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influence customer patronage dynamics in the bread production sector. Understanding the interplay of these elements is crucial for businesses, particularly in an industry where consumer choices and loyalty significantly impact market success.

The bakery industry encounter challenges in the process of using their employees or sales vendor to supply bakery products especially bread to customers. Building a positive customer relationship is key for loyalty and repeat business in the bakery industry (Khan, Salamzadeh, Iqbal, & Yang, 2022). However, some bakeries may underestimate its significance, thinking product availability alone ensures patronage. Yet, in reality, the bakery setting, with products holding personal, necessitates a warm and engaging customer experience. This shift is crucial for bakeries to understand the importance of fostering relationships beyond mere transactions.

Taking cognizance product knowledge is pivotal for bakeries to enhance customer patronage. Clear information about product quality, ingredients, and features is a necessity, not a luxury. This transparency builds trust among customers. Contrary to assuming product availability guarantees loyalty, an informed consumer is more likely to choose a bakery firm providing comprehensive details. This mindset shift encourages bakeries to see product knowledge as a strategic investment impacting long-term customer relationships.

Addressing feedback handling is crucial for bakeries navigating diverse customer tastes. While some believe customers buy if products are available, actively seeking and responding to feedback is vital. In the bakery industry, where tastes vary widely, incorporating customer feedback becomes a strategic imperative. This shift encourages bakeries to view feedback as valuable insights contributing to maintaining satisfaction and fostering loyalty.

Sales personalisation is crucial for bakeries in a competitive market, as it fosters connection and loyalty. Tailoring offerings to individual preferences, like personalized cakes, goes beyond generic products, enhancing customer relationships and influencing patronage through product knowledge and feedback handling.

While prior studies have looked into consumer behaviour across various contexts (Darian, Tucci, & Wiman; Udonde & Ekong, 2023; Khan et al., 2023), there is a scarcity of specific investigations within the bakery sector in Asaba Metropolis. Recognising this void, the study aims to address this gap and contribute valuable insights to the academic discourse by undertaking a thorough analysis of the interplay between customer relationship building, product knowledge, feedback handling, and sales personalisation on customer patronage in this particular industry.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between personal selling strategy and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba, Metropolis. The specific objectives were to:

1. determine the relationship between customer relationship building and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis;

2. ascertain the relationship between product knowledge and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis;
3. examine the relationship between feedback handling and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis; and
4. examine relationship between sales' personalisation and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in the null form:

1. There is no significant relationship between customer relationship building and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis;
2. There is no significant relationship relationship between product knowledge and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis;
3. There is no significant relationship between feedback handling and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis; and
4. There is no significant relationship between sales' personalisation and customer patronage of processed products in Asaba Metropolis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Patronage

Customer patronage refers to customers consistently choosing to make purchases from a particular business or brand over an extended period. It reflects a sustained and loyal relationship between the customer and the business (Jung, Kim, & Kim, 2020). Customer patronage can also be seen as a behavioral commitment where customers repeatedly choose a specific brand or business for their purchasing needs (Adekunle, Isibor, Okere, Kokogho, 2023; Rather, Tehseen, Itoo, & Parrey, 2021). The emphasis here is on the observable actions and choices made by customers, highlighting the consistent patronage over time. Agyeiwaah, Dayour, Zhou, (2022) further view customer patronage from a psychological perspective. They used terms such as affective and cognitive commitment. In this context, customers exhibit repeat business behavior and develop an emotional connection and a cognitive preference for a particular brand or business (Agyeiwaah et al 2022). This description looks into the customer's mindset and the attachment formed, encompassing factors beyond transactional considerations.

Another viewpoint on customer patronage concerns relational commitment (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2022). That is the interpersonal aspect of the customer-business dynamic (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2022). This definition underscores the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships between the business and its customers. It involves trust, communication, and mutual understanding, fostering a connection that goes beyond the mere exchange of goods or services (Tegambwage, & Kasoga, 2022).

