Relationship Marketing Dimensions and Customer Loyalty of Selected Public Teaching Hospitals in Southwest, Nigeria

[1]**Kabuoh Margret Nma,** [2]**Onu Christopher Ajah &**
[3]**Smith Oluwafolakemi Miriam**

[1,2&3]*Department of Business Administration and Marketing,*
School of Management Sciences, Babcock University, Ilishan –Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Customer loyalty driven by Relationship marketing is a key critical success factor desiring by any organization aspiring to become a market leader with view of sustainability. However, some organizations disregard these two critical variables in their marketing planning. Consequent upon this is customer disloyalty as well as dissatisfaction. This study investigates the effect of relationship marketing dimensions on customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in South-west, Nigeria. This study adopted the positivism philosophy and Quantitative approach. Survey research design was used via a structured questionnaire. The population comprised 6,464 outpatients as at the time of study from six (6) selected public teaching hospitals in South West Nigeria. Sample size of 471 was determined via Cochram method including 30 % attrition rate. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.725 to 0,927. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential (multiple and hierarchical regression) statistics. Findings revealed that relationship marketing dimensions have significant effects on Customer loyalty of public teaching hospital in South-West, Nigeria [Adj R^2=0.675; $F(6, 464) = 163.704$ at $p = 0.000$ (p<0.05). The study concluded that relationship marketing dimensions have significant effect on customer loyalty of public teaching hospital in South-West, Nigeria. The study recommended that public teaching hospitals should make use of the benefit of relationship marketing dimensions in order to improve service quality of public teaching hospitals in South-West, Nigeria. Hospital management should prioritize patients' needs and satisfaction as a key performance indicator to improve overall performance and gain their loyalty.

Keywords: *Relationship marketing, Commitment, Communication, Competence, Empathy, Conflict handling, Customer loyalty.*

Corresponding Author: **Kabuoh Margret Nma**

Background to the Study

Relationship marketing involves creating, maintaining, and enhancing a strong relationship with customers and other stakeholders within and outside an enterprise. Relationship marketing is deeply rooted in trust and plays a vital role in achieving long term profitability and sustainability in the marketplace so that the objectives of the parties involved are met for this reason. However, the poor performance of the public teaching hospital evidence through decline customer loyalty of the hospital workers, is negating its importance. The healthcare sector is so designing strategies to enhance the customers' loyalty of the selected public teaching hospitals through maintaining cordial relationship management that is worthy of emulation by competitors. An elevated rate in patient retention further underscores the hurdles faced by public teaching hospitals, while a decline in patients' intention to engage in repeat interactions signals a potential disconnection between healthcare services and patients' evolving expectations (WHO, 2021).

Globally, managing teaching hospitals is a major challenge facing healthcare services and hospital decision-makers. Hospitals have challenges in the provision of health services, education, research, also teaching hospitals in all countries suffer from problems in different areas: such as, performance of some teaching hospitals are undesirable concerning responsiveness to medical errors as well as quality and safety of healthcare due to presence of students from different disciplines and sometimes due to unsatisfactory performance of assistants and residents in the provision of healthcare to patients. The USA's total healthcare expenditure reached $3.65 trillion in 2021, consisting 17.8% of the nation's GPD. Notably, despite this significant financial investment, public hospital in the USA grapple with ongoing issues, including a decline in service quality, erosion of patient loyalty, reduced engagement for repeated interactions and a noticeable deficiency in crucial resource allocation. This highlights the critical performance variables affecting hospital, such as, patient dissatisfaction, lack of loyalty, high employee turnover, slackness in patient referrals, and a decline in customers' lifetime values (WHO, (2022).

The challenges of delivering first-class healthcare services highlight the many aspects involved in healthcare management. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in the healthcare system, causing a substantial 50% decrease in revenues in the United States alone. This crisis acted as a litmus test, challenging the healthcare sector's resilience and prompting adaptations to overcome unforeseen challenges. Public hospitals in Europe are grappling with the challenge of maintaining consistent quality service due to factors such as resource constraints and staffing. The struggle to retain patients has become evident in United Kingdom (UK) public hospitals, has challenges in service quality and patient satisfaction impact the hospital's ability to keep its patient base intact (Kalei, 2021). Ensuring customer retention has become a focal point for hospitals aiming to secure their financial stability and maintain consistent patient volumes (Darmayasa & Yasa, 2021). Taran et al (2022) stated that Health systems are experiencing profound shocks due to the COVID-19 pandemic; national policy documents and the intention to implement and develop the "Slaintecare" program were identified with a significant budgetary allocation; the intention to implement and develop national policy documents and program were identified with a significant budgetary

allocation, various features of digital technology, accuracy, automation process; forecast; data analysis; and interaction present physical challenges.

The struggle to retain patients has become evident in United Kingdom (UK) public hospitals, has challenges in service quality and patient satisfaction impact the hospital's ability to keep its patient base intact (Kalei, 2021). Ensuring customer retention has become a focal point for hospitals aiming to secure their financial stability and maintain consistent patient volumes (Darmayasa & Yasa, 2021). In Africa, the majority of African countries are unable to meet the basic requirement for good healthcare systems, poor governance and human resource challenges are linked to ineffective integration of services in resource limited nations. Other healthcare problems prevalent in Africa include financial barriers to healthcare services with high rates of out-of-pocket expenses, owing to ineffective national health insurance systems, and poor service integration, human resources shortages and "brain drainage" from Africa to Europe, the Middle East and North America compound healthcare outcomes. Healthcare sector industrial action (healthcare workers' strikes) are frequent within the human development index (HDI) and has complicated most aspects of the healthcare service delivery and consequently prevented optimal healthcare delivery in Africa (Oleribe et al., (2019).

