LAPAI JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCE (LAJOMAS), Vol. 14 NO.1 APR/OCT 2025 - ISSN: 2315 9243
A Publication of the Department of Business Administration, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE IN BENUE LINKS TRANSPORT COMPANY MAKURDI, BENUE STATE.

[1]Ochanya Blessing Adegbe; [2]Helen Emiene Ikwue; [3]Bukola Rebecca Oyeleye & [4]Shagbaor Theophilus
[1, 2, 3&4]Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
Correspondent's email address/Mobile Number: owoichi@gmail.com/07089060687

ABSTRACT
Despite extensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) research in other sectors, there is limited empirical evidence linking CRM elements to sustained customer patronage in Nigeria's state-owned transportation sector. The main objective of the study is to investigate the effect of Customer Relationship Management on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited, Makurdi. The study used a survey research design and population is 320 staff members from all departments of Benue Links Transport Company. Since the population size was manageable, a census approach was utilized as all elements of the population are studied. taken. Data collected through questionnaire instrument were analyzed using descriptive and multiple regression statistics with aid of SPSS version 26. The findings reveal that trust, complaint handling, and competence significantly boost customer patronage at Benue Links Nigeria Limited in Makurdi. However, communication has a negative and significant impact on customer patronage. The study concludes that effective customer relationship management plays a crucial role in influencing customer patronage at Benue Links Transportation Company. Key factors like professionalism, customer trust, and efficient complaint resolution enhance passenger loyalty. The study recommends ongoing staff training to improve service competence, operations, and conflict resolution skills.
Keywords: *Trust, Communication, Complaint Handling, Competence, Customer Patronage*

1. INTRODUCTION
Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has transformed into a key strategy worldwide for gaining a sustainable edge, especially in service-driven industries. It goes beyond just technology; CRM focuses on making decisions that put customers first, fostering long-term relationships, and creating personalized interactions that boost retention, loyalty, and profitability (Ajayi & Owolabi, 2020; Reinartz, 2026). While CRM is widely adopted in developed countries, its spread in African nations has been a bit slower. However, the rise of mobile technology, better internet access, and digital platforms is speeding up its use. In Nigeria, CRM is gaining traction in competitive fields like banking and telecommunications, but its uptake in public services and transportation is lagging due to issues like poor infrastructure, skill shortages, and a lack of focus on structured customer engagement (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Nwaimo, Njoku, Ugwu, Akujor, Ejiogu, Nwoko, Ozurumba & Ubah, 2024).

The importance of CRM really stands out in service industries, where the quality of service hinges on ongoing interactions, trust, and managing relationships rather than just physical products. Take transportation services, for example; they involve regular contact with customers, which makes aspects like communication, handling complaints, reliability, safety, personalization, and feedback crucial for keeping customers satisfied and loyal (Adefarasin & Toludare, 2018). Effective CRM

in transport services leads to proactive communication, tailored services, loyalty programs, and quick resolution of complaints all of which help build customer trust and encourage them to come back. Since transport services are more about experiences than tangible goods, CRM becomes an essential tool for shaping how customers perceive the service, reducing the impact of any service failures, and maintaining a competitive edge (Buttle & Maklan, 2019).

Customer loyalty, shown through repeat purchases, retention, referrals, and positive word-of-mouth, is a key result of effective CRM practices. Rooted in relationship marketing theory, genuine customer engagement nurtures long-term loyalty (Osu & Chidiebele, 2015). When organizations roll out CRM strategies like timely updates, quick complaint resolution, trust-building, and high-quality service, they can significantly influence how customers perceive them and lower the chances of customers switching to competitors. However, when these practices are weak or poorly coordinated, customer experience deteriorates, leading to dissatisfaction, loss of trust, and ultimately a drop in patronage jeopardizing a company's sustainability and competitive edge.

Research in this field has expanded, but important gaps remain. Malki, Bellahcene, Latreche, Terbeche and Chroqui (2024) used structural equation modelling with 314 automotive customers and found that traditional CRM dimensions directly influenced customer loyalty, while social media CRM operated indirectly through customer satisfaction. Similarly, Dwivedi, Lohmor, Sharma, Sahiba and Naik (2024) confirmed a strong positive relationship between CRM, service quality, and customer loyalty in India's tourism sector. In a Nigerian context, Odor, Bakwuye & Dokai-Okonkwo (2025) revealed that customer segmentation and personalized marketing significantly enhanced retention in Nigerian deposit money banks, though multi-channel engagement showed no significant effect. While these studies affirm the CRM–loyalty link, they remain concentrated in banking, tourism, and automotive sectors, with little empirical attention to how CRM dimensions collectively drive sustained patronage in the transportation sector, particularly among state-owned enterprises. Most studies also examine technology adoption or customer satisfaction in isolation, overlooking their combined influence on patronage behavior. This study addresses that gap by investigating how CRM practices affect customer patronage at Benue Links Transportation Company, contributing both theoretical insight and practical guidance for improving service delivery in Nigeria's public transportation sector.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of customer relationship management on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited, Makurdi. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the effect of trust, communication, complaint handling and competence on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited, Makurdi.