The relevance of customer patronage is profound for businesses (Elgarhy, & Mohamed, 2023). This contributes significantly to the financial stability and sustainability of a company. A repeat business from loyal customers often forms a substantial portion of revenue, providing a more

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predictable and reliable income stream compared to sporadic or one-time transactions. Customer patronage is crucial for brand equity and reputation (Wang, Liao, Wu, & Le, 2021). Loyal customers become enthusiastic advocates, recommending the brand to others and driving positive word-of-mouth marketing. This positive feedback loop strengthens the brand's image and attracts new customers, creating a cycle of growth and success. This organic promotion enhances the brand's image, attracting new customers and reinforcing the loyalty of existing ones.

Building on the benefits of customer patronage for brand equity and reputation, it also plays a crucial role in driving cost efficiency (Iqbal, Hasan, Bukhari, & Ramish, 2023). Acquiring new customers can be significantly more expensive than retaining existing ones. Loyal customers are already familiar with the brand and its offerings, requiring less marketing effort and resources. Additionally, Umashankar, Bhagwat, and Kumar (2017) suggest that satisfied and loyal customers are less price-sensitive, placing greater value on factors like trust and familiarity. This reduces the need for aggressive pricing strategies to attract and retain customers, leading to improved profitability for the business.

Personal selling strategy

Personal selling strategy refers to a systematic plan of action employed by sales professionals to engage potential customers, build relationships, and persuade them to make a purchase (Aura, 2010).

Personal selling strategy embraces a multifaceted nature, encompassing different perspectives on its application and effectiveness. One definition emphasises its customised approach, where communication and sales tactics are tailored to individual customer needs and preferences (Yusanda & Rahmanto, 2022). This highlights the importance of personalisation in successful sales, acknowledging that adapting the approach based on each customer's unique characteristics is key.

Another perspective views personal selling strategy as a process-oriented framework involving planned and coordinated activities that guide a prospect through the sales funnel (Good, Mangus, & Bolman, 2023). This definition underscores the importance of strategic sequencing, emphasising the well-defined and organised approach necessary to effectively navigate each stage of the sales process, from initial contact and needs assessment to presentation, negotiation, and closing the sale.

Finally, personal selling strategy can be seen as a relationship-building foundation, extending beyond the immediate transaction to focus on establishing and nurturing long-term connections with customers (Good, et al., 2023). This definition emphasises the relational aspect of personal selling, highlighting the importance of building trust, understanding customer preferences, and providing ongoing support as integral components of the overall strategy.

These varying definitions collectively paint a comprehensive picture of personal selling strategy, encompassing its personalised nature, strategic approach to the sales process, and focus on building long-lasting customer relationships. The relevance of personal selling

strategy lies in its effectiveness in cultivating and maintaining customer patronage (Thaib & Widiyanti, 2022).

Firstly, a well-crafted personal selling strategy contributes to customer satisfaction by addressing individual needs and concerns (Alimin & Marco, 2023). When customers feel understood and valued through personalised interactions, they are more likely to become loyal patrons, choosing the same salesperson or company for future purchases.

Secondly, personal selling strategy plays a pivotal role in relationship-building. By fostering strong connections between sales professionals and customers, the strategy contributes to the development of trust and rapport (Denga, Vajjhala, & Rakshit, 2022). In turn, this trust becomes a foundation for customer loyalty, encouraging repeat business and reducing the likelihood of customers exploring alternative options.

Thirdly, the strategy contributes to a positive customer experience, which is a key driver of patronage. A positive and personalised interaction during the sales process enhances the overall perception of the brand. When customers have a satisfying experience, they are more inclined to become loyal patrons, often sharing their positive experiences with others, thus contributing to word-of-mouth marketing and customer retention (Mohanty & Patro, 2022).

Personal Selling Strategies

Scholars have identified strategies for personal selling to include customer relationship building, product knowledge, feedback handling and personalisation. They are discussed as follows.

Customer Relationship Building

Customer relationship building is a strategic and multifaceted approach that goes beyond mere transactions, emphasising the establishment of strong, enduring connections between a business and its clientele. At the heart of this concept is the recognition that customer loyalty and satisfaction are pivotal to the success of any enterprise (Jo, 2023). The process commences with the initial interaction, whether in-person, online, or through various communication channels. During this phase, businesses focus on creating a positive and personalised experience that resonates with the customer, laying the foundation for a lasting relationship.