In Nigeria, the challenges facing public hospitals are multifaceted and result in declining quality service and subsequent patient dissatisfaction, often aggravated by resource constraints and evolving healthcare demands. These factors converge to create a scenario of reduced patient loyalty, presenting intricate challenges in formulating effective customer retention strategies, as patients explore alternative healthcare options (Ejike, 2019). The consequential decline in Customer Referral underscores the urgency of addressing service deficiencies and restoring patient trust, pivotal for sustaining the healthcare ecosystem (Nurmartiani & Huda, 2020). Optimizing the customer lifetime value assumes paramount importance (Harikumar & Saleeshya 2021). This encompassing objective entails addressing financial limitations, embracing emerging technologies, and proactively addressing the recruitment and retention of skilled healthcare professionals (Ippolito et al., 2020). These strategic measures are instrumental in safeguarding the sustainability of healthcare delivery, aligning it with the global standards of quality care (Etim et al., 2020).

Numerous studies (Aldaihani & Ali 2019; Odoom et al., 2019; Sam, 2019; Soniewicki, et al., 2022; Sutanto et al., 2021; Utor & Ugba, 2020) have investigated the influence of relationship marketing on patient loyalty within developed countries, leading to a discernible disparity in the extent of research conducted in developing nations. Consequently, a noticeable paucity of empirical research (Ali et al., 2021; Nurmartiani & Huda, 2020) exists, specifically examining patient's loyalty within the distinctive socio-economic and cultural milieu characterizing Nigeria's public healthcare sector. Remedying this research gap assumes paramount importance, as it offers an avenue to gain nuanced insights into the efficacy of relationship marketing strategies in cultivating patient loyalty (Almohaimmeed 2019; Ippolito et al., 2020; Mofokeng 2020). Such insights, in turn, hold the potential to engender enhanced patient experiences, improved healthcare outcomes, and the enduring sustenance of patient-provider relationships within the framework of Nigeria's public healthcare institutions. Customers'

loyalty towards public hospitals in Nigeria is being negatively influenced by various factors such as inadequate service quality arising from resource limitations and understaffing erodes patients' trust and commitment (Almomani 2019; Boadi et al., 2019; Dew et al., 2019). Prolonged waiting times due to overcrowding and insufficient staff exacerbate patient dissatisfaction and contribute to attrition (Mofokeng, 2020).

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of relationship marketing dimensions on customer loyalty of selected Public Teaching Hospitals in Southwest, Nigeria. To achieve this objective, a research hypothesis was formulated.

H0: Relationship marketing dimensions do not have significant effect on customer loyalty of selected Public Teaching Hospitals in Southwest, Nigeria.

Literature Review
This section deals with the review of conceptual, empirical, and theoretical reviews of both independent variable and its sub variables as well as the dependent variable.

Customer Loyalty
Customer loyalty is the consistent preference and willingness of customers to choose a specific brand, product, or service over alternatives, often driven by positive experiences and emotional connections (Almohaimmeed, 2019). Customer loyalty represents the strong and enduring attachment that customers develop towards a brand or organization, resulting in repeat purchases and advocacy (Nurmartiani & Huda, 2020). Customer loyalty refers to the commitment and trust that customers demonstrate by repeatedly choosing a particular brand or business, even when faced with competitive options (Dew et al., 2019). Customer loyalty is the outcome of consistently delivering exceptional value and experiences that create a bond between customers and a brand, fostering ongoing patronage (Etim et al., 2020).

Customer loyalty denotes the degree to which customers are dedicated to a brand, often expressed through their repeat purchases, referrals, and advocacy (Kofi Amoako et al., 2020). Customer loyalty encompasses the enduring relationship and allegiance that customers form with a brand, leading to sustained patronage and reduced consideration of alternatives (Ippolito et al., 2020). Customer loyalty represents the emotional connection and affinity that customers feel towards a brand, resulting in a preference for its offerings and willingness to engage repeatedly (Gilboa et al., 2019). Customer loyalty is the manifestation of a brand's ability to consistently meet or exceed customer expectations, resulting in long-term commitment and loyalty (Mofokeng, 2020). Customer loyalty refers to the depth of attachment that customers have to a brand, influencing their choices and leading to a sense of belonging and trust (Ali et al., 2021). Customer loyalty is the demonstration of allegiance and preference that customers exhibit by consistently choosing and recommending a specific brand, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship (Utor & Ugba, 2020).