Based on the specific objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated;

H_{01}: Trust has no significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited Makurdi.

H_{02}: Communication has no significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited Makurdi.

H_{03}: Complaint handling has no significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited Makurdi.

H_{04}: Competence has no significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links Nigeria Limited Makurdi.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

This aspect presents a review of related literature on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and customer patronage. The review is structured to provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding the relationship between CRM practices and customer patronage.

2.1 Customer Patronage

Customer patronage is a complex idea that includes both how people behave and how they feel about their loyalty. It is not just about using a service repeatedly; it also reflects how committed customers are to a brand or service on a psychological level (Asamoah, Agyei & Agyemang, 2021). We can measure this through various indicators like how often customers use the service, how well they stick around, their satisfaction levels, and their willingness to recommend it to others. Tools like the Net Promoter Score help capture this emotional side of loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Reichheld, 2003; Morgan & Rego, 2006). In this study, we focus on usage frequency and customer loyalty as the main ways to assess patronage in the context of Customer Relationship Management within transportation. These measures give us practical insights into how often passengers use the service and how emotionally connected they feel, which in turn reflects how effective relational strategies are in encouraging ongoing engagement and repeat business.

Frequency of usage is a behavioral measure that shows how often customers interact with a product or service over a specific time frame. It serves as a clear indicator of loyalty and patronage (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This frequency is a tangible sign of customer satisfaction and trust, as people are likely to return to services that consistently meet their needs and offer real value (Asiegbu, Powei, & Iruka, 2012). In the transportation sector, keeping track of usage patterns like daily commutes, weekly bookings, or monthly trips provides valuable insights into the strength of the customer relationship, habitual patronage, and the success of Customer Relationship Management strategies. Customer loyalty refers to a customer's ongoing preference for a specific brand, product, or service. This loyalty is built on positive experiences, trust, and satisfaction, and it goes beyond just making repeat purchases. It also involves an emotional connection and a willingness to recommend the service to others (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Loyalty can be seen in two ways: behavioral loyalty, which is shown through repeated purchases, and attitudinal loyalty, which reflects positive perceptions and advocacy. Loyal customers tend to be less sensitive to price changes and are more likely to share feedback and spread positive word-of-mouth. In the transportation sector, fostering loyalty is essential. Providing safe, reliable, timely, and comfortable services helps maintain customer patronage, lowers acquisition costs, and boosts long-term profitability. For the purpose of this study, customer patronage is operationally defined as the observable and attitudinal disposition of passengers to consistently choose, repeatedly use, and positively recommend the company's transportation services as a direct outcome of their relational experiences with the organization.

2.2 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is often seen as both a strategic mindset and a practical framework that brings together organizational processes, technology, and customer insights to create outstanding customer experiences and maintain a competitive edge. Experts view CRM as a dynamic, customer-focused, and knowledge-driven capability that helps businesses forge long-lasting relationships through data analysis, personalized interactions, effective

communication, and performance tracking (Nguyen, Simkin & Canhoto, 2020; Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, Thrassou, & Vrontis, 2021; Ahmad & Butt, 2020; Almotairi, 2022). This understanding highlights that CRM is more than just adopting technology; it also involves cultivating an organizational culture, aligning strategies, and systematically managing customer information, feedback, and interactions to boost customer value and improve business performance.

CRM importance stretches across various industries, including banking, healthcare, retail, hospitality, and transportation, where it aids in customizing services, managing customer loyalty, and ensuring efficient service delivery (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). In the transportation industry, CRM has become even more vital due to the growing need for reliable service, safety, and real-time customer engagement. Transportation companies utilize CRM to handle bookings, provide travel updates, address complaints, analyze travel trends, and run loyalty programs, all of which enhance service quality and customer satisfaction (Ismail & Kuppusamy, 2022). With the rise of digital platforms and mobile technologies, CRM now facilitates real-time communication, tailored services, and data-driven decision-making, allowing transportation firms to boost operational efficiency, strengthen customer loyalty, and stay competitive in a fast-changing service landscape. For the purpose of this study, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is defined as the deliberate and systematic deployment of organizational processes, communication strategies, and customer-focused practices to build trust, manage complaints, enhance staff competence, and maintain consistent engagement with customers in order to sustain patronage and improve service delivery.