Tseng (2021) notes that consistency is a cornerstone of effective customer relationship building. Businesses strive to provide a uniform standard of service, quality, and communication throughout the customer journey. By maintaining a consistent experience from the first point of contact to post-purchase interactions, companies instill a sense of reliability and trust. Customers are more likely to engage in long-term relationships when they can depend on a business to meet their expectations consistently.

Beyond mere transactions, successful customer relationship building involves ongoing engagement (de Silva, 2020). This includes regular communication, personalised interactions, and efforts to understand and adapt to the evolving needs of customers. Loyalty programs, special offers, and personalised services contribute to the depth of the relationship, creating a sense of value and appreciation for the customer (Jain & Sundström, 2021). The goal is to

transform satisfied customers into loyal advocates who not only continue to patronise the business but also recommend it to others.

In essence, customer relationship building is a dynamic and reciprocal process. Businesses must be proactive in their efforts, seeking to understand their customers on a deeper level and demonstrating a genuine commitment to their satisfaction. By cultivating these relationships over time, companies not only foster customer loyalty but also create a positive brand image, contributing to sustained success in a competitive market (Shulga, Busser, Bai, & Kim, 2021).

Product Knowledge

Product knowledge is a fundamental component of a successful sales strategy, encompassing a deep understanding of the features, benefits, and applications of a particular product or service (Putra, Astuti, & Fadhli, 2021). It forms the basis for effective communication between sales professionals and potential customers, as it enables them to articulate the value proposition and address customer needs with precision (Amor, 2019). Beyond basic information, a comprehensive grasp of the product includes insights into its competitive advantages, potential challenges, and how it fulfills specific customer requirements.

When customers perceive that a salesperson has a thorough understanding of the product, they are more likely to trust the information provided and feel confident in their purchasing decisions (Jin, & Hong, 2004). This trust forms the basis for long-term customer relationships, as customers appreciate dealing with individuals who demonstrate expertise and can guide them through the decision-making process.

Furthermore, product knowledge is instrumental in overcoming objections and addressing customer concerns (Adusei, Tweneboah-Koduah, & Agyapong, 2020). A salesperson armed with in-depth knowledge can anticipate potential questions, proactively address doubts, and present compelling arguments that align the product's features with the customer's needs. This not only enhances the salesperson's persuasiveness but also contributes to a smoother sales process, reducing the likelihood of objections derailing the conversation.

Product knowledge extends beyond the initial sale; it plays a crucial role in providing excellent post-purchase support (Santy, & Atika, 2020). Sales professionals who are well-versed in the product can offer valuable guidance, troubleshoot issues, and ensure customers maximise the benefits of their purchase. This level of support fosters customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth, contributing to the overall success and reputation of the product and the business.

Feedback Handling

Feedback handling is a critical aspect of effective communication and customer relationship management within any business (Mosa, 2022). It involves the process of receiving, understanding and responding to feedback from customers, employees, or other stakeholders. The goal is not only to acknowledge the feedback but also to use it as a tool for continuous improvement and relationship building (Wanberg, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

First and foremost, an organisation's ability to handle feedback demonstrates its commitment to customer satisfaction. When customers take the time to provide feedback, whether positive or negative, they expect a responsive and considerate engagement from the business. Acknowledging feedback promptly and professionally creates a positive impression, showing customers that their opinions are valued. This initial acknowledgment sets the stage for a constructive dialogue and reinforces the customer's sense of importance to the business.

The process of feedback handling involves actively listening to customer concerns or suggestions. This goes beyond a simple acknowledgment and requires a thorough understanding of the underlying issues. Sales professionals and customer service representatives must demonstrate empathy, putting themselves in the customer's shoes to grasp the impact of the feedback on their experience. Through active listening, businesses can identify root causes, patterns, and opportunities for improvement, laying the groundwork for meaningful action.

