The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.93$) indicated that 93% of customer satisfaction can be explained by Sales of Spare Parts. The significant value of 0.041 ($p < 0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between Sales of Spare Parts and customer satisfaction of electronics outlets in Port Harcourt.

Research Hypothesis Four

Ho₄: relationship between sales of spare part and customer advocacy

Statistical Analysis for Hypothesis Four

Correlations

| | | | Sales of Spare Parts | Customer Advocacy |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Sales of Spare Parts | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .945 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .039 |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |
| | Customer Advocacy | Correlation Coefficient | .945 | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .039 | . |
| | | N | 148 | 148 |

Source: SPSS Version 20.0 Output

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.945$) between Sales of Spare Parts and customer advocacy is very strong and positive.

The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.89$) indicated that 89% of customer advocacy can be explained by Sales of Spare Parts. The significant value of 0.039 ($p < 0.05$) reveals a significant relationship.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that a significant relationship exist between maintenance service and customer satisfaction. According to Jacobs (2010) maintenance service is the knowledge possessed by experts and their ability on how to perform a particular task. Leonard et al, (2002) argued that all businesses are service business to some degree, because service organizations can retain customers through quality after-sales service. A study carried out by Thurau-Heeing, (2004) supports our findings that maintenance service has direct relationship on customer expectation with high importance for an electronic outlet

service. Hackett *et al*, (1994) developed a service profit chain that suggests that satisfaction and advocacy are stimulations by related customer retention, a direct result of customer satisfaction, which is created by excellent after-sale service.

From our findings the respondents agreed that customer satisfaction increases customer's retention as it leads to more customers' patronage on the part of the firm and it brings about high turnover as this has enhanced sales. Namasivayam and Lin (2008) further affirm that service environment is important because it influences the customer's cognitive, emotional and physiological state as well as their behaviors.

Conclusions

In view of the outcome of this study's analyses, and the discussions by the researcher's here from, we therefore concluded that excellent after-sales services would boost customer retention.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the management of these electronics outlets in Port Harcourt should adopt active strategies of after-sales service

provision hence, Specific and special attention should be given to little details with the firm's after-sales services as it has to do with how customers perceive firms services. The researchers equally recommend that further research interest should be conducted using other organizational factor as contextual variable to ascertain its influence on after-sales service as it affects retention.

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