2.2.1 Measures of Customer Relationship Management

Various scholars have explored different aspects of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to shed light on how it impacts customer satisfaction, loyalty, and patronage. They emphasize that CRM plays a crucial role in fostering and maintaining long-term relationships with customers. Foundational research points out that trust and communication are essential elements that help alleviate customer uncertainty and boost cooperation. Additionally, effective complaint resolution and organizational competence can significantly enhance customer confidence, satisfaction, and the likelihood of repeat business (Coelho & Machas, 2004). Building on these insights, this study utilizes the CRM dimensions of trust, communication, complaint handling and competence as identified by Ball, Coelho, and Machas (2004) and Ndubisi (2007).

2.3 Trust

Customer patronage is all about the loyalty and preference that customers show towards a service provider. It reflects both a commitment to using the service repeatedly and an emotional connection that is shaped by factors like satisfaction, trust, perceived value, and the quality of the relationship. Scholars see patronage as a pattern of returning to a service, advocating for it, and engaging over the long haul especially when customers feel understood, valued, and in sync with the provider (Oyeniyi & Abiodun, 2020; Amoako, Arthur, & Osei-Tutu, 2021; Narteh & Braimah, 2022). Research shows that effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is key to fostering this patronage. By building trust, communicating clearly, resolving complaints promptly, and demonstrating organizational competence, businesses can strengthen relationships and enhance service experiences (Boateng, 2023). This is especially true in the transportation sector, where services are experienced in real time and judged on reliability, safety, staff behavior, and

communication. Here, emotional and experiential factors often take precedence over price (Haider, Jabeen, & Aamir, 2022). For transport providers like Benue Links Transportation Company in Makurdi, maintaining customer loyalty hinges not just on delivering functional services but also on employing relational strategies that build trust, inspire positive word-of-mouth, and establish a reputation for reliability, responsiveness, and excellent customer care (Asamoah, Agyei, & Agyemang, 2021).

2.4 Communication

Communication is a fundamental aspect of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). It involves the timely, clear, and interactive sharing of information, expectations, and feedback that shapes how customers perceive and relate to a brand (Boateng, 2023). In service-oriented industries like transportation, effective communication whether it is verbal, nonverbal, or digital boosts customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and repeat business. This is achieved by minimizing uncertainty, managing expectations, and encouraging two-way interactions (Choudhury et al., 2021; Alrubaiee & Al-Nazer, 2020). Experts highlight that CRM communication should be consistent, personalized, and reciprocal. It is not just about sharing information; it also involves active listening and responding to feedback, which helps build trust and long-term relationships, even when services face disruptions (McCornack, 2020; Haider, Jabeen & Aamir, 2022). With the growth of digital platforms like SMS, mobile apps, and social media, CRM communication has become quicker and more data-driven. This allows for real-time updates, tailored messaging, and better complaint management, as long as the communication remains clear, empathetic, and focused on the human experience (Choudhur & Harrigan, 2014). In transportation services like Benue Links Transportation Company, effective communication such as timely updates about schedules, pricing, routes, and delays is crucial for managing passenger expectations, enhancing perceived service quality, and building customer trust and loyalty.

2.5 Complaint Handling

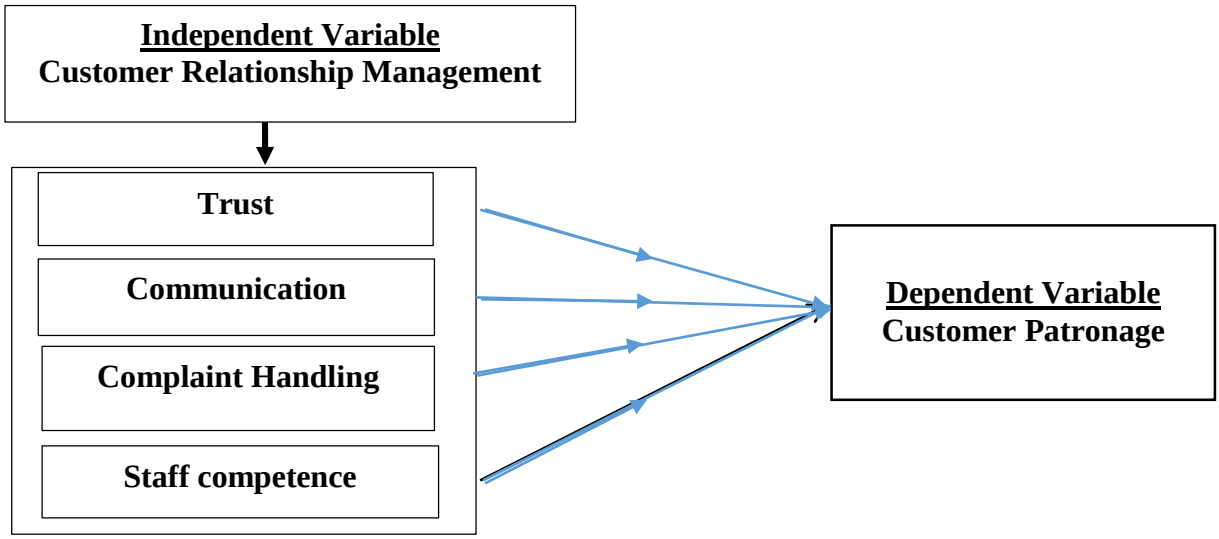
Complaint handling is a key part of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). It involves a structured, fair and empathetic approach that organizations use to receive, address and resolve customer complaints aiming at rebuilding trust and strengthening relationships (Al-Hawary & Aldaihani, 2022; Boateng, 2023). In industries like transportation, where service hiccups are often unavoidable, effective complaint handling acts not just as a way to recover from issues but also as a strategic tool to boost customer satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat business. Experts highlight that having accessible channels, quick responses, transparency, fairness, empathy, and follow-ups are crucial for successful complaint management. These elements help reduce feelings of injustice and rebuild customer confidence (Haider *et al*., 2022; Asamoah, Agyei & Agyemang, 2021). When complaints are managed well, they can provide valuable insights that drive continuous service improvement and even turn unhappy customers into loyal advocates through effective recovery efforts (Choudhury, Dey & Basu, 2021).