In light of the diverse definitions found in literature, customer loyalty is defined by the researcher as the consistent and intentional choice of customers to repeatedly engage with and prefer a specific brand, product, or service provider over alternatives. It reflects a deep-seated

commitment and attachment that goes beyond transactional interactions. Customer loyalty is fostered by positive experiences, quality service, personalized engagement, and the establishment of a strong emotional connection between the customer and the organization. It often leads to continued patronage, increased customer lifetime value, and active endorsement of the brand to others.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is viewed as the activities carried out by business organizations for the purpose of attracting, interacting with and retaining more profitable or high net-worth customers. Advantage: The purpose of relationship marketing will create strong, even emotional, customer connections to a brand capable of guaranteeing ongoing business interactions, free word-of-mouth promotion and information from customers that can generate future leads for a company, has a long-time bond with the customer by providing ultimate customer satisfaction. Since the RM prioritizes creating loyalty on existing customers, new customers can be treated as secondary commodity to the business. Accoding to Abekah-Nkrumah et al (2021), Relationship marketing basically entails establishing long-term relationships with customers. Instead of attempting to achieve a single one-time purchase by customers, relationship marketing promotes customer retention by offering high quality and valuable products and services. Retaining existing customers and supporting them by giving them a priority can make the new customers feel ignored (Etim, et al., 2021). Relationship marketing involves fostering customer loyalty, trust, and satisfaction through personalized communication, understanding customer needs, addressing concerns, and offering tailored solutions. It encompasses dimensions such as trust, commitment, communication, competence, empathy, and conflict handling to enhance customer experiences, drive customer retention, and ultimately contribute to Organisational success.

Trust

Trust is containment of guides and within the confinement of these guides, there is the cognitive and behavioral component which guides the operations of the relationship. Trust is a critical factor that leads to customer loyalty (Amoako, 2019). Trust and confidence are key components of the clinician-patient relationship. There are many benefits that can accrue from a trusting relationship such as open communication of information improved adherence to medical advice, improvement of health outcomes and better patient experience. While disadvantages may not be limited to management irregularities, continuous budgetary gap, clinical laboratories run by external companies (incorrect statements of laboratory tests); managers running the hospital with lower number of staffs, unhappiness among staff and excessive patient complaints. Trust is obtaining a service or product at a reasonable price believing that it will meet consumer's expectation. If expectation is met a stronger relationship will be established between an organization and its consumer, it is a crucial factor in building relationships with clients (Fatima et al., 2018). In light of the diverse definitions found in literature, trust is defined by the researcher as the belief, confidence, and reliance that individuals or entities have in the integrity, reliability, and credibility of another party. It is built over time through consistent and transparent actions, effective communication, and the fulfillment of promises and commitments.

Commitment

Hassan (2019) views commitment as an intention to continue a course of action or activity or the desire to maintain a relationship. Commitment refers to an implicit or explicit pledge of the continuity of a relationship between exchange partners. Another strong definition of commitment emphasizes on the willingness to rely on an exchange partner on whom another has confidence. Mubarak and Ali (2021) define commitment as reinforcing the strength of a marketing relationship and is a useful construct for predicting Customer Loyalty. Characteristics of commitment is the willingness to strive and uphold the values and goals of the profession; Competence, Knowledge, Conscientiousness, Integrity, Respect, Emotional Intelligence, Appropriateness, and Confidence towards patients and the community and putting these at the center of work, patients and their care should be healthcare giver's priority. Being highly committed to them helps to improve their quality of care and experience as well as that of the other patients. (Oluwabiyi et al., 2022).

Firms should ensure that customers get more value from the relationship in order to get them to be committed Mubarak and Ali (2021). It produces enduring stability and predictability in business progress through symbiotic relational exchanges. Commitment. Also, commitment can also mean as a strong individual acceptance toward organization aims and values. Furthermore, the individual tries, works, and has a strong passion to survive in the organization. Commitment is also a trust between the related parties who want a continuous relationship which is considered as important in maintaining the relationship (Amoako et al., 2019). In light of the diverse definitions found in literature, commitment is defined by the researchers as a strong dedication, allegiance, and willingness to invest effort, resources, and time towards achieving a specific goal, objective, or relationship. It involves a sense of responsibility and attachment, often extending beyond immediate benefits.

Communication

Krataithong and Rakrachakarn (2020) are of the opinion that communication in relationship marketing means keeping in touch with valued customers, providing them with timely and trustworthy information on services, and communicating proactively. Also, is the act of talking, writing, listening, giving, receiving, sharing information, and messages. Communication is a relationship. Communication is a relationship marketing strategy to maintain, sustain, and retain customers thereby making them loyal (Simanjuntak et al., 2020). Haghkhah et al (2020) sees communication as the formal as well as informal exchanging and sharing of meaningful and timely information between buyers and sellers.

Characteristics of communication: communicator, receiver, clarity, concise, concrete, coherent, complete, courteous and response. Commey and Adom, (2020) states that communication in healthcare builds trust between patients and providers and allows providers to find better opportunities to improve service quality through feedback. Immediate understanding of a patient's condition and needs; understand the emotional state of patients; and identifying specialized needs. Helps to ensure patients and family caregivers can participate effectively in their care and make informed decisions (Makhitha, 2019). Competence is defined by Mubushar et al (2020) as the buyer's perception of the supplier's technological and commercial competence.