Handling feedback effectively also entails a strategic approach to response. Whether addressing positive feedback to reinforce positive behavior or addressing concerns to resolve issues, businesses must respond thoughtfully and transparently. Constructive responses demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and customer satisfaction. Additionally, when negative feedback is addressed openly and resolved promptly, it can contribute to rebuilding trust and loyalty with the customer, turning a potentially adverse situation into an opportunity to showcase exceptional customer service. Ultimately, feedback handling is an integral part of a company's quality assurance and customer experience management. By viewing feedback as a valuable resource for improvement rather than a mere critique, businesses can leverage it to enhance their products, services, and overall customer satisfaction. A robust feedback-handling process contributes not only to customer retention but also to the overall reputation and success of the business in a competitive market.

Sales Personalisation

Sales personalisation is a strategic approach that involves tailoring interactions, communications, and offerings to meet the specific needs, preferences, and characteristics of individual customers. This practice recognises that one size does not fit all and aims to create a more meaningful and engaging experience for customers (Berkovsky, Freyne & Oinas-Kukkonen, 2012). Personalisation goes beyond addressing customers by their names; it involves a deeper understanding of their buying behavior, motivations, and unique challenges (Shin, Zhong, & Biocca, 2020).

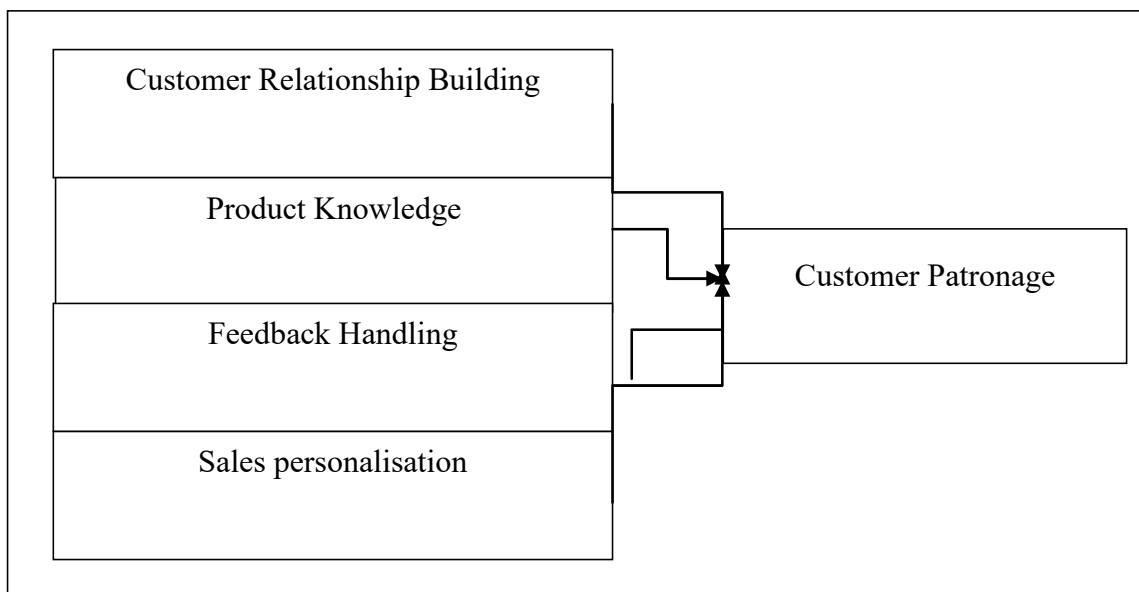
At its core, personalisation in sales is about building a connection with customers. By demonstrating an understanding of their individual needs and preferences, sales professionals can create a more empathetic and customer-centric interaction. This personalised approach often begins with data analysis, leveraging customer information and insights to inform the sales process. Understanding a customer's purchase history, preferences, and even browsing behavior allows sales professionals to anticipate needs and tailor their recommendations accordingly.

