

**WEST AFRICAN JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES  
FACULTY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
IMO STATE UNIVERSITY, OVERRI  
NIGERIAN EDITION  
VOL. 10 NO. 1 MARCH 2021**

**CUSTOMER RETENTION STRATEGIES AND POST-COMPLAINT BEHAVIOUR OF GSM  
SUBSCRIBERS IN RIVERS STATE**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined the relationship between customer retention strategies and post-complaint behaviour of GSM subscribers in Rivers State. A sample size of one hundred and forty (140) subscribers of MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile were evenly selected for the study using jugmental sampling method. 140 copies of questionnaires were distributed to respondents and all returned usable. Hypotheses were tested using spearman ranked correlation coefficient with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 23. The study finding reveals that there is a positive and significant relationship between assurance, responsiveness, and apology and post compliant behaviour. The study concluded that GSM service providers' subscribers are more satisfied with responsiveness, seconded by assurance and lastly, apology. The study recommended among others that GSM service providers should invest more on responsiveness to earn repeat purchase and encourage brand advocates and anticipate subscribers' complaints and design post-complaint satisfaction antidote.*

*Key Words: Assurance, responsiveness, apology and post-compliant behaviour.*

**Introduction**

The business world today has migrated from the transactional era to relationship exchange era owing to intensive competition and consumer growing awareness. This has made firms setup viable strategies with a view to winning and retaining customers and avoid customer switch (Ang & Buttle, 2005). Thus, firms in a highly competitive industry resort to customer retention techniques as avenue for resolving service ordeals with their customers to induce commitment (Awa, Ogwo & Ukola, 2014). Consequently, service firm managers craving

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for customers and survival in the face of stiff competition develop customers' retention strategies to keep customers in the funnel of loyal customers (Wanjohi et al., 2013). Talak & Albert (2013) empirically revealed that service quality and service recovery framework are measurements of customer retention strategies while Molapo & Mukwuda (2011) statistically established that service quality, affordability and customer support administrations are most fitting retention strategies among mobile service providers. Basic-Hodovic, Arglanagic-Kalajdzic & Banda (2015) assert that reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles are dimensions of service quality and Awa et al. (2014) conceptualized timeliness, facilitation, redress, apology, credibility and attentiveness as dimensions of service quality.

Basic-Hadovic et al. (2015), quality of service is equal to consumer experience or perception minus expectation. Quality service influences consumer satisfaction (Basic-Hodovic et al., 2015) indicating that customer dissatisfaction emanates from the inability of service to meet consumer expectation, hence complaint, post-complaint behaviour (negative word of mouth) and loss of customers in the long-run (Awa et al., 2014).

The Nigerian telecommunication industry stands out like a sore thumb in service failure in spite of government legislations (Awa et al., 2014). This attracts dissatisfied actions and post-complaint behaviour from subscribers. Tronvoll (2011) opines that customers' positive or negative emotional experience with service influences subscribers' relationship commitment to a service provider in form of post-complaint behaviour. Awa et al. (2014), conceptualized customer satisfaction, repurchase intention and word-of-mouth as critical measures of post-complaint behaviour in telecommunication industry. Almossawi (2012) affirms that repeat purchase, brand commitment and referral are indicators of customer satisfaction.

Reviewed extant literature revealed that studies have been conducted on customer retention strategies and post-complaint behaviour (Molapo & Mukwuda, 2011; Talak & Albert, 2013; Davidow, 2003; Awa et al., 2014) using either variable against different explanatory or criterion variable in Nigeria and the south-south with different sub-variables respectively. On this premise, this study examine the impact of assurance, responsiveness and apology on repeat purchase and referrals as measures of subscribers post-complaint behaviour