Competence can be defined as ability to perform effectively and efficiently that can be observed in the function. Competence is the full knowledge of the marketing stakeholders in the organization, and that it is an important corner of the relationship marketing, that any organization, which has distinguished competence, wins many customers, reflecting on their share of marketing and increase profitability. Organizations are therefore required to pay attention to the area of competence through the recruitment of experts and specialists in the field of work operated by the Organization (Aldaihani & Ali, 2019). As viewed by the researchers, effective communication involves transmitting messages clearly, accurately, and in a manner that ensures mutual understanding. In the context of relationships and organizations, communication is essential for conveying expectations, building trust, resolving conflicts, and facilitating collaboration. In relationship marketing, strong communication helps establish rapport, address customer needs, and create personalized experiences that enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Empathy

Empathy is the capacity to understand and share the feelings, perspectives, and emotions of others, demonstrating a genuine concern for their well-being (Harmoko & Shihab, 2019). Empathy is the genuine and sincere effort to grasp the emotions, thoughts, and circumstances of others, fostering a sense of shared understanding and support (Anabila, 2019). Empathy is the quality of being attuned to the emotions and needs of others, enabling one to offer comfort, validation, and assistance when needed (Muangmee, 2020). Empathy involves the ability to tune into the feelings and perspectives of others, allowing for meaningful connections, effective communication, and compassionate responses (Saputra & Antonio, 2021). Empathy is the cognitive and emotional skill that enables one to recognize, understand, and respond to the emotions of others, fostering a sense of connection and unity (Amoako et al., 2019). Empathy is the capacity to engage with others on an emotional level, demonstrating compassion, sensitivity, and a genuine desire to share in their experiences (Tehci & Şenbursa, 2021). Empathy is the practice of actively engaging with others' feelings and experiences, showing understanding, support, and a willingness to stand alongside them (Fong & Goh, 2021).

In light of the diverse definitions found in literature, empathy is defined by the researcher as the ability to understand and share the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others. It involves being sensitive to the emotions and needs of individuals and demonstrating genuine concern for their well-being. In relationship marketing, empathy plays a vital role in creating meaningful connections with customers by showing that their concerns are acknowledged and valued. Organizations that exhibit empathy in their interactions can enhance customer satisfaction, build trust, and foster lasting relationships based on understanding and compassion.

Conflict Management

Conflict management refers to the provider's ability to avoid conflicts, resolve overt conflicts before they create problems, and discuss solutions openly. Characteristics of conflict occurs when two or more employees pursue incompatible goals that is the behavior of employee in order to prevent the other in achieving goals, when there is mismatch between the actual and

expected; unresolved conflicts and frustrations as a result of carrying out responsibilities (Mubarak & Ali, 2022). The effectiveness of the conflict handling procedure influences customer loyalty as a well-managed conflict may sometimes promote loyalty far beyond what an otherwise stable relationship might offer (Sun, et al., 2020). Studies have found that conflict handling is positively correlated with customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Commey & Adom, 2020). The company's ability in handling conflict will create customers satisfaction and loyalty (Makhitha, 2019). states that when a company can be trusted, committed to the service, can be counted on, efficient in doing communication with its customers, and good in handling problems, then the customers will likely to be loyal toward the product, while the disadvantages in handling conflict shows poor communication between employee and management, uncooperative behavior, intervention that increase employee animosity, lack of progress toward Organisational goals and disintegration of customers (Rather et al., 2021). Conflict handling can become a serious problem in a company, and it has a potential in lowering the performance if it is neglected for a long period of time without solving it. Conflict handling is a special action in the process of doing interaction with customers (Mubushar et al., 2020). Considering the diverse definitions found in literature, Conflict handling is defined by the researcher as the process of managing disagreements, disputes, or differences that arise between individuals, parties, or entities. It encompasses strategies and approaches used to address conflicts constructively, aiming to find solutions that satisfy all parties involved.

Relationship Marketing Dimensions and Customer Loyalty
Aldaihani and Ali (2019) studied impact of relationship marketing on customers loyalty of Islamic Banks in the State of Kuwait results revealed that all the dimensions of relationship marketing (trust, commitment, competence, and cooperation) except communication had positive and significant effect on customer loyalty of the Islamic banks in Kuwait. Afifi and Amini (2019) studied factors affecting relationship marketing in creating customer loyalty in the hospital services business and found from analyzed data showed that the three dimensions of service quality (interaction quality, physical environment quality, outcome quality) all had positive significant effect on customer trust. Customer trust had a positive significant effect on customer value, while it had a negative insignificant effect on customer loyalty. Furthermore, customer value had a positive significant effect on customer loyalty. The results also showed that customer value had a significant mediating effect on the relationship between customer trust and customer loyalty.

Zaid et al, (2020) studied customer relationship marketing as the antecedents to increasing customer loyalty and results found that simultaneously CRM variables consisting of Bonding, Empathy, Reciprocity, Trust, and Commitment simultaneously had a significant effect on customer loyalty at Bahteramas Bank in Southeast Sulawesi. The t-test results further revealed that bonding had a positive significant effect on customer loyalty, empathy had a no significant effect on customer loyalty. Reciprocity as CRM strategy had no significant effect on customer loyalty, while both trust and commitment as CSR strategies have positive significant effect on customer loyalty. Also, Abekah-Nkrumah et al (2020) researched on customer relationship management and patient satisfaction and loyalty in selected hospitals in Ghana, according to the results, CRM is significantly positively correlated with patient satisfaction and patient

loyalty, with patient satisfaction also significantly correlated with patient loyalty. Additionally, the results suggested that the introduction of education, health facility ownership health insurance status and gender, neither impact significantly on the relationship between CRM and patient satisfaction/patient loyalty nor influenced patient satisfaction and patient loyalty directly.

