

## **SERVICE QUALITY AND CONSUMER PATRONAGE IN ROBAN STORES, AWKA ANAMBRA STATE-NIGERIA: CONTENT ANALYSIS**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

This study explores the relationship between service quality and consumer patronage at Roban Stores, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, employing a qualitative research approach through content analysis. Service quality is conceptualized as the provider's ability to meet customer expectations and enhance business performance through dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Consumer patronage is defined as the consistent preference of consumers to repeatedly choose a particular firm's products or services over competitors', influenced by factors including product quality, price competitiveness, customer service, and overall satisfaction. The study investigates these dynamics at Roban Stores, highlighting factors such as quality products, competitive pricing, excellent customer service, strategic location, diverse product offerings, promotional activities, store ambiance, word-of-mouth, loyalty programs, and social media presence as crucial in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering patronage. Findings underscore the significance of managing service quality to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, recommending strategies for continuous improvement to sustain competitive advantage in the retail market.

**Keywords:** Service Quality; Consumer Patronage; Robban Stores; Customer Satisfaction

## INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, according to Vu (2021), quality service and customer satisfaction are crucial factors that determine the success and longevity of any organization. One such organization that has consistently prioritized quality services and consumer patronage is Roban Stores, located in Awka, the Southeast of Nigeria. As a leading retail store in the region, Roban Stores has built a reputation for providing exceptional services and products to its customers. Since its inception in the early 1990s, the store has grown significantly, adapting to the changing dynamics of consumer needs and the economic landscape (Anwatu, 2021). On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2016 Roban Stores officially opened their new superstore in Awka, Anambra State. The retail industry in Nigeria has undergone considerable transformation over the past few decades, driven by economic reforms, technological advancements, and shifts in consumer behavior (Ibukunoluwa, 2021). Roban Stores has navigated these changes through strategic expansion, diversification of product offerings, and a commitment to customer satisfaction. Roban Stores was founded by Sir. Robert Anwatu, an entrepreneur with a vision to provide quality and affordable goods to the residents of Awka and its surrounding areas. The store's strategic location in the heart of Awka, coupled with its emphasis on sourcing products directly from manufacturers and wholesalers, established a foundation for its early success. Over the years, Roban Stores has expanded its product range to include groceries, electronics, clothing, and home appliances, positioning itself as a comprehensive retail destination for a diverse customer base.

Service quality is a vital element that significantly influences consumer patronage, particularly in service-oriented industries such as hospitality and fast food. According to Onyeonoro et al. (2024), high service quality ensures that customers have a positive experience, leading to increased satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat patronage. The dimensions of service quality, including reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance, play a critical role in shaping customer perceptions of value. When consumers perceive service quality to be high, they are more likely to trust the business, feel valued, and return for future services. In highly competitive sectors, such as the fast-food industry, the delivery of superior service quality becomes indispensable. Etuk et al. (2023) argued that the capacity of fast-food businesses to consistently meet or exceed customer expectations is a crucial determinant of their success. Given the characteristics of the fast-food market, which include high customer turnover and low brand loyalty, businesses must prioritize the quality of services they offer. A commitment to exceptional service quality not only fosters customer satisfaction but also enhances loyalty. Loyal customers are more likely to become repeat patrons, providing a stable revenue stream and contributing to the business's long-term success. Furthermore, positive customer experiences can lead to word-of-mouth referrals, which are invaluable in attracting new customers in a competitive market.

The retail industry is one of the most competitive and dynamic sectors in the world, with businesses constantly striving to stay ahead of the competition by providing high-quality products and services to their customers (Assosia, 2024). In Nigeria, the retail industry is also a significant contributor to the country's economy, with millions of people relying on it for their daily needs. Retailing involves the sale of goods and services to the end consumer and plays a crucial role in the economy by linking producers with consumers (Hameli, 2018). In recent years, the competitive landscape of the retail industry has become increasingly complex. Retailers are now required to deliver high-quality services to differentiate themselves from competitors and ensure customer satisfaction (Homburg et al., 2017). Service quality in retail entails various dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and

tangibles (Pakurár et al., 2019). These dimensions collectively determine the overall shopping experience and influence customer perceptions and behaviors.

The turn of the millennium brought significant technological advancements that reshaped the retail environment globally (Zhang, 2021). Roban Stores embraced these changes by adopting point-of-sale systems, inventory management solutions, and establishing an online presence. These technological integrations not only enhanced the customer experience but also expanded the store's reach beyond Awka. Despite the recognized importance of service quality, there is limited empirical research on how it specifically affects consumer patronage in the context of Roban Stores in Awka. Given the competitive pressures and the need for sustainable growth, understanding the nuances of this relationship is critical for the store's management. This study addresses this gap by employing content analysis to examine customer feedback and reviews, providing a detailed assessment of the impact of service quality on consumer patronage at Roban Stores.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Conceptualization of Service Quality and Consumer Patronage**