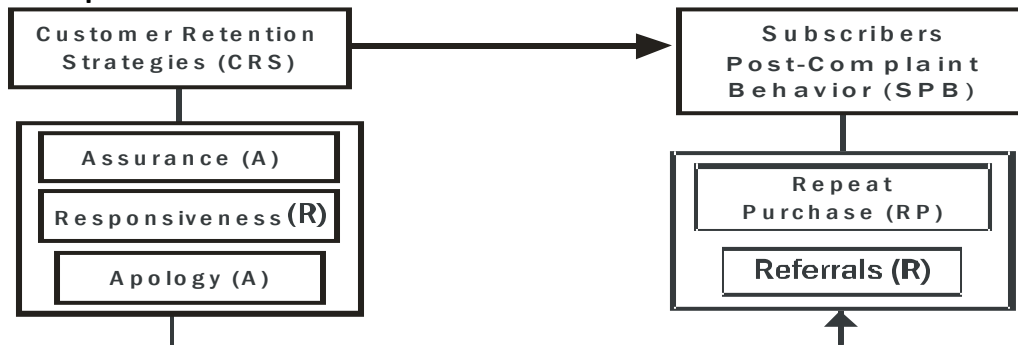
### **Statement of the Problem**

Government regulations via the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) in the Nigerian telecommunications industry is meant to protect consumers but do not reduce nor prevent service failure. As such, dissatisfied customers\subscribers expects fairness from the firm's employees or take individual action or seek redress for justice. To avoid customer negative post-complaint behaviour by GSM firms, they promptly attend to customer ordeals with compensation and avoid re-occurrence (Lovelock, Wirtz, & Chew, 2009). Customer retention strategies are one among the critical considerations for satisfying subscribers and inducing positive post-complaint behaviour in the world of telecom.

Ordinarily, considering the diverse customer retention strategies available to telecommunication firms and their attendant rewards, GSM firms would have been able to satisfy subscribers and sustain positive post-complaint behaviour in the event of service failure but is rarely visible. The questions is, are GSM firms employees not skill enough to redeem failed service or are not prompt to service ordeal? Could it be that customer retention techniques has lost it value? It is against this backdrop we seek to examine the effect of

assurance, responsiveness and apology on repeat purchase and referrals as measures of post-complaint behaviour of GSM subscribers in Rivers state.

### Conceptual Framework



**Fig.1.0 Conceptual framework of the relationship between customer retention strategies and subscribers post-complaint behaviour**

**Source: Researcher's conceptualization from review of related literature.**

### Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between customer retention strategies and subscribers post-complaint behaviour in GSM firms in Port-Harcourt. Basically, its objectives are to:

1. Ascertain the relationship between assurance and repeat purchase of GSM firms subscribers in Rivers state.
2. Examine the relationship between assurance and referrals of GSM firms subscribers in Rivers state.
3. Determine the relationship between responsiveness and repeat purchase of GSM firms subscribers in Rivers state.
4. Determine the relationship between responsiveness and referrals of GSM firms subscribers in Rivers state.
5. Examine the relationship between apology and repeat purchase of GSM firms subscribers in Rivers state.
6. Examine the relationship between apology and referrals of GSM firms subscribers in Rivers state.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study

- How does assurance enhance repeat purchase of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State?
- How does assurance enhance repeat purchase of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State?
- How does responsiveness influence repeat purchase of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State?
- How does responsiveness influence referrals of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State?
- In what way does apology promote repeat purchase of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State?

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- In what way does apology promote referrals of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The study hypotheses are presented in null frame.

- H<sub>01</sub>:** Assurance has no significant relationship with repeat purchase GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State.
- H<sub>02</sub>:** Assurance has no significant relationship with referrals of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State.
- H<sub>03</sub>:** Responsiveness has no significant relationship with repeat purchase of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State.
- H<sub>04</sub>:** Responsiveness has no significant relationship with referrals of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State
- H<sub>05</sub>:** Apology has no significant relationship with repeat purchase of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State.
- H<sub>06</sub>:** Apology has no significant relationship with referrals of GSM Firm's subscribers in Rivers State.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theory for this study is the Holistic Approach Theory by Ranaweera & Neely (2003). Holistic Approach Theory states that satisfaction, trust and switching barriers collectively and independently affect customer retention and certify satisfaction to be prominent. They added, retained customers experienced enhanced customer value and have trust: confidence, reliability and integrity in the firm's offer. But argued that satisfaction alone cannot retain customers in the long-run but trust reduces the propensity to shun existing relationship. The theory describes switching barriers as customer's evaluation of resources, opportunities and switch constraints and argues that higher switching cost generates higher likelihood to keep customers committed and vice-versa. This theory is fit for this study because the more a customer trusts a supplier; the greater the perceived value of their relationship thereby keeping concerned customers in partnership (Boohene, Agyapong, & Gonu, 2013).