Theoretical review

Relationship marketing theory propounded by Berry, (1983) and Jackson, (1985), suggests that successful relationship marketing results from certain aspects of cooperative relationships that characterize successful relational exchanges. Relationship marketing theory assumes that retaining existing customers is often more cost-effective than acquiring new ones. It recognizes that customer churn is detrimental to businesses and, therefore, encourages efforts to satisfy and retain current customers (Jackson, 1985). Relationship marketing theory prioritizes quality relationships with a select group of customers over mass marketing to a large audience. It assumes that deeper, more personalized connections are more valuable than a high volume of superficial interactions (Chesula, 2021). Relationship Marketing Theory assumes that customers appreciate and respond positively to customized and personalized marketing efforts. It recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach is less effective in building strong relationships (Berry, 1983).

Supporters and proponents of Relationship Marketing Theory have played a pivotal role in advancing and validating the principles and strategies associated with this customer-centric approach to marketing. Many authors and scholars have contributed to the development and support of relationship marketing theory. One of the notable advocates is Leonard Berry, a renowned marketing scholar who co-authored the influential book "Relationship Marketing" in 1995. Berry's work emphasized the significance of building and maintaining strong, enduring relationships with customers as a means of achieving business success. His research laid the foundation for the theory by highlighting the advantages of a customer-focused approach. Additionally, Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995), along with Parvatiyar, (2001), has been a prominent figure in championing relationship marketing theory. Sheth & Parvatiyar, (1995) contributions to the theory revolve around the development of a comprehensive framework for understanding and implementing relationship marketing strategies. Sheth & Parvatiyar, (1995) work has focused on the shift from transactional marketing to relationship marketing, emphasizing the importance of

Methodology

This study adopted the positivism philosophy and quantitative approach. Survey research design was used for primary data collection via a structured and validated questionnaire. The population comprised 6,464 outpatients as at the time of study from six (6) selected public teaching hospitals in Southwest Nigeria. Sample size of 471 was determined via Cochram 1977 sample technique method including 30 % attrition rate. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.729 to 0.925. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential (multiple and hierarchical regression) statistics.

Analysis

Restatement of Research Objective and Hypothesis,

Objective: Investigate the effect of relationship marketing dimensions on customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in South-west Nigeria. Descriptive analyses were done on all the independent sub variables table by table as well as the customer loyalty analysis table with emphasis on Percentage, Mean & Standard Diviation. Thereafter, the summary table of the Multiple linear regression for the hypothesis testing was done as indicated below:

Restatement of Research Hypothesis

H_0: Relationship marketing dimensions do not have significant effect on customer loyalty.

Table 1: Multiple Regression between relationship marketing dimensions and customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in South-West, Nigeria.

N	Model	B	Sig.	T	ANOVA (Sig.)	R	Adjusted R^2	F (6,464)
	(Constant)	-.092	.507	-.665				
	Trust	.146	.001	3.206				
	Relationship Commitment	.173	.001	3.431	0.000^b	$.824^a$	.675	163.704
	Communication	.048	.089	1.702				
	Competence	.293	.000	7.782				
471	Empathy	.227	.000	4.740				
	Conflict Handling	.110	.028	2.209				
	Predictors: (Constant), Trust, Relationship Commitment, Communication, Competence, Empathy, Conflict Handling							
	Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty							

Source: Researchers' Findings 2024

Interpretation

Table 1 above shows the multiple regression analysis results for the relationship marketing dimensions on customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in South-West Nigeria. The results showed that trust (β = 0.146, t = 3.206, p<0.05), relationship commitment (β = 0.173, t = 3.431, p<0.05, competence (β = 0.293, t = 7.782, p<0.05), empathy (β = 0.227, t = 4.740, p<0.05) and conflict handling (β = 0.110, t = 2.209, p<0.05) have a positive and significant effect on the customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospital in south-west Nigeria while communication (β = 0.048, t = 1.702, p>0.05) have a positive but insignificant effect on customer loyalty. This implies that trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy and conflict handling are important factors in the public teaching hospitals which in turn yields an increase in customer loyalty.

The R-value of 0.824 supports this result and it indicates that relationship marketing dimensions have a strong positive relationship with the customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospital in south-west Nigeria. The coefficient of multiple determination Adj R^2 = 0.675 indicates that about 67.5% of the variation that occurs in the customer loyalty in selected public teaching hospital in south-west Nigeria can be accounted for by the relationship marketing dimensions while the remaining 32.5% changes that occur is accounted for by other variables not captured in the model.

The predictive and prescriptive multiple regression models are thus expressed:
CL= -0.092+0.146TR+0.173RC+0.048CM+0.293CP+0.227EP+0.110CH+U_i --- Predictive Model)
CL = -0.092+0.146TR+0.173RC+0.293CP+0.227EP+0.110CH+U_i --- (Prescriptive Model)

Where:
        CL = Customer loyalty
        TR = Trust
        RC = Relationship Commitment
        CM = Communication
        CP = Competence
        EP = Empathy
        CH = Conflict Handling

The regression model shows that holding relationship marketing dimensions to a constant zero, customer loyalty would be -0.092 which is negative. In the predictive model, it is seen that the variable communication is positive and insignificant so the management of the public teaching hospitals can downplay the variable which is why they are not included in the prescriptive model. The results of the multiple regression analysis as seen in the prescriptive model also show that when all other variables of relationship marketing (trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy, and conflict handling) are improved by one unit customer loyalty would also increase by 0.146, 0.173, 0.293, 0.227 and 0.110 respectively and vice-versa. This implies that an increase in trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy and conflict handling would lead to an increase in the rate of customer loyalty in selected public teaching hospitals in south-west Nigeria. Also, the F-statistics (df = 6, 464) = 163.704 at p = 0.000 (p<0.05) indicates that the overall model is significant in predicting the effect of relationship marketing dimensions on customer loyalty which implies that relationship marketing dimensions except for communication are important determinants in the customer loyalty rate of selected public teaching hospitals in south-west Nigeria. The result suggests that public teaching hospitals should pay more attention towards developing the components of relationship marketing, especially trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy and conflict handling. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which states that relationship marketing has no significant effect on the customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in south-west Nigeria was rejected.