2.6 Competence

In the world of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), competence is all about how customers view the skills, knowledge, professionalism, and reliability of an organization and its employees. This perception plays a crucial role in building trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, especially in service-oriented industries (Boateng, 2023; Haider *et al.*, 2022). Competence is not just a single trait; it is a mix of individual skills like staff expertise, courtesy, and problem-solving

abilities, along with organizational factors such as supportive systems, infrastructure, and policies that ensure services are delivered consistently (Al-Hawary & Aldaihani, 2022). Research shows that when customers perceive high competence, it lowers their sense of risk, boosts brand credibility, and enhances trust and loyalty, particularly in high-contact sectors like transportation, where the quality of service hinges on frontline performance and operational reliability (Asamoah *et al*., 2021; Choudhury *et al*., 2021). Additionally, competence plays a vital role in handling complaints effectively and improves other aspects of CRM, as clear communication and trust only matter when there is a genuine ability to provide solutions. The conceptual framework of this study is shown in the Figure 1 as follow.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Researchers' Conceptualization (2025).

2.7 Customer Relationship Management and Customer Patronage

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is increasingly seen as a strategic, customer-focused approach that goes beyond just supporting sales operations. It plays a vital role in shaping customer attitudes, satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, patronage. Research shows that effective CRM practices like building trust, maintaining good communication, showing empathy, being responsive, and personalizing interactions greatly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. These factors are crucial for ensuring long-term patronage. For instance, a study involving customers of United Bank for Africa in Enugu State, Nigeria, revealed that CRM dimensions accounted for 71.4% of the variations in customer patronage, significantly impacting satisfaction and loyalty (Onuzulike & Oparah, 2024). Similar findings in emerging markets indicate that CRM tools lead to better customer engagement, improved sales performance, and increased repeat purchases through data-driven and personalized interactions (Ijomah et al., 2024). However, the literature also cautions that CRM adoption alone does not automatically translate into patronage unless it is effectively implemented and perceived as valuable by customers, as evidenced by studies in Ghana's banking sector showing that CRM's impact on performance and patronage is realized mainly through the mediating roles of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gonu et al., 2024).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study is built on three key theories: Social Exchange Theory, Customer Equity Theory, and Resource-Based Theory.

2.8.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET), introduced by Homans in 1958 and later expanded by Blau in 1964 and Emerson in 1976, suggests that human relationships thrive on reciprocal exchanges. People naturally aim to maximize their rewards while minimizing their costs. Trust, loyalty, and commitment flourish when interactions are beneficial for both parties. CRM practices like building trust, effective communication, quick resolution of complaints, and skilled employees act as investments or rewards in the customer relationship. When customers feel that the service provider is genuinely dedicated to fulfilling their needs, they are more likely to respond with ongoing loyalty, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth. Therefore, SET lays a solid theoretical groundwork that connects CRM practices to customer behavior, reinforcing the idea that lasting patronage stems from successful, mutually beneficial exchanges between the transport service and its customers.

2.8.2 Customer Equity Theory

Customer Equity Theory, crafted by Rust, Zeithaml, and Lemon back in 2000, shines a light on the long-term financial value of customers. It takes into account the lifetime worth of both current and potential clients, urging companies to nurture relationships that boost retention, satisfaction, and loyalty. This theory breaks down into three main components: value equity, which is all about how customers assess the utility of a service compared to its cost; brand equity, which captures the emotional ties and perceptions people have about a brand; and relationship equity, which reflects the loyalty built through personal attention, trust, and rewards over time. This ensures that services like those offered by transportation companies consistently satisfy customers, strengthen their loyalty, and maximize long-term patronage.