### **The Concept of Customer Retention Strategies**

The navigation of customers among competitive firms led to scholarly research on relationship marketing which produces customer retention (sonwalker, 2016). The authors assert that customer retention technique serves as an avenue to increasing organisational profitability and minimize both organizational cost and customer switching rate. Kassin & Souiden (2007) define consumer retention as the future propensity of the customers to stay to their service provider. Customer retention is attained via a conscious strategy which is design, monitored and improved overtime (Sharma & Sonwalker, 2016). Mostert, Meryer & Rensburg (2009) define consumer retention strategies as conscious efforts of organisation's on current buyers so as to keep partnership of business and Sharma & sonwalker (2016) see it as different ways and means to retain actual consumers by satisfying them and meeting their needs. Customer retention strategies are very useful in a highly competitive industry (Sharma & Sonwalker (2016). Organisation would attract desired consumer behaviour in the face of stiff competition if service quality is used as customer retention tool (Talak & Albert, 2013; Molapo & Mukweda, 2011).

**Assurance**

Assurance entails trust, confidence, competence and the security a firm offer that influences desirable consumers\customers attitude and behaviour (Iddrisu, Nooni, Fianko & Mensah, 2015). Assurance is the use of employee's knowledge to inspire trust and confidence in the service offered via competent service, skill, accuracy, courtesy and security that boost business performance and its relationship with customers (Ramya, kowsalya & Dharanipriya, 2019). Trust and confidence are tools that retain customers but trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment ( Iddrisu et al.,2015); brand trust leads to brand loyalty (Dantes & Pagidimarri, 2013). Therefore, assurance is the quality a product earns through positive word-of-mouth and referrals (Lobel, Sadler, & Varshney, 2016).

**Responsiveness**

Politeness, complaint handling and effective resolves of customers ordeals with service are basic factors of responsiveness (Yarimoglu, 2014). He defines responsiveness as the willingness or readiness of employees to provide timely service such as mailing a transaction slip immediately, calling the customers back quickly and giving prompt service. For a firm to adopt efficient customer services as their unique selling point, it is necessary to approach customers with prompt response (Adeji & Denanyoh, 2014). Because non-provision of prompt service to customers in the service industry will lead to customer dissatisfaction with the brand that can mar existing business partnership and discourage re-buy (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017). Fang, Luo, and Jians (2012) opine that employees' timely attention to customers can boost customers trust and commitment which produces customer satisfaction that enhance partnership with the firm. In same vein, Guninot, Chiva & Mallen (2014) assert that timely response of employees to customers increases loyal customers' volume.

**Apology**

Awa et al. (2014) describes apology as an emotional compensation given to customers by sellers. Professional sincere apology to an aggrieved dissatisfied customer entails acknowledgement, acceptance of responsibility of negative events and demonstration of heartfelt regret (Ofori-Okyere & Kumadey, 2015). Bergsieker et al. (2010) posit that apologizing may have a drawback effect. Indicating that sincere apology from a firm' personnel to a dissatisfied customer could result to repeat buy. Thus, Ofere-Okyere & Kumadey (2015) state that apology enhanced perception of benevolence-based trust that strongly correlates with behavioural trust. Aghaie, Piramann & Faith (2011) opine that trust may enhance long-term relationship, loyalty and brand commitment; indicating rebuy. Repeat purchase indicates the desire to build long-term business partnership (Demirgunes, 2015). Ofere-okyere & Kumadey (2015) attest that apology is critical to trust, relationship restoration and customer satisfaction. Awa et al. (2014) opine that apology significantly affect positive word-of-mouth that affects repeat purchase.

**Post-Complaint Behaviour**

Awa et al. (2014) assert that complaint behaviour is a product of responses to perceived dissatisfaction around a purchase either during possession or consumption of the offer. However, customers complaints gives firms the opportunity to forestall customer satisfaction (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017) but the firm's inability to ideally address service failure immediately

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triggers complaint behaviour ( Chang, Lee, & Tseng, 2008) which in turns causes customer switch (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017) whereas effective handling of service failure result in post-complaint satisfaction and induce customer loyalty. Ateke & Harcourt (2017) suggest that successful complaint handling process increases customers trust and commitment and make customers active advocate of the brand or product (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017).