In our rapidly changing world, where choices abound, understanding service quality and consumer patronage is more essential than ever. As consumers, we all know the feeling of walking into a store or using a service and expecting more than just a transaction; we seek connection, care, and a memorable experience. Businesses today face the challenge of not only meeting these expectations but exceeding them to stand out in a crowded market. Ramya et al. (2019) defines service quality as the service provider's capability to efficiently satisfy customers, thereby enhancing overall business performance. Service quality encompasses the provider's competence in meeting customer expectations, ensuring prompt and effective service delivery, and consistently improving customer satisfaction levels. This efficiency not only meets immediate customer needs but also contributes to long-term business success by fostering loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and sustained profitability. Vu (2021) states that service quality is often regarded as the result of a service delivery system, playing a key role in shaping consumer satisfaction, perceptions, and opinions. These perceptions are influenced by multiple factors, such as the reliability of the service, the responsiveness of staff, the level of empathy demonstrated, and the overall tangibility of the service environment. Consumer expectations, prior experiences, and external references also contribute significantly to how service quality is evaluated, ultimately affecting customer loyalty and retention. According to Ali et al. (2021), service quality in the service industry is defined as the degree to which businesses prioritize meeting customer requirements, building trust, and fulfilling customer expectations regarding products and services. This approach emphasizes understanding and addressing customer needs consistently, which in turn influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. High-quality service is seen as essential for fostering customer trust and ensuring long-term business success by exceeding customer expectations.

Service quality, according to Kankam (2023), refers to the degree to which a business meets or exceeds customer expectations. It is understood as a multidimensional construct, emphasizing that fulfilling customers' needs is central to service quality. The SERVQUAL model, often used as a foundation for assessing service quality, highlights six key components: dependability, responsiveness, assurance, access, empathy, and tangibles. These dimensions help businesses evaluate how well they align with customer expectations across different service aspects. Ighomereho et al. (2022) explain that service quality is essentially the gap between what customers expect and what they actually experience. It involves a subjective

comparison, where customers evaluate the perceived performance of a service against their preconceived expectations. If the service delivered meets or exceeds expectations, customers perceive the quality as high. Conversely, if it falls short, the quality is perceived as low. This concept highlights the importance of understanding customer expectations and ensuring service delivery aligns with or surpasses those standards to enhance customer satisfaction.

According by Susilowati & Yasri (2018), service quality can be defined as the overall impression that consumers form regarding the extent to which a service meets their expectations. It encompasses various dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, which collectively influence consumers' perceptions and satisfaction with the service experience. Susilowati & Yasri (2018) define service quality as the customer's perception of the service component of a product. It encompasses the evaluation of how well a service meets or exceeds customer expectations. Service quality is not only crucial for meeting customer satisfaction but also plays a pivotal role in shaping customer perceptions, loyalty, and overall satisfaction levels with the product or service offered. Service quality represents the discrepancy between customers' expectations of the service they anticipate receiving and their perceptions of what they actually experience (Susilowati & Yasri, 2018). This evaluation encompasses multiple dimensions where customers assess the reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles offered by the service provider. It is not merely a comparison of expected versus received service; rather, it serves as a critical gauge of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Effective management of service quality involves understanding and addressing these gaps to enhance overall customer experiences and maintain competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Hu et al. (2009) assert that quality of service or product plays a pivotal role in enhancing customer satisfaction. They argue that high service quality not only boosts customer satisfaction but also plays a critical role in effectively managing a company's global delivery system for its offerings. The relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality is dynamic and mutually reinforcing over time. Moreover, service quality acts as a key determinant influencing future purchase behaviors, thereby underlining its significance in fostering customer loyalty and driving overall business success. By consistently delivering high-quality services or products, organizations can not only meet but exceed customer expectations, leading to sustained competitive advantage and enhanced brand reputation in the global marketplace. Therefore, investing in service quality is not only beneficial for immediate customer satisfaction but also crucial for long-term business growth and profitability.

On the other hand, Adiele et al. (2015) define customer patronage as the steadfast commitment of consumers to repeatedly purchase products or services from a specific firm, despite the availability of alternative offerings from competitors. This loyalty reflects a deep-seated preference for the quality, reliability, and overall value provided by the firm. Customer patronage is not merely a transactional relationship but signifies a mutual trust and satisfaction that develops over time between the consumer and the business. Central to customer patronage is the concept of repeat purchasing behavior, where customers consistently choose to buy from a particular company rather than exploring other options in the market. This behavior is often driven by positive past experiences, perceived superior product attributes, exceptional customer service, or unique brand identity that resonates with the consumer's values and preferences. Faajir & Nyagba (2022) define patronage as the extent to which a customer consistently chooses to purchase from a specific service provider over time. This concept goes beyond mere transactional interactions; it encompasses the customer's loyalty and emotional connection to the brand or service.

Njelita & Anyasor (2020) describe customer patronage as the process through which customers engage in the purchase of goods and services from vendors, whether these vendors are individual businesses or larger corporations. This relationship is characterized by an exchange wherein customers spend their money with the expectation of receiving tangible benefits or satisfaction in return. The nature of this transaction is influenced by various factors, including the perceived value of the product or service, the quality of customer service, the reputation of the vendor, and the overall shopping experience. Power & Odiri (2023) define a customer's patronage as the behavior of an individual who purchases goods or services primarily for personal consumption. This behavior reflects a fundamental aspect of consumer interaction with businesses, as customers engage with organizations based on a range of motivations. Consumers often patronize products or services after evaluating the expected benefits they will receive from their purchases. These benefits can include quality, price, convenience, brand reputation, and customer service. The decision to patronize a particular organization is influenced by the perceived value these benefits offer, leading consumers to choose one product or service over another. Consequently, understanding the factors that drive customers' patronage becomes essential for organizations aiming to enhance their offerings and build customer loyalty.