2.8.2 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV), first introduced by Wernerfelt in 1984 and later refined by Barney in 1991, highlights that a company's sustainable competitive edge comes from its internal resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, hard to imitate, and non-substitutable (VRIN), whether they are tangible or intangible. RBV points out that the differences in resources controlled by firms can explain variations in performance, emphasizing the strategic importance of aligning internal assets to provide superior customer value. When managed well, these elements enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and patronage. Over time, long-lasting customer relationships themselves become strategic assets, contributing to revenue growth, a solid reputation, and lower marketing costs.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted quantitative research design through a survey research method to collect primary data from the respondents. It allows systematic measurement of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors and supports quantitative analysis (Creswell, 2012). The population comprised 320 staff drawn from all Nine (9) Departments of Benue Links Transport Company (Personnel Department Records, 2025). A census approach was employed because the total population of 320 was small and manageable, making it unnecessary to draw a sample. This approach eliminates sampling

error, ensures full representation of all Nine (9) departments, and produces more accurate and reliable findings (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Kothari, 2004).

Primary data were collected through close-ended questionnaires administered to all staff using the drop-and-collect method. The instrument consisted of two sections: Part A covered respondents' demographic information, while Part B contained 25 items measuring Customer Relationship Management dimensions and customer patronage, adapted from Padmashree and Avudaiammal (2023); and Zhou, Edafioghor and Wu (2022) rated on a five-point Likert scale. Face and content validity of the instrument were established through expert review. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, with all constructs exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1: Test for Reliability of Data Collection Instrument

Constructs	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha	Remark
Trust	5	0.841	Acceptable
Communication	5	0.824	Acceptable
Complaint handling	5	0.822	Acceptable
Competence	5	0.861	Acceptable
Customer patronage	5	0.789	Acceptable

Source: Authors' Computation (2025) using SPSS Version 26

Again, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics entails the use of Percentages and tables to summarize demographic data, while the inferential statistics involved the use of multiple regression analysis with the aid of SPSS version 26. The study's hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level to determine the effect of Customer Relationship Management on customer patronage, using the standard error coefficient comparison decision rule.

The model is expressed as follows:

$$\mathbf{CP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TR + \beta_2 CM + \beta_3 CH + \beta_4 SC + \varepsilon}$$

Where:

CP = Customer Patronage (dependent variable)
$\boldsymbol{\beta_0}$ = Constant (intercept)
$\boldsymbol{\beta_1 - \beta_4}$ = Regression coefficients for each CRM dimension
TR = Trust
CM = Communication
CH = Complaint Handling
SC = Staff Competence
$\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$ = Error term

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSONS

Data collected from the respondents who are employees of Benue Links Transport Company under investigation are presented from Table 2 toTable 4.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

This section is the descriptive statistic of the response rate of questionnaire administered and demographic variables.

Table 2: Response Rate from Respondents

Response Rate of Questionnaire	**Frequency**
Distributed Questionnaire	320
Returned Questionnaire	302
Unreturned Questionnaire	18
Response Rate	94.4%
Non-Response Rate	5.6%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 2 indicate that a total of 320 copies of questionnaire were distributed which 302 were returned representing 94.4% response rate. Eighteen copies (representing 5.6%) were not returned. Given the high response rate, the data were considered sufficient for the analysis.

Table 3: Analysis of Respondents' Demographic Variables

	Frequencies	**Percentage (%)**
Respondents' Age		
Below 20yrs	41	13.6
20-29yrs	82	27.2
30-39yrs	131	43.4
40-49yrs	48	15.9
Total	**302**	**100.0**
Respondents' Gender		
Female	33	10.9
Male	269	89.1
Total	**302**	**100.0**
Educational Qualification		
FSLC	73	24.2
SSCE	105	34.8
ND/NCE	86	28.5
BSc/HND	38	12.6
Total	**302**	**100.0**
Working Experience		
0-5years	79	26.2
6-10years	84	27.8
11-15years	56	18.5
Above 16years	83	27.5
Total	**302**	**100.0**

Source: Authors' Computation (2025) using SPSS Version 26

Table 3 shows that most respondents (43.4%) were aged 30–39 years, indicating a relatively mature and experienced workforce. The majority were male (89.1%), and most had at least secondary or post-secondary education, with 34.8% holding SSCE and 28.5% holding ND/NCE or higher, suggesting adequate literacy to understand the questionnaire. Work experience varied, with 55.3% having over six years on the job, indicating that many employees are well-positioned to provide informed insights on customer relationship management and its effect on customer patronage at Benue Links Transport Company.