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The rise of technology has played a significant role in enabling personalisation in sales. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, artificial intelligence, and analytics tools empower sales teams to collect and analyze vast amounts of data, providing valuable insights for customisation. Automated systems can help personalise communications, recommend products based on past purchases, and even predict future needs. This not only enhances the efficiency of sales processes but also ensures that personalisation is scalable across a broader customer base.

Personalisation contributes to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers feel that a business understands and values their unique preferences, they are more likely to engage in repeat business and become brand advocates. The personalised experience fosters a sense of connection, making customers more receptive to upselling or cross-selling efforts. In a competitive marketplace, personalisation sets businesses apart by creating a differentiated and memorable customer experience that goes beyond the transactional aspects of sales.

Conceptual Framework



Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on social exchange and relationship marketing theories. They are discussed below.

Social Exchange Theory

Homans (1958) is credited as the founder of social exchange theory (SET), positing that social interactions are fundamentally driven by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of costs. SET

argues that individuals engage in reciprocal relationships, exchanging resources, gestures, or favors with the expectation of receiving something in return. The theory assumes individuals are rational actors who calculate potential outcomes, making choices to maximise self-interest. It further suggests people can distinguish between fair and unfair exchanges, being more likely to continue interactions when they perceive a balance in the give-and-take of resources. While social exchange theory provides valuable insights into human behavior and interactions, it has strengths and weaknesses. One strength is its emphasis on rational outcome calculation, making it applicable to various social contexts. However, critics argue SET oversimplifies human behavior, reducing it to a calculation of costs and benefits, neglecting emotions, cultural factors, and social norms. Additionally, the assumption of rationality has been questioned in situations where individuals may not always act in a purely rational manner.

Applying social exchange theory to personal selling and customer patronage of manufactured products involves understanding reciprocal relationships between sellers and buyers. Personal selling strategies aim to emphasise product/service benefits, creating perceived value exceeding the customer's cost. Building trust and delivering excellent customer service foster positive social exchanges, contributing to satisfaction and loyalty. In the context of manufactured products, the theory suggests organisations should prioritise perceived value and ensure fair resource exchanges for enduring customer relationships. Personalised interactions and effective communication can establish a positive social exchange environment, encouraging customer patronage and loyalty.

Relationship Marketing Theory

Relationship marketing theory, often credited to Berry (1983) and Gronroos (1994), responds to evolving marketing practices, emphasising the significance of long-term customer relationships for business success. Unlike transactional marketing, it prioritises establishing enduring connections. The theory highlights customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment as key elements in fostering lasting relationships, leading to enhanced loyalty, repeat business, and sustainable competitive advantage.

The theory assumes that customer satisfaction is vital for relationship building, increasing customer retention. It also emphasises trust and commitment as essential components, fostering security and reliability. Lastly, it acknowledges two-way communication in customer relationships, with organisations providing value and listening to customer needs. While relationship marketing theory is praised for its customer-centric strategies and recognising the long-term value of relationships, critics argue its applicability may vary across industries or product types, as some transactions are inherently short-term and don't necessitate ongoing relationships. Applying relationship marketing to personal selling and customer patronage of manufactured products means customising sales approaches to establish and maintain long-term connections. Personal selling benefits from relationship-oriented techniques that prioritise understanding and meeting customer needs over immediate sales. In the context of manufactured products, relationship marketing involves providing personalised customer service, implementing loyalty programs, and maintaining ongoing communication to strengthen the bond between the customer and the brand. By highlighting customer satisfaction, trust, and

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commitment in personal selling strategies, organisations can cultivate lasting relationships, leading to increased customer patronage and loyalty.

Emperical Review

Shamdasani and Balakrishnan (2000) examined the relationship between customer interactions with service firms in personalised services. The study focused on determinants of relationship quality, including trust and satisfaction, and their influence on loyalty. Based on a survey of 325 respondents, the findings revealed that the physical environment significantly influenced trust and satisfaction in personalised service encounters. Service contact personnel's friendliness and knowledge strongly influenced relationship quality, and both trust and satisfaction significantly influenced loyalty to the service provider, with variations observed for high-end and low-end service providers.