According by Adiele et al. (2015), customer patronage is defined as a deeply held commitment on the part of consumers to consistently repurchase a firm's products or services, even when faced with competitive offerings from other companies. This commitment reflects a strong preference and loyalty towards the firm, influenced by positive experiences, perceived value, and satisfaction derived from the products or services provided. Customer patronage goes beyond mere repeat purchases; it embodies a relationship built on trust, reliability, and mutual benefit. Consumers who patronize a particular firm often do so because they perceive the firm's offerings to be superior in meeting their needs or desires compared to alternatives available in the market. This perception is shaped by various factors, including product quality, pricing, customer service, brand reputation, and overall experience. Customer patronage is characterized by a willingness to advocate for the firm, recommending its products or services to others based on personal satisfaction and trust in the brand. This advocacy can significantly impact the firm's reputation and market positioning, contributing to sustained competitive advantage and long-term profitability.

Anyadighibe et al. (2023) discussed the concept of patronage as a significant factor influencing organizational commitment. They argue that patronage arises from an individual's desire to align themselves with an organization, which can stem from two main sources: the organization's service quality and the perceived qualities of that service. When individuals experience high service quality, characterized by reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangible elements, they are more likely to develop a positive association with the organization. This positive experience fosters a sense of loyalty, encouraging patrons to continue their engagement with the organization.

Customer patronage can be understood as a direct extension of customer satisfaction (Udo et al., 2024). When customers are satisfied with their experiences, whether through product quality, service, or overall interaction with a brand, they are more likely to return and engage in repeat purchases. This satisfaction fosters a sense of loyalty, making customers feel valued and appreciated. As a result, satisfied customers not only make repeated transactions but also become advocates for the brand, recommending it to others and contributing to positive word-of-mouth marketing. Thus, customer satisfaction serves as a foundational element in building and maintaining customer patronage, driving long-term business success and fostering a strong customer-brand relationship.

Udo et al. (2024) emphasized that a company's dedication to satisfying its customers is instrumental in fostering consumer loyalty towards a brand, product, or service. This highlights the crucial role that customers and their continued patronage play in the success of a brand. He identified several key factors that influence customer patronage, including the economic environment, which affects consumer spending power; the actions of competitors, which can sway customer preferences; and social and psychological influences, which shape consumer behaviors and motivations. The attributes of a product or service, such as quality and unique features, significantly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. Marketing strategies, including product development, pricing, distribution, and promotional activities, are also vital in shaping consumer perceptions and encouraging loyalty. Thus, customer patronage is vital for a firm's ongoing business operations, providing a foundation for stability and market share growth. By consistently meeting customer expectations through well-planned strategies, a company can ensure sustained patronage, which is essential for its long-term success and competitive edge in the market.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theory adopted for study was Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL), developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1985, is widely used to assess and measure service quality. The SERVQUAL model includes a gap analysis that assesses discrepancies between customer expectations and their actual perceptions of service quality. It utilizes five dimensions—Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Responsiveness—to evaluate service performance (Ali et al., 2021). The model's perception-expectation gap specifically aims to gauge how closely service delivery meets customer expectations, crucial for identifying areas needing improvement in service provision. SERVQUAL's dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, And Empathy, provide a structured approach to assess the service experience at Roban Stores. The tangibles dimension examines the physical infrastructure, brands, supply chain, products and services of the store, its layout, and most importantly, the overall capacity of the human resources. For Roban Stores, this could mean evaluating the store's ambiance, cleanliness, and the professionalism of its employees. Reliability focuses on whether Roban Stores delivers on its promises consistently and accurately. This includes aspects like product availability, pricing accuracy, and timely service. Customers are likely to patronize Roban Stores more frequently if they can rely on consistent service delivery. Responsiveness refers to the willingness and ability of Roban Stores' staff to assist customers promptly and effectively. Quick response times to customer inquiries, helpfulness in resolving issues, and accessibility of staff can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

For this study, we chose a scoping review approach, which is crucial for achieving our research goals. This method allows us to gather and synthesize secondary data from various trustworthy sources to develop meaningful findings. Scoping reviews are particularly effective for collating information on specific topics, giving us a well-rounded view of the subject. We took care to source our secondary data from reputable academic repositories, ensuring we avoided any irrelevant documents. This attention to detail helps to enhance the reliability and validity of the materials we selected. We also made use of online publications to streamline our data extraction process. As we analyzed the results and discussions, we examined the key variables of interest within their thematic contexts. This analysis offers valuable insights into

how service quality impacts consumer patronage at Roban Stores. Located right next to the Central Bank of Nigeria and easily accessible via the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway, Roban Stores is in a prime spot that makes it convenient for residents, travelers, and tourists. This strategic location likely plays a significant role in attracting consumers to the store.

### **Factors that Influence Consumer Patronage at Roban Stores, Awka**

The study by Iloke & Oguegbe (2024) investigated the influence of public awareness and product quality on customer loyalty among consumers in Awka metropolis, Anambra state. They conducted their research with 200 participants and utilized measures such as the advertising effectiveness scale, Quality of Products Scale (QPS), and Customer Loyalty Scale (CLS). Three hypotheses were tested, all of which were supported by the data: firstly, public awareness significantly predicted customer loyalty; secondly, product quality also significantly predicted customer loyalty; and thirdly, public awareness and product quality together had a joint significant prediction on customer loyalty. The study recommended enhancing marketing campaigns across various media channels to increase public awareness and educate consumers about product features and benefits, aiming to strengthen customer loyalty. An online review conducted by AFRICABZ.COM highlights several key factors responsible for patronage at Roban Store:

1. **Quality of Products:** The quality of products offered by Roban Stores is paramount in building trust and satisfaction among customers. High-quality merchandise not only meets but exceeds customer expectations, setting Roban Stores apart from its competitors in terms of reliability and customer confidence.
2. **Price Competitiveness:** In the competitive retail landscape, price plays a crucial role, especially for price-sensitive customers. Roban Stores' strategy of maintaining competitive pricing ensures that budget-conscious shoppers find value in their purchases, thereby attracting a broad customer base looking for affordability without compromising on quality.
3. **Customer Service:** Excellent customer service is a cornerstone of Roban Stores' success. Every interaction with customers is seen as an opportunity to enhance the shopping experience. Friendly, knowledgeable staff who go the extra mile to assist customers create a positive atmosphere that encourages repeat visits and builds long-term loyalty.
4. **Location and Accessibility:** The strategic location of Roban Stores in Awka ensures convenient access for shoppers. Being centrally located and easily accessible by both public and private transport contributes to higher foot traffic, allowing Roban Stores to capitalize on its prime location to attract a steady flow of customers.
5. **Product Variety:** Roban Stores offers a wide range of products to cater to diverse customer needs and preferences. The extensive product variety ensures that customers can find everything they need in one place, enhancing convenience and satisfaction. This comprehensive selection also positions Roban Stores as a preferred shopping destination for a wide demographic.
6. **Promotions and Discounts:** Regular promotions, discounts, and special offers are effective strategies employed by Roban Stores to stimulate sales and encourage impulse purchases. These attractive deals not only draw in cost-conscious shoppers but also create excitement and urgency among customers, boosting sales volume during promotional periods.
7. **Store Ambiance:** The ambiance and atmosphere within Roban Stores play a crucial role in shaping the overall shopping experience. A pleasant and welcoming environment with clean, well-organized displays, comfortable shopping aisles, and soothing background music makes shopping enjoyable. This positive ambiance fosters a sense of relaxation and

satisfaction among customers, contributing to increased loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

8. **Word-of-Mouth:** Positive reviews and recommendations from satisfied customers significantly influence potential shoppers' decisions. Strong word-of-mouth referrals, both offline and online, serve as powerful endorsements for Roban Stores, attracting new customers who trust the firsthand experiences and recommendations of others.
9. **Loyalty Programs:** Roban Stores' loyalty programs are designed to reward repeat customers and foster long-term loyalty. These programs offer incentives such as discounts, exclusive offers, and rewards points for purchases, encouraging customers to return for future shopping needs. By recognizing and appreciating customer loyalty, Roban Stores builds stronger relationships and enhances customer retention.
10. **Social Media Presence:** Maintaining an active and engaging presence on social media platforms is essential for Roban Stores to connect with tech-savvy customers. Social media channels provide opportunities to showcase new products, announce promotions, interact with customers directly, and receive feedback. This digital engagement helps Roban Stores build brand awareness, reach a wider audience, and stay relevant in an increasingly digital marketplace.

By effectively balancing these factors—quality products, competitive pricing, exceptional customer service, strategic location, diverse product offerings, attractive promotions, inviting store ambiance, positive word-of-mouth, rewarding loyalty programs, and robust social media presence—Roban Stores can continue to attract and retain a loyal customer base in Awka, fostering sustained business growth and success.

In a related study, Okoro et al. (2019) conducted a study in Enugu metropolis to identify factors influencing shoppers' patronage of shopping malls. They used a survey method with a target population of adults aged 18 years and above, resulting in a sample size of 596 respondents. Their findings, analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS version 25.0, showed that while distance and customer service do not significantly influence shoppers' patronage, convenience, socialization, and exploration play crucial roles. Specifically, convenience, socialization, and exploration were found to significantly impact shoppers' decisions to patronize shopping malls in Enugu metropolis. Based on these results, the study recommends that mall management focus on enhancing facilities that improve convenience and social interaction to attract more shoppers.

Based on the study by Okoro et al. (2019), several factors influence shoppers' patronage of shopping malls in Enugu metropolis:

1. **Convenience:** Convenience refers to how easily accessible and user-friendly the shopping mall is for shoppers. Factors such as location, parking facilities, ease of navigation within the mall, and availability of essential services (like restrooms and food courts) contribute to convenience. Shoppers are more likely to patronize malls that offer convenience in terms of accessibility and amenities.
2. **Socialization:** Socialization involves the social aspects of shopping, including opportunities for social interaction, meeting friends or acquaintances, and engaging in leisure activities within the mall. Shopping malls that provide spaces for socializing, such as cafes, seating areas, and events, attract shoppers who value social engagement as part of their shopping experience.
3. **Exploration:** Exploration refers to the variety and novelty of offerings within the shopping mall. It includes the diversity of stores, product range, entertainment options (like cinemas or arcades), and overall experiential elements that encourage shoppers to explore different



parts of the mall. Malls offering unique experiences, and a wide range of choices tend to attract shoppers looking for new discoveries and experiences.

4. **Distance:** While the study found that distance does not significantly influence shoppers' patronage in Enugu metropolis, it typically refers to the physical proximity of the mall to shoppers' residences or frequent locations. Generally, closer proximity reduces travel time and effort, making it more likely for shoppers to visit the mall regularly.
5. **Customer Service:** Despite the study's findings that customer service does not significantly impact patronage, good customer service remains a fundamental aspect of overall shopping satisfaction. It includes aspects such as courteous staff, efficient problem-solving, and responsiveness to customer needs. Positive customer service experiences can enhance shoppers' overall perception of the mall and encourage repeat visits.