Post-complaint behaviour is defined as consumers' attitude towards a brand or its offerings after a complaint action following an unsatisfactory experience with the brand ((Ateke & Harcourt, 2017). Post-complaint behaviour may either be positive or negative but when negative, it causes customer switch and make the fellow bad mouth the brand (Komunda, 2013), if otherwise it induces repeat purchase intention, referral, trust and commitment (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017).

### **Repeat Purchase**

Repeat purchase is the readiness and willingness of a consumer to repeatedly buy same brand previously bought (Wirtz & Lwin, 2009). Customers repeatedly purchase a brand that satisfy them emotionally, intellectually, and physically (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015). Satisfactory purchase experience reinforces customers' purchase intention. Timely satisfactory response to customers complaints by an organisation representative produces complaint satisfaction and induce repeat purchase (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017). Most customers repeat same purchase behaviour consequent on previous purchase experience but those who have no previous transaction experience with a firm's offer depend on friends positive words-of- mouth and households members recommendation ( Jianqin et al., 2007). This is peculiar to handset, services and tariffs (Alshurideh (2014).

### **Referrals**

Referral is the promotion of an offer by a customer to a potential customer through positive word-of-mouth (Utami, 2015) voluntarily done by a loyal customer (Griffin, 2005). The author describes referral as a systematic and methodological process of maximising customers potential word-of-mouth through pushing, informing, promoting and speaking positively about a supplier, company, product, service, value and benefits one stand to earn from consuming an offer to others. He added that referral reduces promotion associated cost and increases sales.

Most often, customer of service firm lives on advice and suggestions of those that have purchase and/ or had consumption experience with the brand (Ateke & Harcourt, 2017). That is, complaint satisfaction increases referral while timely and accurate complaint handling brings about post-complaint satisfaction and consumer loyalty.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a realist approach to ontology backed up by positivist epistemology, relatively deterministic and nomothetic methodologies. To test the hypotheses, data were generated through the field survey questionnaire administered randomly to thirty five (35) GSM subscribers in same proportion from MTN, Globacom, Airtel, and 9Mobile respectively within the active economic population in Rivers state. Hence, the study sample size is 140. The study instruments were validated by experts in the field of marketing. The internal consistency was determined using Cronbach Alpha formular and the results yielded above 0.7 which shows instrument reliability. Judgmental sampling method was used to select the sample units for this

work. Spearman rank correlation coefficient (Rho) was used to test the hypotheses with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

### Data Analyses and Discussion of Findings

**Table 1 Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval**

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percent (%)
Distributed	140	100
Retrieved	140	100
Useful response	140	100

**Source: Survey data 2021**

Table 1 above indicates that one hundred and forty (140) questionnaires were administered and same numbers retrieved were useful for the analysis. Thus, the frequencies are the same as well as the percentages.

### Correlation Matrix on all Variables

		Correlations				
		ASSURA- RESPONSIV NCE E-NESS		REPEAT APPOLOGYPURCHASE REFERRAL		
Spearman's ASSURANCE rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.859**	.768**	.666**	.625**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	140	140	140	140	140
RESPONSIVENESS	Correlation Coefficient	.859**	1.000	.698**	.823**	.773**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	140	140	140	140	140
APPOLOGY	Correlation Coefficient	.768**	.698**	1.000	.461**	.433**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	140	140	140	140	140
REPEAT PURCHASE	Correlation Coefficient	.666**	.823**	.461**	1.000	.953**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	140	140	140	140	140
REFERRAL	Correlation Coefficient	.625**	.773**	.433**	.953**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	140	140	140	140	140

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

### Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed that a positive relationship exists between customer retention strategies and GSM subscriber's post-complaint behavior. The test on hypothesis 1 shows that assurance has positive and strong significant influence on repeat purchase and referral with a correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) = 0.666 and 0.625,  $p_v = 0.000 < \alpha$  value. This result is in consonance with the view that trust and confidence boost business performance and its relationship with customers (Ramya, kowsalya & Dharanipriya, 2019). Result on the test of hypothesis 2 and 3 show that responsiveness has a very strong and significant relationship with