Darian et al (2001) investigated the impact of selected salesperson service attributes on consumer patronage intentions in a consumer electronics store setting. The study used conjoint analysis to measure consumer priorities. Results highlighted that a salesperson's respect, knowledge, and responsiveness were crucial attributes. Three service levels revealed a greater impact difference between the lowest and middle levels. This suggests that retailers need not offer the best service levels but must avoid poor service levels.

Oly (2007) examined the impact of supplier-customer relationship management on customer loyalty in the banking industry in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. The study focused on relationship marketing elements—commitment, competence, communication, and conflict handling—and their direct and indirect associations with customer loyalty, mediated by trust and relationship quality. A questionnaire was administered to 220 bank customers using the bank intercept technique. Results showed direct and indirect associations between relationship marketing strategies and customer loyalty. Trust and relationship quality also directly influenced loyalty.

Simons (2016) conducted a study assessing the mediating effect of ICT adoption on the relationship between customer service and customer patronage in Access Bank. Limited to branches in the Kumasi Metropolis, the study used hierarchical linear multiple regression with 386 questionnaires. Findings indicated the significance of customer service to ICT adoption and the significance of ICT adoption to customer patronage. ICT partially mediated the relationship, emphasising the need for improved customer service content and delivery and leveraging the youthful age of customers for increased ICT adoption.

Khan et al (2022) investigated the impact of customer relationship management on customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction mediating this relationship among small and medium-sized enterprises in Pakistan. Using structured questionnaires, 345 were distributed to top management. AMOS was employed for hypothesis testing. Findings indicate a positive and significant impact of CRM and company reputation on customer loyalty. Additionally, customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship among CRM, company reputation, and customer loyalty. The study suggests building deep trust among company staff to enhance company reputation.

METHODOLOGY

Customer relationship building, product knowledge, and of sales personalisation

The study employed a survey research design. A survey research design is the collection of data for the purpose of testing hypotheses or providing answers to questions about a given subject (Yen, 2005). The population of the study comprised the owners, managers and assistant managers of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis. The choice of using Metropolis was due to the high concentration of bakery factories in the region. The choice of using owners and managers was because individuals that occupy such positions in the company were more predisposed to provide requisite responses to the statements on their marketing strategies and sales performance. The total number of bakeries in the region was 288 as at November, 2023. A census method was therefore adopted. This involved collecting data from all the members of the population. Table I shows the distribution of owners and managers of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis.

Table 1: Distribution of owners and managers of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis

S/N	Location	No of bakeries	Managers/owners
1	Asaba Central,	5	52
2	Okpanam,	6	57
3	Nnebisi	4	55
4	Ibusa,	5	53
5	GRA	4	71
Total		24	288

Primary source of data was utilised in this study and was obtained with the aid of a structured closed-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections. Section A captured demographic characteristics. This enabled the researcher to identify the nature of respondents. Section B captured statements on the variables. This enabled the researcher to collect data on the variables that was studied. The questionnaire was structured on a 5-point Likert scale measurement which was in the order of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), Undecided (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). The questionnaires were administered to the senior staff in each of the selected bakeries after obtaining permission from the required authority to carry out the study.

The questionnaire was validated by the use of content and face validity by experts in marketing. The researcher conducted a pilot survey by administering the questionnaire to 20 bakeries. Cronbach alpha reliability test was used to ascertain the reliability of the results. Table 1 shows the results of the reliability test.

Table 2: Reliability of Results

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha Values
1.	Customer relationship building	4	0.781
2	Product Knowledge	4	0.723

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha Values
3.	Feedback Handling	4	0.754
4	Sales presentation	4	0.711
5	Customer Patronage	4	0.818

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2023

From Table 2 above, it was seen that the Cronbach alpha values for all the items are higher than 0.7 (i.e. greater than 70%) which confirms that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument for the study.

The data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics was used to describe the data and they comprise of frequency distribution tables, percentages and means and standard deviation. The inferential statistics was used to provide an explanation of the nature of relationship existing between the independent and dependent variables. They include correlation and multiple regression analysis. The Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS 22.0 version) software at 0.05 level of significance was utilised in conducting these analyses. The data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

Out of the 288 questionnaires that were administered, 246 were filled and returned. The 246 copies were used for data analysis. Lastly, the findings from the analysis of data were discussed.