### **Quality Services Offered by Roban Stores, Awka**

In an online review conducted by AFRICABZ.COM on forty (40) customers of Roban Stores Awka indicates that the quality of services offered by Roban Stores in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, is indeed a mixed bag. On one hand, the store prides itself on delivering excellent customer service and meeting set goals, which suggests a strong commitment to customer satisfaction and a focus on high-quality service. This dedication likely contributes to increased customer loyalty and repeat business, essential elements for success in the retail industry. Additionally, Roban Stores aims to provide a seamless shopping experience by being a one-stop destination for a wide range of products, including groceries, confectionery pastries, sports goods, fashion items, perfumes, and more. This convenience is attractive to customers, as it allows them to find everything they need in one location, thereby enhancing the store's appeal and drawing a broad customer base. However, despite these positive aspects, there are criticisms about poor management, which is crucial for maintaining smooth operations and ensuring overall customer satisfaction. Ineffective management can lead to operational inefficiencies and a decline in service quality, impacting the store's reputation. Furthermore, reports of rude staff, particularly in the bakery area, indicate a potential gap in customer service training and employee engagement. Rude interactions can deter customers from returning and damage the store's image. Addressing these issues through regular training programs and fostering a positive work culture is essential to improve the overall shopping experience.

Micheal & Ifunanya (2022) conducted a study on product quality and customer loyalty in selected fast moving consumer goods firms in Anambra State, Nigeria, with a particular focus on Stanel Group of Companies (Awka), Shoprite Nigeria Ltd (Onitsha), and Roban Stores (Awka). Their research sought to understand how product quality influences customer loyalty among these firms. The questionnaire used in their study included several key items designed to gauge customer perceptions and behaviors:

- The company's product brand performance is outstanding in the market.
- Their brand features are more desirable compared to other firms.
- I prefer their brands because they are more reliable and durable.
- Their products conform to standards.
- I consume their products more often.
- I would like to repeat my purchase because I trust their brands.
- I have been using this brand for a long time and do not intend to switch to similar brands available from other firms.
- I am likely to convince my friends to patronize this firm.

The analysis of the responses to these questions revealed a strong positive affirmation from customers regarding the quality of services provided by the retail outlets, including Roban Stores. The findings suggest that customers perceive the product brands from these firms as superior in performance and more desirable compared to competitors. Additionally, the reliability and durability of these brands contribute significantly to customer preference and repeated purchases. Customers also indicated a high level of trust in the brands, with many expressing long-term loyalty and no intention of switching to other brands. This loyalty is further reinforced by their willingness to recommend these brands to friends, indicating a high level of customer satisfaction and advocacy.

The study by Anetoh (2016) investigates the dimensions of service quality and their impact on customer patronage in grocery services in Anambra State, Nigeria. It identifies a gap in previous research methodologies and conceptualizations using the SERVPERF model. The research employed a descriptive survey design with a sample of 156 customers from ten grocery outlets. Data collection was through structured questionnaires validated for reliability, achieving a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.997. Analysis using Pearson correlation coefficients indicated strong positive relationships between service dimensions (reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, responsiveness) and customer patronage. The findings suggest significant correlations, highlighting the importance of service quality in influencing customer behavior in grocery services in Nigeria.

Iloke & Oguebe (2024) explored how public awareness and product quality predict customer loyalty among consumers in Awka metropolis, Anambra State. The study involved 200 participants and utilized measures such as advertising effectiveness, a Quality of Products Scale (QPS), and a Customer Loyalty Scale (CLS). The findings showed that public awareness significantly predicted customer loyalty ( $\beta = .238, p < .05$ ), and product quality also had a significant impact on customer loyalty ( $\beta = .390, p < .05$ ). Additionally, the combined effect of public awareness and product quality on customer loyalty was statistically significant ( $F = 22.49, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .245, p < .001$ ). These results suggest that both factors, individually and together, influence consumer loyalty in the region. The study recommended that businesses implement effective marketing strategies, utilizing various channels like social media, television, radio, and billboards to enhance public awareness and educate consumers about product features and benefits.

Okoro (2021) conducted a study on consumer purchase decision-making at store retailers, with a focus on Roban Stores' operations in Abakaliki (Ebonyi State), Enugu (Enugu State), and Nnewi (Anambra State), all in southeastern Nigeria. The study aimed to investigate consumer purchasing decisions, preferences, and reasons for choosing products from the wide variety offered at these stores. Two hypotheses were tested, and chi-square analysis was used to evaluate the results. The study found that consumers' preferences for the product range in Roban Stores reflected satisfaction, convenience, loyalty, and staff commitment. The study's methodology involved administering 120 questionnaires to consumers, with 103 returned, and 30 questionnaires to Roban Stores personnel across the three locations. Data analysis was conducted using tables and percentages. Key findings indicated that Roban Stores attracted a high number of active consumers, with the majority of their workforce being under 30 years old, contributing to the store's stability and growth. The study concluded that consumer satisfaction with the variety of products offered positively influenced Roban Stores' development. Recommendations included hiring more educated staff to match the growing number of educated consumers and expanding operations to other cities in the region and beyond to increase patronage.