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repeat purchase but a strong positive significant relationship with referrals at correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) = 0.823 and 0.773,  $p_v = 0.006 < 0.05$  alpha value. This concurs with the works of (Guninot et al., 2014; Fang et al., 2012) which established that responsiveness boost customer satisfaction and increases customer brand loyalty which reflect repeat purchase. The test on hypothesis 3 and 4, shows that ( $r$ ) = 0.461 and 0.433 with  $p_v = 0.000 < 0.05$  alpha value. That is, apology has a moderate and positive significant relationship with repeat purchase and referrals. This affirm the stands of Bergsieker et al. (2010), stating that apology may have customer drawback effect.

### **Conclusion**

In this age of intensive business competition via relationship exchange, mobile service firms are looking forward to adopting customer retention strategies capable of converting buyers to loyal customers. Assurance, responsiveness and apology; dimensions of customer retention strategies influenced GSM subscribers' post-complaint behaviour in different magnitude but responsiveness has a positive and more significant impact on repeat purchase and referral as measures of subscribers post-complaint behaviour.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion, we recommend that: Mobile firms should invest more on responsiveness earn repeat purchase and encourage brand advocates; Firms should always redeem promises made to customers/ subscribers to earn trust and confidence as it enhances brand commitment. This is because customers will always appreciate and remain committed to credible firm in exchange relationship, and Mobile firms should anticipate subscribers' complaints and design post-complaint satisfaction antidote responsiveness and assurance.

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**Questionnaire**

**Instruction: Please tick the appropriate option.**

- (1) What gender are you? (a) Male (b) Female
- (2) What is your marital status? (a) Single (b) Married (c) Divorce/Separated (d) Widowed/ Widower
- (3) What is your age category? (a) 18 - 25yrs (b) 26 - 35yrs (c) 36 - 45yrs (d) 56 – 65yrs
- (4) What is your educational background? (a) O'Level (b) OND/ND (c) HND/B.Sc/ B.ED (d) Masters (e) P.HD

**Instruction: Please note that assigned weights are given to responses below as filling guide.**

Strongly agree (SD) = 5

Agree (A) = 4

Disagree (D) = 2

Strongly disagree (SD) =1

## CUSTOMER RETENTION STRATEGIES AND POST COMPLIANT

S/NO	ASSURANCE	4	3	2	1
ASS1	Employees competence, trust and courtesy satisfies and retained customers				
ASS2	Firms that excel at customer retention have employee that exhibit credibility, trust and confidence				
ASS3	Firms that excel at customer retention display competence in handling customers ordeals and delightly reinforce satisfaction				
ASS4	Firm's service assurance moderately affect customer satisfaction				

S/NO	RESPONSIVENESS	4	3	2	1
RES1	Delivery of customer expected service promptly earn customer referral				
RES2	Employees willingness to assist dissatisfied customer enhances repeat purchase				
RES3	Timeliness and speed of service is key to customer brand commitment				
RES4	Brand commitment is not influence by service responsiveness				

S/NO	APOLOGY	4	3	2	1
APO1	Acceptance and correction of customers complaints does not positively affect customer brand commitment				
APO2	Apology only does not influence repeat purchase				
APO3	Acknowledgement and apology to legitimate complaints engender referral				
APO4	Firms that acknowledge legitimate complaints, apologized and reinforce satisfaction at no extra cost induce customer loyalty				

S/NO	REPEAT PURCHASE	4	3	2	1
REP1	Trust and confidence repose by a firms employees a service delivery triggers repeat purchase				
REP2	Trust and confidence are critical factor to customer repeat purchase				
REP3	Customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchase				
REP4	Non provisions of prompt service to customers by firms affect repeat purchase negatively				

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S/NO	REFERRAL	4	3	2	1
TAN1	Customer satisfaction with service delivered do refer potential customers to it				
TAN2	Prompt service with caring causes customers referral				
TAN3	Referral increase a firms sales volume and market share				
TAN4	Referring potential customers to firms is a function of assurance, responsiveness and empathy.				