Discussion of Finding
The results of the test of the hypothesis shows that relationship marketing (trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy, and conflict handling) has a significant effect on the customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in south-west Nigeria. These findings are in line with past studies conceptually, empirically, and theoretically. Of all the dimensions of relationship marketing, communication is the only dimension that had an insignificant effect on customer loyalty. This study conceptualized customer loyalty as the repeat visit, recommendation, personalized interactions, contended, and addressing customer needs. This supports past studies conceptualization of customer loyalty, which represents the strong and

enduring attachment that customers develop towards a brand or organization, resulting in repeat purchases and advocacy (Nurmartiani & Huda, 2020). Customer loyalty refers to the commitment and trust that customers demonstrate by repeatedly choosing a particular brand or business, even when faced with competitive options (Dew et al., 2019).

Similarly, past empirical studies, supports the findings of this study, as Zaid et al (2020) studied customer relationship marketing as the antecedents to increasing customer loyalty and results found that simultaneously CRM variables consisting of Bonding, Empathy, Reciprocity, Trust, and Commitment simultaneously had a significant effect on customer loyalty at Bahteramas Bank in Southeast Sulawesi. Consequently, this study findings support that relationship marketing dimensions (trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy, and conflict handling) have significant effect on the customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in south-west Nigeria. Corroborating with Zaid et al's finding is the view of Aldaihani and Ali (2019) who studied the impact of relationship marketing on customers loyalty of Islamic Banks in the State of Kuwait, results revealed that all the dimensions of relationship marketing (trust, commitment, competence, and cooperation) except communication had positive and significant impact on customer loyalty of the Islamic banks in Kuwait. In the same vein, Afifi and Amini (2019) study discovered positive effect of Relationship management dimensions on customer loyalty.

Theoretically, the result is in agreement with The Relationship marketing theory which is based on the idea that both the customer and the business should receive value from the relationship. It assumes that customers seek value, whether it's in the form of products, services, information, or experiences, and that businesses should strive to provide this value in exchange for customer loyalty (Jackson, 1985). Relationship Marketing Theory assumes that trust and commitment are the foundation of strong, long-lasting customer relationships. Trust is essential for customers to feel secure in their interactions with a business, while commitment on both sides ensures a continued relationship. Trust and commitment lead to customer loyalty (Berry, 1983).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that relationship marketing dimensions (trust, relationship commitment, competence, empathy and conflict handling) have significant positive effect on customer loyalty of selected public teaching hospitals in south-west Nigeria [Adj R^2=0.675; $F(6, 464) = 163.704$ at $p = 0.000$ (p<0.05). The research findings suggest that the relationship marketing is a critical factor in enhancing the performance of public teaching hospitals. The study revealed that staff competence and expertise are vital factors in the implementation of relationship marketing strategies in public teaching hospitals. The research findings revealed that customer loyalty is a critical factor in enhancing the effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies in public teaching hospitals.

The study therefore recommends the following:
1. The adoption of relationship marketing strategies will lead to better patient satisfaction, which ultimately translates into improved healthcare outcomes.

2. Healthcare industry regulators should establish guidelines and standards for relationship marketing practices in hospitals to ensure they are ethical and effective.
3. Hospital management should prioritize patients' needs and satisfaction as a key performance indicator to improve overall performance.
4. There is a need for the government to increase funding and support for public teaching hospitals in the region, to enable them to invest in relationship marketing strategies.

References

Abekah-Nkrumah, G., Yaa Antwi, M., Braimah, S. M., & Ofori, C. G. (2021). Customer relationship management and patient satisfaction and loyalty in selected hospitals in Ghana, *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing, 15*(2), 251-268. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPHM-09-2019-0064

Afifi, I., & Amini, A. (2019). Factors affect to relationship marketing for creating customer loyalty in hospital services business, *ASEAN Marketing Journal, 91*-108. http://www.jke.feb.ui.ac.id/index.php/amj/article/viewArticle/9111

Aldaihani, F. M. F., & Ali, N. A. B. (2019). Impact of relationship marketing on customers' loyalty of Islamic banks in the State of Kuwait. International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research, 8(11), 788-802. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.536.2019.09 .213.224

Ali, B. J., Gardi, B., Jabbar Othman, B., Ali Ahmed, S., Burhan Ismael, N., Abdalla Hamza, P. & Anwar, G. (2021). Hotel service quality: The impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in hospitality, *International Journal of Engineering, Business and Management, 5*(3), 14-28. https://ssrn.com/abstract-3851330

Almohaimmeed, B. (2019). Pillars of customer retention: An empirical study on the influence of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer profitability on customer retention. SeCLTVian, *Journal of Management, 14*(2), 421-435. https://doi.org/10.5937/sjm14-15517

Almomani, H. Q. (2019). Relationship quality as predictor of B2B customer loyalty in the pharmaceutical sector: Evidence from Jordan, *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 18*(2), 108-123. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2018.1534062