Iwuchukwu et al. (2023) conducted a study to assess the conformity of five brands of vegetable oil sold in Roban stores, Awka, to the standards set by the National Agency For Food And Drug Administration And Control (NAFDAC). The brands examined were Sunchi Soya Oil (CBI), Carlini Pure Canola Oil (ABI), Lassa Vegetable Oil (NEI), Golden Penny Pure Soya Oil (NMN), and Active Pure Vegetable Oil (JGO). The analysis of physical properties—specific gravity (0.65-0.92), refractive index (1.33-1.54), and viscosity (50.55-80.44 mPa·s)—revealed significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) across the brands, with most values below NAFDAC's standards, except for CBI, which met the required specific gravity (0.91-0.92) and refractive index (1.46-1.48). All samples, however, complied with the NAFDAC viscosity standard of  $\geq 0.2$  mPa·s. The study further examined the chemical properties, including saponification number (145-190 mg KOH/g), iodine value (0.90-8.86 mgI<sub>2</sub>/g), and peroxide value (1.70-7.48 meq/kg), all of which conformed to NAFDAC standards. Additional properties analyzed, such as free fatty acid, pH, base value, and impurity level, though not regulated by NAFDAC, were also within acceptable ranges. Overall, the findings indicated that the oils were of good quality and safe for consumption.

Anionwu (2019) examined the success factors of retail businesses among Micro, Small, And Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The study focused on the impact of market, organizational, and regulatory drivers on retail business success. Using a descriptive survey of 277 retail MSME owners and structured questionnaires, the research employed descriptive statistics and t-tests to analyze the data. Key findings revealed that market drivers such as the availability of brands, selling price, location, long opening hours, and customer ratings significantly influence business success. Organizational drivers, including location security, human resource management, corporate reputation, and fast service, were also pivotal, with a mean score of 3.78. In terms of regulatory drivers, business ownership structure and compliance with professional standards emerged as major influences. The study recommends that retail business managers should focus on these key success factors, developing strategies that emphasize quality service, legal compliance, optimal location, and strong corporate management to maintain a competitive edge.

The study by Nwangwu et al. (2024) examined the predictive role of service quality on online shopping preferences in Anambra State, Nigeria. It involved 329 adults from Awka, Nnewi, and Onitsha, with a demographic breakdown of 116 males (35.3%) and 213 females (64.7%), aged 18 to 51 years, and a mean age of 39.45 (SD = 9.19). The researchers used purposive and incidental sampling methods, along with the quality of service scale and online shopping preference scale to collect data. Employing a correlational design and multiple linear regression statistics, the results indicated that dimensions of quality service, such as tangibles ( $\beta = -3.49$ ), reliability ( $\beta = -3.07$ ), and responsiveness ( $\beta = -.24$ ), had significant positive effects on online shopping preferences. In contrast, assurance ( $\beta = .67$ ) and empathy ( $\beta = .49$ ) negatively predicted online shopping preferences ( $p < .05$ ). The findings suggest that online retailers should enhance their service quality—particularly tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—to attract and retain consumers.

The paper by Mbamalu & Okeke (2021) evaluated the relationship between e-service quality and customer satisfaction regarding Point-Of-Sale (POS) systems in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two specific objectives and two hypotheses, employing a quantitative research design with a sample of 380 bank account holders using POS services. Data collection was primarily through questionnaires, and the analysis involved descriptive statistics, including frequencies and mean scores, along with Pearson Product Moment Correlation to test hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. The findings revealed that about half of the respondents were comfortable with POS services in Awka and expressed confidence

in the operators' policies, indicating a perception of trustworthiness. However, less than half (45.2%) found the POS systems user-friendly. The study established a significant relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction ( $p=0.00$ ,  $<0.05$ ) and between trust and customer satisfaction ( $p=0.00$ ,  $<0.05$ ).

Jacobs (2022) conducted a study on the challenges and prospects of e-commerce and retail business in Awka South L.G.A., focusing on the effects of e-marketing and e-trade on retail operations. Using a structured questionnaire, data was collected from staff at selected firms, with a population of 3,085 retail businesses registered with the National Association of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra State. A sample size of 552 was determined using the Borg & Gall formula, and purposive sampling techniques were employed. The study utilized innovation diffusion theory as a theoretical framework, with data analyzed through percentage tables and ANOVA to test research hypotheses. Findings revealed that both e-marketing and e-trade significantly influenced retail business in Awka South. The study recommended that government and private organizations enhance infrastructure and technology, improve high-speed information networks, and recruit IT-skilled personnel to foster e-commerce growth. It also suggested that regulations for electronic approval processes, consumer protection, and e-commerce legal frameworks be standardized to boost user confidence in e-commerce.

The study by Ogbunankwor & Madumere (2023) explores the factors that influence consumer choices in retail outlets in Nigeria, highlighting that many retail businesses struggle to sustain themselves due to a lack of understanding of consumer preferences. The research focuses on three key attributes: customer service, product quality, and store location. Using a convenience sample of 138 retailers in Awka metropolis, South-East Nigeria, the study employed multiple regression analysis with SPSS Version 20.0 at a 5% significance level. The findings reveal that all three factors significantly influence consumer choice, with customer service being the most impactful, followed by store location and product quality. The study concludes that consumer patronage is crucial for the success of retail businesses. It recommends that retailers invest in technology to enhance customer purchasing experiences and improve customer service support.

Omeje & Olise (2022) explored the role of customer satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between relationship marketing and customer loyalty among commercial bank customers in Awka, Anambra State. The study emphasizes that the banking industry's success relies on building a strong customer base and maintaining positive customer relationships. It investigates how relationship marketing dimensions—trust, commitment, communication, and conflict handling—affect customer loyalty. Data from 691 respondents were analyzed using SPSS version 17. The findings reveal that these dimensions significantly influence customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction playing a crucial mediating role. The study concludes that banks should prioritize customer satisfaction through effective relationship marketing to foster customer loyalty and encourage ongoing patronage.