4.2 Regression Analysis

The study's data were analyzed using a single model, which examined customer patronage against the independent variables trust, communication, complaint handling, and competence. As a result, the results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Result

Observation	302			
R Square	0.241			
Prob>f	0.000			
Df	4, 297 = 23.549			
Measure	**β**	**SE**	**t-value**	**P Value.**
Trust	.112	.104	1.987	.048
Communication	. -097	.111	-2.119	.035
Compliant Handling	.107	.106	1.965	.020
Competence	.252	.423	7.639	.000

Dependent Variable: Customer Patronage
Source: Authors' Computation (2025) using SPSS Version 26

Table 4 indicates that the dimensions of Customer Relationship Management (CRM); Trust, Communication, Complaint handling, and Competence had a significant joint effect on Customer Patronage at Benue Links Transportation Company, $F(4, 297) = 23.549$, $p < 0.05$, with the model explaining 24.1% of the variation in patronage ($R^2 = 0.241$). Individually, trust ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = 0.048$), complaint handling ($\beta = 0.107$, $p = 0.020$), and competence ($\beta = 0.252$, $p = 0.000$) had positive and significant effects on patronage, indicating that confidence in services, effective complaint resolution, and employee competence enhance customer loyalty. Conversely, communication had a negative and significant effect ($\beta = -0.097$, $p = 0.035$), suggesting that poor or ineffective communication discourages patronage. Overall, the findings highlight competence as the strongest driver of customer loyalty, while other CRM practices also meaningfully influence passengers' decisions to continue using the service.

4.3 Test of Hypotheses and Discussion of Findings

The primary tool utilized in this study for data analysis and hypothesis testing is regression analysis. How one variable connects to another is demonstrated using regression analysis.

Test of Hypothesis One

Given that the standardized beta coefficient for trust is $\beta = .112$, $t = 1.987$, $p < 0.05$, which is lower than the 5% level of significance, the researcher therefore rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis that trust has a significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links

Transportation Company. This aligns with Ahmad, Khan and Bashir (2023) who identified trust as key to customer loyalty in Pakistan's transport sector. Also, Ojo and Oyeniyi (2022) who reported similar effects in Nigerian retail banking. The results underscore that fostering confidence in service reliability and safety is crucial for customer retention. Overall, trust emerges as a central driver of continued patronage in transportation services.

Test of Hypothesis Two

The standardized beta coefficient for communication was $\beta = -0.097$, with $t = -2.119$ and $p < 0.05$. Since the p-value is below the 5% level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Consequently, the study accepted the alternative hypothesis that communication significantly influences customer patronage of Benue Links Transportation Company. This supports Bello and Usman (2023), who found that unclear or delayed communication in Nigerian ride-hailing services reduced loyalty, but contrasts with Wu and Lin (2022), where effective communication boosted loyalty in Taiwanese airlines. The negative impact in Benue Links may result from delayed schedule updates, weak feedback systems, or ticketing issues. These lapses likely created customer dissatisfaction, reversing the expected positive effect of communication. Overall, effective communication is crucial for maintaining customer patronage.

Test of Hypothesis Three

Given that the standardized beta coefficient for complaint handling is $\beta = .107$, $t = 1.965$, $p < 0.05$, which is lower than the 5% level of significance, the researcher therefore rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis that complaint handling has a significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links Transportation Company. This aligns with Adegbite and Oladapo (2024), who found that effective complaint resolution in Nigerian SMEs enhanced trust and loyalty, and with Gupta and Sharma (2023), who reported similar effects in the Indian hospitality sector. The findings highlight that responsive and transparent grievance mechanisms are crucial for retaining customers. Overall, effective complaint handling strengthens customer relationships and repeat patronage at Benue Links.

Test of Hypothesis Four

The standardized beta coefficient for competence was $\beta = 0.252$, with $t = 7.639$ and $p < 0.05$. Because the p-value is lower than the 5% level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, indicating that competence has a significant effect on customer patronage of Benue Links Transportation Company. This aligns with Amponsah, Adom and Yeboah (2024) who found staff competence crucial for customer satisfaction in Ghana's transport sector. Similarly, Wilfred, Prasad and Kumar, (2024) reported similar effects in the Indian airline industry. The findings emphasize that at Benue Links, competent staff from drivers to front-desk officers shape customer satisfaction and encourage repeat patronage.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that customer relationship management significantly influences customer patronage at Benue Links Transportation Company. Competence, trust, and complaint handling had positive effects, showing that professionalism, customer confidence, and effective grievance resolution encourage loyalty. Conversely, communication had a significant negative effect, indicating that poorly managed communication can reduce patronage. This highlights that while

CRM is important, its dimensions must be strategically implemented to positively impact customer retention.

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that Benue Links Nigeria Limited, Makurdi adopt a data-driven Customer Relationship Management approach by investing in continuous staff training to enhance competence, implementing transparent and reliable service practices to build trust, establishing an efficient and technology-supported complaint handling system, and improving clear, timely, and customer-focused communication channels, as these factors have been empirically shown to significantly influence customer patronage.