Amoako, G. K. (2019). Relationship marketing, orientation, brand equity and firm value: The mediating role of customer value: An emerging market perspective. *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 18*(4), 280-308. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667. 2019.1639589

Anabila, P. (2019). Service quality: A subliminal pathway to service differentiation and competitive advantage in private healthcare marketing in Ghana, Health marketing quarterly, 36(2), 136-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/07359683.2019.1575062

Anabila, P. (2021). Connecting the vital link nodes to superior value creation in private healthcare marketing in Ghana: A relationship marketing paradigm. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing, 15*(1), 155-172. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPHM-11-2019-0071

Aldaihani, F. M. F., & Ali, N. A. B. (2019). Impact of relationship marketing on customers' loyalty of Islamic banks in the State of Kuwait, *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research, 8*(11), 788-802. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.536.2019.09.213.224

Berry, L. (1983). Relationship marketing. In Christopher, M., Payne, A., Clark, M. & Peck, H. (1997). *Relationship marketing for competitive advantage*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 65-74. http://103.62.146.201:8081/jspui/handle/1/5349

Boadi, E. B., Wenxin, W., Bentum-Micah, G., Asare, I. K. J., & Bosompem, L. S. (2019). Impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in Ghana hospitals: A PLS-SEM approach, *Canadian Journal of Applied Science and Technology, 7(*3). 503-511. https://doi.org/10.1080/10630667.2044.9265142

Chesula, O. W., Kiriinya, S. N., & Rintari, A. (2021). Effect of relationship marketing concept of reciprocity on customer satisfaction among foreign owned supermarkets in Kenya: A case study of Carrefour Supermarket, *International Journal of Research and Scholarly Communication, 4(*2). https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0556-5698

Commey, N. O., & Adom, K. (2020). Relationship marketing and customer retention in the Ghanaian banking industry, *European Journal of Business Management, 12(*29), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.7176/EJBM/12-29-01

Darmayasa, G. N. A. R., & Yasa, N. N. K. (2021). The influence of relationship marketing on customer loyalty: Customer satisfaction as a mediation variable, *International Research Journal of Management, IT and Social Sciences, 8*(6), 648-660. https://doi.org/10.21744/irjmis.v8n6.1963

Dew, L., K., C., Soares, A., D., Sujadi, D. (2019). The role of product innovation in mediating the relationship between customer relationship marketing and competitiveness of small-medium industry (UKM) in Bali, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research, 8*(7), 270-289.

Ejike, I. K. (2019). Effect of marketing strategy on business performance of private hospitals in Nigeria: A study of holy family hospital, Amanda hospital and new creation hospital in Owerri. *Ulysses International Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Studies*, 1(1), 1-15.

Etim, G. S., Etuk, I. U., James, E. E., & Ekpe, S. (2020). *Effect of relationship marketing on customer retention in the telecommunications industry Studies, 4*(4), 68-81. https://doi.org/10.52589/BJMMS-YIPPKDVZ

Fatima, T., Malik, S. A., & Shabbir, A. (2018). Hospital healthcare service quality, patient satisfaction and loyalty: An investigation in context of private healthcare systems. *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management, 35*(6), 1195-1214. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJQRM-02-2017-0031

Gilboa, S., Seger-Guttmann, T., & Mimran, O. (2019). The unique role of relationship marketing in small businesses' customer experience, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 51*, 152-164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.06.004

Haghkhah, A., Rasoolimanesh, S. M., & Asgari, A. A. (2020). Effects of customer value and service quality on customer loyalty: Mediation role of trust and commitment in business-to-business context. *Management Research and Practice, 12*(1), 27-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/0767254X.2020.1707560

Harikumar, P., & Saleeshya, P. G. (2021). A systems approach to mapping performance in Indian healthcare organizations. *International Journal of Healthcare Management, 14*(4), 1134-1147. https://doi.org/10.1080/20479700.2020.1752990

Harmoko, B. T., & Shihab, M. S. (2019). The effect of promotion, relationship marketing, and service quality on recipient satisfaction of participants of BPJS, *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology, 4*(7), 1194-1201. https://bit.ly/2KEhi2U

Hasan, M. (2019). Relationship marketing and customer loyalty: Experience from Banking industry of Bangladesh. *Journal of Organisational Studies & Innovation, 6*(1). 18-32. https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm13030042

Ippolito, A., Smaldone, F., & Ruberto, M. (2020). Exploring patient empowerment: The link between satisfying physician relationship and patient involvement, *The TQM Journal, 32*(1), 92-109. https://doi.org/10.1108/TQM-04-2019-0096

Jackson, B. B. (1985). *Winning and keeping industrial customers*, Lexington Books. https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130282270996269312.

Kalei, A. (2021). Relationship marketing and customer satisfaction at Safaricom: A case of M Pesa services in Kajiado Central, Kenya, *The International Journal of Business & Management, 9*(5), 227-231. https://doi.org/10.24940/theijbm/2021/v9/i5/BM2105-043.

Krataithong, J., & Rakrachakarn, P. (2020). The Impact of relationship marketing on millennial customer loyalty in the Bangkok hotel industry. *Human Behavior, Development and Society, 21*(4). 86-96. https://doi.org/10.3390/su81241150.