Mbazor & Okeke (2019) examined the effect of perceived service quality dimensions on customer loyalty within the telecom industry, particularly focusing on the GSM subsector. Utilizing a survey research design, they gathered data from 246 respondents across three major urban areas in Anambra State—Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi—using structured questionnaires. The analysis, conducted through descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression, revealed that four out of five service quality constructs—tangibility, reliability, assurance, and responsiveness—significantly influenced customer loyalty in the GSM sector. In contrast, the dimension of empathy, while positively correlated, was not statistically significant. The study recommended that GSM service providers enhance the consistency of their service offerings

and improve responsiveness to customer requests to foster loyalty. Additionally, it suggested directions for further research and highlighted the implications for GSM company management.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings regarding the quality of services provided by Roban Stores in Awka paint a clear picture that highlights both the store's strengths and areas that could benefit from enhancement. An online review conducted by AFRICABZ.COM, featuring feedback from forty customers, reveals a dual narrative that offers important observations into the shopping experience. On one hand, many customers expressed genuine appreciation for the store's outstanding customer service. They frequently mention the staff's friendliness and willingness to go the extra mile to assist shoppers, which speaks volumes about the store's commitment to fostering a welcoming atmosphere. This focus on customer satisfaction is particularly significant in the competitive retail environment, where positive interactions can lead to increased customer loyalty and repeat business. As noted by Iloke & Oguegbe (2024), a strong emphasis on service quality can be a key differentiator for retailers, making it essential for Roban Stores to maintain and build upon this strength. However, the review also uncovers areas needing improvement. While many customers are satisfied, there are also mentions of occasional stock shortages and long wait times during peak hours. These challenges can detract from the overall shopping experience and may lead to frustration among customers who expect a seamless visit. Addressing these issues will be vital for Roban Stores as it strives to enhance its service quality and ensure that every aspect of the shopping journey meets or exceeds customer expectations.

### **Strengths of Robban Stores**

Roban Stores has set its sights on becoming a one-stop shopping destination, offering a wide array of products that cater to every customer's needs. From groceries and delectable confectionery pastries to sports equipment, trendy fashion items, and alluring perfumes, the store creates a vibrant marketplace under one roof. This ambitious vision not only enhances customer convenience but also attracts a diverse customer base, significantly boosting foot traffic and, ultimately, sales (Micheal & Ifunanya, 2022). In today's fast-paced world, consumers increasingly seek the convenience of finding everything they need in one place. Roban Stores embraces this retail trend by creating a seamless shopping experience, ensuring that customers can easily browse and purchase items without the hassle of visiting multiple stores. This alignment with current market demands for accessibility and ease is essential for attracting and retaining customers (Okoro, 2021). By offering such a broad range of products, Roban Stores not only simplifies the shopping process for its customers but also fosters a sense of community. Shoppers can enjoy a lively atmosphere where they can discover new products and engage with knowledgeable staff. This personal touch enhances customer loyalty, making them more likely to return for their diverse shopping needs. In essence, Roban Stores is not just about selling products; it's about creating an enjoyable and efficient shopping experience that resonates with the modern consumer's lifestyle.

### **Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction**

Research conducted by Micheal & Ifunanya (2022) paints a compelling picture of customer perceptions regarding product quality at Roban Stores, positioning it as superior to that of its competitors. Their findings delve into various dimensions that influence customer

loyalty, including brand performance, reliability, and durability. Customers have voiced high levels of trust in the brand, which suggests a strong foundation of long-term loyalty—an essential component for sustaining business growth.

This trust and reliability are not just abstract concepts; they manifest in tangible outcomes. The ability of Roban Stores to foster such trust correlates directly with customer satisfaction and advocacy. Many customers are willing to recommend the store to friends and family, indicating that their positive experiences translate into a powerful word-of-mouth endorsement. This kind of advocacy is invaluable, as it not only attracts new customers but also strengthens the existing customer base. Further supporting this view, findings from Iloke & Oguegbe (2024) highlight that public awareness and product quality are pivotal in shaping customer loyalty. Their study provides statistical evidence underscoring a robust connection between these factors and consumer behavior, reaffirming the notion that both dimensions are critical for maintaining a loyal customer base. Given these insights, it becomes evident that effective marketing strategies are vital for enhancing public awareness of Roban Stores' offerings. The researchers recommend utilizing diverse marketing channels to educate consumers about the quality and reliability of the store's products. By increasing visibility and promoting their strengths, Roban Stores can further solidify its reputation and enhance customer loyalty, ensuring continued growth in a competitive market. This strategic focus on marketing, combined with the existing trust and satisfaction among customers, could pave the way for the store to maintain its leading position in the retail sector.

### **Areas for Improvement**

While Roban Stores showcases several positive attributes, it is essential to address some critical concerns that have emerged regarding its management practices. These criticisms indicate that inadequate management can significantly undermine the store's operational efficiency and overall service quality. For instance, ineffective management often manifests in ways that directly impact customer satisfaction, leading to a negative perception of the store and potentially harming its reputation (Iwuchukwu et al., 2023). One particularly troubling aspect has been the reported instances of rude behavior among staff members, especially in the bakery section. Such negative interactions not only sour the customer experience but also highlight a pressing need for enhanced training in customer service. When customers encounter unhelpful or discourteous staff, it creates a barrier to repeat patronage, as many shoppers are inclined to take their business elsewhere in search of a more positive shopping environment (Anionwu, 2019). To remedy this situation, Roban Stores must invest in regular training programs that emphasize customer service excellence and foster a positive work culture. This approach would not only empower employees to interact more effectively with customers but also help create a more welcoming atmosphere in the store, ultimately enhancing the overall shopping experience. Further emphasizing the importance of service quality, research conducted by Anetoh (2016) highlights the critical relationship between various dimensions of service quality—namely reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness—and customer patronage within grocery services. The significant correlations found in this study underscore the necessity for Roban Stores to prioritize these service dimensions. By focusing on these areas, the store can cultivate customer loyalty, thereby enhancing patronage and ensuring a more sustainable business model.