5.1 SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Future research on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and customer patronage in the transportation sector can be expanded for broader insights. Studies should examine CRM practices across multiple transport companies in Makurdi and other Nigerian regions to test consistency across organizational and geographic contexts. This would enhance the generalizability of findings and identify region-specific factors affecting patronage. Additionally, future research should explore CRM dimensions beyond trust, communication, complaint handling, and competence. Areas such as personalization, service innovation, responsiveness, and customer engagement could be assessed. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing customer loyalty and repeat patronage.

REFERENCES

Adefarasin, A. O., & Toludare, A. S. (2018). Service quality attributes and customer satisfaction in transportation services in Nigeria. *Journal of Transport Management*, 5(2), 45–58.

Adegbite, J., & Oladapo, T. (2024). Complaint handling and customer loyalty in Nigerian SMEs. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 31(1), 55–70.

Ahmad, A., & Butt, A. S. (2020). The mediating role of customer satisfaction between customer relationship management and customer loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 19(3), 1–22.

Ahmad, S., Khan, R., & Bashir, M. (2023). The role of trust in customer loyalty: Evidence from the Pakistani transport sector. *Journal of Transport and Customer Relations*, 12(2), 45–61.

Ajayi, O. M., & Owolabi, O. A. (2020). Customer relationship management and organizational performance of deposit money banks in Nigeria. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 19(3), 213–230.

Al-Hawary, S. I. S., & Aldaihani, F. M. F. (2022). The impact of trust dimensions on customer loyalty in the service sector. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 17(3), 43–55.

Almotairi, M. (2022). Customer relationship management and firm performance: The moderating role of organizational culture. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 37(6), 1235–1248.

Alrubaiee, L., & Al-Nazer, N. (2020). The effect of customer relationship management on organizational performance: Evidence from the hotel industry. *Management Science Letters*, 10(1), 61–72.

Amoako, G. K., Arthur, E., & Osei-Tutu, E. (2021). Customer engagement and repurchase intentions in the service sector: The mediating role of customer satisfaction. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 20(2), 109–130.

Amponsah, B., Adom, A., & Yeboah, E. (2024). Service quality and customer satisfaction in urban transport: Evidence from Ghana's public transit sector. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(3), 1–15.

Asamoah, E. S., Agyei, M., & Agyemang, F. G. (2021). Customer relationship management and customer retention: The mediating role of trust and customer satisfaction. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 20(3), 183–205.

Asiegbu, I. F., Powei, D. M., & Iruka, C. H. (2012). Consumer attitude: Some reflections on its concept, trilogy, relationship with consumer behavior, and marketing implications. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 4(13), 38–49.

Ball, D., Coelho, P. S., & Machas, A. (2004). The role of communication and trust in explaining customer loyalty: An extension to the European customer satisfaction index. *European Journal of Marketing*, 38(9/10), 1272–1293.

Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120.

Bello, A., & Usman, K. (2023). Impact of communication on customer satisfaction in Nigerian ride-hailing services. *Journal of Service Management Studies*, 15(3), 101–119.

Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Boateng, S. L. (2023). Customer engagement and loyalty in the digital age: The role of trust and CRM capability. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 31(1), 45–63.

Buttle, F., & Maklan, S. (2019). *Customer relationship management: Concepts and technologies* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Chatterjee, S., Chaudhuri, R., Thrassou, A., & Vrontis, D. (2021). Antecedents and consequences of customer relationship management in small and medium-sized enterprises: Evidence from emerging economies. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 29(5), 1–18.

Choudhury, M. M., & Harrigan, P. (2014). Social CRM: Organizational social media adoption and customer engagement outcomes. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 22(5), 430–451.

Choudhury, N. N., Dey, S., & Basu, P. (2021). Building trust in service relationships: An empirical analysis of customer perceptions. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 42(2), 110–125.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Coelho, P. S., & Machas, A. (2004). The role of trust, commitment and satisfaction in service relationships. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 20(1–2), 73–99.

Dwivedi, R. K., Lohmor Choudhary, S., Sharma Dixit, R., Sahiba, Z., & Naik, S. (2024). The customer loyalty vs. customer retention: The impact of CRM on customer satisfaction. *Journal of Web Intelligence*, 22(3), 425-442.

Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology, 2*, 335–362.

Gonu, E., Okeniyi, J., & Agyapong, G. K. (2024). Customer relationship management practices and organisational performance of commercial banks in Ghana: a mediation analysis. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, *Palgrave Macmillan*, 29(2), 607-624.

Gupta, R., & Sharma, P. (2023). The influence of complaint resolution on customer retention in the Indian hospitality sector. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 45(2), 89–105.

Haider, S. H., Jabeen, S., & Aamir, M. (2022). Exploring the dimensions of trust in service relationships: Evidence from the transport sector. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 13(1), 1–14.

Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(6), 597–606.

Ismail, R., & Kuppusamy, S. (2022). Customer relationship management practices and service quality outcomes in the transportation sector. *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 14(2), 87–101.

Ijomah, T. I., Nwabekee, U. S., Agu, E. E., & Abdul-Azeez, O. Y. (2024). The impact of customer relationship management (CRM) tools on sales growth and customer loyalty in emerging markets. *International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research*, 6(9), 2964-2988.

Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques* (2nd ed.). New Age International Publishers.

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson Education.

Kumar, V., & Reinartz, W. (2018). *Customer relationship management: Concept, strategy, and tools* (3rd ed.). Springer.

Malki, D., Bellahcene, M., Latreche, H., Terbeche, M., & Chroqui, R. (2024). How social CRM and customer satisfaction affect customer loyalty. *Spanish Journal of Marketing – ESIC*, 28(4), 465–480.

Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches.* African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) Press.

McCornack, S., & Morrison, K. (2020). *Reflect & Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication* (6th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Morgan, N. A., & Rego, L. L. (2006). The value of different customer satisfaction and loyalty metrics in predicting business performance. *Marketing Science*, 25(5), 426–439.

Narteh, B., & Braimah, M. (2022). Service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer patronage in emerging economies. *Service Industries Journal*, 42(5–6), 421–444.

Ndubisi, N. O. (2007). Relationship marketing and customer loyalty. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(1), 98–106.

Nguyen, B., Simkin, L., & Canhoto, A. I. (2020). The dark side of digital personalization: An agenda for research and practice. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 316–325.

Nwaimo, C. E., Njoku, C. O., Ugwu, K. E., Akujor, J. C., Ejiogu, U. G. C., Nwoko, N. M., Ozurumba, B. A., Ubah, C. P. (2024). Overcoming barriers to technology adoption in nigeria government institutions. *Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal*, 30(4), 1-12.

Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Ojo, T., & O yeniyi, O. (2022). Trust and repeat patronage in Nigerian retail banking. *African Journal of Banking and Finance*, 8(1), 23–37.

Odor, H. O., Bakwuye, C. O., & Dokai-Okonkwo, C. N. (2025). CRM strategies and customer retention in deposit money banks in Nigeria. *University of Benin Journal of Marketing*, 4(1), 70–83.

Onyenezide, C. V. (2025). Customer relationship management adoption as a driver of loyalty: A study of small-scale businesses in Onitsha, Nigeria. *European Journal of Management and Marketing Studies*, 14(4), 219–228.

Osu, E. C., & Chidiebele, O. (2015). Relationship marketing and customer patronage in service organizations in Nigeria. *International Journal of Marketing Studies,* 7(3), 45–56.

Ogonna, O. P., & Oparah, P. C. (2024). Customer relationship management strategy and customer patronage: Evidence from United Bank for Africa customers in Enugu State, Nigeria. *American Journal of Economics and Business Management*, 7(1), 9–20.

Oyeniyi, O., & Abiodun, A. J. (2020). Customer experience and patronage behaviour in service organizations. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness,* 14*(*2), 50–62.

Padmashree, K. A., & Avudaiammal, P. (2023) Measuring the effectiveness of customer relationship management on customer service satisfaction: Evidence from the Indonesian banking industry. *International Journal of Banking and Finance Studies,* 12(3), 45–59.

Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2017). *Strategic customer management: Integrating relationship marketing and CRM*. Cambridge University Press.

Reichheld, F. F. (2003). The one number you need to grow. *Harvard Business Review,* 81(12), 46–54.

Reinartz, W. J. (2026). Customer relationship management: Past, present, and future. *International Journal of Research in Marketing,* 43(1), 8-27.

Singh, A., & Verma, N. (2024). Competence and customer retention in the Indian airline industry. *Journal of Air Transport Management,* 29(1), 12–28.

Wernerfelt, B. (1984). A resource-based view of the firm. *Strategic Management Journal,* 5(2), 171–180.

Wilfred, V., Prasad, M. V. R., & Kumar, J. P. S. (2024). Study of service quality, price sensitivity, and passenger satisfaction in India's airline sector. *Innovative Marketing,* 20(3), 182-192.

Wu, C., & Lin, Y. (2022). Communication effectiveness and customer loyalty: Evidence from Taiwanese airlines. *International Journal of Airline Management,* 14(4), 77–92.

Zhou, Q., Edafioghor, T. E., & Wu, C.-H. (2022). Measuring customer patronage and loyalty in service industries: Evidence from emerging markets. *Journal of Marketing Research and Practice,* 15(4), 112–125.

Zhou, Y., Zhang, X., Nguyen, T., & Thang, N. (2022). CRM Practices and customer patronage: An empirical investigation. *International Journal of Service Industry Management,* 15(2), 45–63.