Makhitha, K. M. (2019). Supplier relationship marketing practices and small retailer performance in South Africa, *Cogent business & management, 6*(1), 1672490. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2019.1672490

Mofokeng, T. E. (2020). Switching costs, customer satisfaction, and their impact on marketing ethics of medical schemes in South Africa: An enlightened marketing perspective, *Cogent Business & Management, 7*(1), 1811000. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1811000

Muangmee, C. (2020). Relationship marketing and perception service quality model of business operator of homestays in Samut Sakhon Province of Thailand. Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica, 29(5), 966-976. https://doi.org/10.24205/03276716.2020.1093

Mubarak, K. M., & Ali, M. I. (2021). Impact of 5Cs of relationship marketing on customer satisfaction: evidence from financial services sector in Sri Lanka, *Journal of Marketing, 6*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.3019/CLTVgn.v22i1.4080

Mubushar, M., Jaafar, N. B., & Rahim, R. A. (2020). The influence of corporate social responsibility activities on customer value co-creation: The mediating role of relationship marketing orientation, *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC, 24*(3), 309-330. https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-12-2019-0101

Nurmartiani, E., & Huda, M. (2020). Marketing mix performance and customer relationship in improving trust of Indihome customer: A case from West Java Indonesia. *Journal of CRtical Reviews, 7*(2), 275-282. https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.02.51

Odoom, R., & Tweneboah-Koduah, E. Y. (2019). *Service brand orientation and firm performance: The moderating effects of relationship marketing orientation and customer orientation. In finding new ways to engage and satisfy global customers*: Proceedings of the 2018 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) World Marketing Congress (WMC) 21(1), 233-250. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02568-7_60

Oleribe, O. O., J. M. Momoh, B. S. C. Uzochukwu, F. Mbofana, A Adebiyi, T. Barbara, R. Williams & S. D. Taylor-Robinson (2019). Identifying key challenges facing healthcare systems in Africa and potential solutions. International Journal of general Medicine, 12 395-403, DOI 10.2147/IjGM.S223882. https://doi.org/10.2147/IJGM.S223882

Parvatyar, A. & Sheth, J. N. (2000). *The domain and conceptual foundations of relationship marketing", in Handbook of Relationship Marketing, J.N. Sheth and A. Parvatyar (Eds)*, Sage Publications, 3-38. https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=pDs5DQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA3&dq=Parvatyar,+A.+and+Sheth,+J.N.+(2000)

Rather, R. A., Tehseen, S., Itoo, M. H., & Parrey, S. H. (2021). Customer brand identification, affective commitment, customer satisfaction, and brand trust as antecedents of customer behavioral intention of loyalty: An empirical study in the hospitality sector, *In Consumer Behaviour in Hospitality and Tourism* (44-65). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003181071-4/

Sam, S. S. (2019). An examination of the impact of relationship marketing on customer patronage and retention, *Finance & Management Engineering Journal of Africa, 1*(7), 01-35, 10, 22501991

Saputra, M. F., & Antonio, F. (2021). The influence of e-service quality and trust on customer satisfaction and its impact on customer loyalty (An empirical study on online Syariah banking in Indonesia). *JMBI UNSRAT (Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Bisnis dan Inovasi Universitas Sam Ratulangi), 8*(2). https://doi.org/10.35794/jmbi.v8i2.35163

Sheth, J. & Parvatiyar, A. (1995). The evolution of relationship marketing, *International Business Review, 4*(4), 397-418. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0969593195000186

Soniewicki, M., Paliszkiewicz, J., Koohang, A., & Nord, J. H. (2022). Critical components affecting Organisational performance, *Journal of Computer Information Systems, 62*(5), 965-974. https://doi.org/10.1080/08874417.2021.1954564

Sun, H., Bang, W., & Sun, L. (2020). The role of internal marketing in Korea's public medical sector, Journal of Marketing Management, 8(2), 23-36. https://doi.org/10.15640/jmm.v8n2a3

Sutanto, H., Handayani, S. D., & Susanto, S. (2021). Measuring customer loyalty and satisfaction of bank bantul using crm and service quality. JBTI: Jurnal Bisnis: Teori dan Implementasi, 12(3), 172-183. https://doi.org/10.18196/jbti.v12i3.12765

Ţăran, A. M., Mustea, L., Vătavu, S., Lobonţ, O. R., & Luca, M. M. (2022). Challenges and drawbacks of the EU medical system generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of health systems' digitalization. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(9), 4950. 1-26. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19094950 https://www.mdpi.com/journal/ijerph

Tehci, A., & Şenbursa, N. (2021). Relationship marketing orientation and perceived Organisational performance of employees: A case of maritime business organization, *The Journal of International Scientific Researches, 6*(3), 261-270. https://doi.org/10.23834/isrjournal.983520

Utor, V., & Ugba, V. A. (2020). Flextime and service quality of medical employees in teaching hospitals in Nigeria: A study of teaching hospitals in north central Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management Studies* (ISSN: 2582-2292), 2(6), 36-59.

World Health Organization 2021: World health statistics 2021: monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. ISBN 978-92-4-002705-3 (electronic version) ISBN 978-92-4-002706-0 (print version).

Zaid, A. A., Arqawi, S. M., Mwais, R. M. A., Al Shobaki, M. J., & Abu-Naser, S. S. (2020). The impact of total quality management and perceived service quality on patient satisfaction and behavior intention in Palestinian healthcare organizations, *Technology Reports of Kansai University, 62*(03), 221-232.