### **Product Quality Compliance**

In the quest to ensure high product quality at Roban Stores, the study conducted by Iwuchukwu et al. (2023) meticulously evaluated a selection of vegetable oil brands available

on the shelves. This evaluation focused on the compliance of these products with the rigorous standards established by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). The research highlighted a generally positive outcome, with most brands meeting the required standards. However, the study did uncover some discrepancies that raised concerns about a few specific brands. Such evaluations are not merely academic exercises; they play a crucial role in protecting consumers. By scrutinizing product quality and ensuring compliance with established safety standards, retailers like Roban Stores can build and maintain customer trust. The implications of product quality extend beyond mere compliance; they are integral to customer satisfaction. As emphasized by Mbamalu & Okeke (2021), the assurance of safety and quality directly influences consumers' perceptions of a brand. When customers feel confident that the products they purchase are safe and reliable, it fosters loyalty and enhances their overall shopping experience. This study not only serves as a reminder of the importance of adherence to regulatory standards but also underscores the responsibility of retailers to prioritize the safety and well-being of their customers. By addressing discrepancies and promoting transparency in product quality, Roban Stores can reinforce its commitment to consumer health and satisfaction, ultimately contributing to a positive shopping environment.

### **Consumer Preferences and Decision-Making**

Okoro (2021) conducted a thorough examination of consumer preferences and purchasing decisions, revealing that the diverse array of products available at Roban Stores plays a significant role in fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty. The study highlighted that customers are not only pleased with the extensive product range but also highly value the dedication and commitment exhibited by the store's staff, particularly the younger employees. This alignment of staff engagement with the store's growth path is essential for cultivating a positive shopping experience and encouraging repeat business. Despite these strengths, Nwangwu et al. (2024) highlights a crucial challenge facing retail Stores: the rapid shift towards online shopping. As consumer behavior evolves, it is imperative for the store to enhance its service quality dimensions, including responsiveness and reliability, to maintain a competitive edge in the dynamic retail environment. This perspective resonates with the insights shared by Jacobs (2022), who advocates for the integration of e-marketing strategies into retail operations. By adopting such strategies, Roban Stores could significantly expand its market reach and better cater to the needs of a tech-savvy consumer base, ultimately positioning itself for sustained growth in an increasingly digital world.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of Roban Stores in Awka underscores the store's dual narrative of strengths and areas needing improvement within its service quality and operational practices. Customers have expressed high levels of satisfaction with the friendly and supportive staff, reinforcing the store's commitment to exceptional customer service. This aspect is particularly valuable in a competitive retail environment, as positive interactions are crucial for fostering customer loyalty and encouraging repeat business. The store's diverse product range further enhances its appeal, making it a convenient one-stop shopping destination that caters to various consumer needs. However, the findings also reveal critical areas for improvement. Issues such as stock shortages, long wait times, and reports of rude staff behavior in certain sections highlight the necessity for better management practices and employee training. Addressing these challenges is essential for maintaining a positive customer experience and upholding the store's reputation. Moreover, the evaluation of product quality compliance indicates that while the majority of

items meet safety standards, ongoing scrutiny is necessary to ensure consistency and reliability. Retailers like Roban Stores have a responsibility to prioritize product safety, which directly influences consumer trust and satisfaction. As consumer preferences evolve, particularly with the growing trend towards online shopping, Roban Stores must adapt by enhancing its service quality dimensions and considering the integration of e-marketing strategies. By leveraging its strengths while simultaneously addressing weaknesses, Roban Stores can solidify its position in the retail sector and ensure long-term growth and customer loyalty. Ultimately, a focus on customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and product quality will be vital for navigating the challenges of a dynamic retail landscape and for fostering a loyal customer base in the years to come.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure sustained growth and competitive advantage, Roban Stores should implement the following recommendations:

1. Roban Stores must prioritize continuous staff development through comprehensive training programs. This will not only enhance the skills and capabilities of the employees but also ensure exceptional customer service. Well-trained staff can effectively meet and exceed customer expectations, leading to increased satisfaction and repeat patronage.
2. Implementing robust management practices is crucial for operational efficiency and organizational success. Roban Stores should adopt a proactive management approach, focusing on strategic planning, performance monitoring, and resource optimization. Effective management will enable the store to swiftly respond to market changes, streamline operations, and drive sustainable growth.
3. To stay ahead in the competitive retail market, Roban Stores should continuously enhance the shopping experience for its customers. This includes maintaining a clean and welcoming store environment, ensuring product availability, and offering a diverse product range. Additionally, leveraging technology to improve convenience, such as through efficient checkout processes and personalized shopping experiences, will significantly boost customer satisfaction and loyalty.
4. Roban Stores should conduct regular assessments to identify and address any challenges that may hinder its performance. By leveraging its strengths, such as a loyal customer base and strategic location, the store can create targeted strategies to overcome obstacles and capitalize on opportunities. This proactive approach will position Roban Stores as a preferred shopping destination.

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