Description of Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This contains the different background information of the respondents which includes respondents’ sex, age, educational qualification and selling experience. Table 3 shows the information.

Table 3: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

S/N	Variables	Attributes	Frequency	%
	Gender	Male	140	56.9
		Female	106	43.1
		Total	246	100
	Age	16-25 years	46	18.7
		26-35	103	41.9
		36-45	97	39.4
		46 and above	-	-
		Total	246	100
	Education	SSCE	36	14.6
		NCE/Diploma	127	51.6
		Graduate	83	33.7

S/N	Variables	Attributes	Frequency	%
		Total	246	100.0
	Locality in Asaba	Asaba central	53	21.5
		Okpanam	81	32.9
		Nnebisi	62	25.2
		GRA	50	20.3
		Total	246	100.0

In Table 3, the gender distribution reveals that 140 respondents (56.9%) were male, and 106 (43.1%) were female. This suggests a higher participation of males in the study, indicating greater availability of male respondents for employment in bakery companies compared to females. Regarding age, 46 (18.7%) respondents were 16 to 25 years old, 103 (41.9%) were 26 to 35 years old, and 97 (39.4%) were 36 to 45 years old, with none above 46 years old. The majority being of youthful age suggests they possess the necessary energy for implementing marketing strategies. In terms of education, 36 (14.6%) held SSCE, 127 (51.6%) had NCE/Diploma, and 83 (33.7%) were graduates. The distribution of respondents across Asaba showed 53 (21.5%) from Asaba central 81 (32.9%) from Okpanam, 62 (25.2%) from Nnebisi, and 50 (20.3%) from GRA, indicating adequate coverage of Asaba, Metropolis.

Relationship between Personal Selling Strategy and Customer Patronage

In establishing relationships among different variables, the multiple regression analyses were conducted. The results are shown in Tables 4 below.

Table 4: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.458	1.165		.393	.694
Customer relationship building	1.059	.089	.592	11.839	.000
Product Knowledge	.344	.097	.148	3.550	.000
Feedback Handling	.295	.103	.164	2.870	.004
Sales personalisation	.165	.084	.081	1.948	.046
R = .904 ^a , R ² = .816; Adjusted R ² = .813; F-Statistic = 268.059; F-Statistic (Prob.) = .000 ^b Number of Observation = 245 Dependent Variable: Customer patronage					

Table 3 shows a significant relationship between all personal selling strategy variables and customer patronage. The regression analysis resulted in an R value of 0.904 and an R² value of 0.816. The R value signifies a strong association (0.904) between personal selling strategies and customer patronage. The R-square value (0.816) indicates that the combined variables in the model explain 81.6% of the systematic variation in customer patronage. The F statistic (F = 268.059; p= 0.000) confirms that personal selling strategy significantly predicts customer patronage as a group, with the model capturing 81.6% of the variation, leaving 18.4% unexplained by the variables included.

Hypotheses Testing

The results in Table 3 were used to test the hypotheses one to four

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between customer relationship building and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis. The results show that there was a significant relationship between customer relationship building and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis ($\beta = 1.059$; $p = 0.000$). The t-statistic of 11.839 and p-value less than 5% confirmed the result. Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis. We therefore concluded that there was a significant relationship between product design strategy and customer patronage of the bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between product knowledge and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis. The results show that there was a significant relationship between product design strategy and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis ($\beta = 0.344$; $p = 0.000$). The t-statistic of 3.550 and p-value less than 5% confirmed the result. Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis. We therefore concluded that there was a significant relationship between product knowledge and customer patronage of the bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between feedback handling and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis. The results show that there was a significant relationship between feedback handling and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis ($\beta = 0.295$; $p = 0.004$). The t-statistic of 2.870 and p-value less than 5% confirmed the result. Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis. We therefore concluded that there was a significant relationship between feedback handling and customer patronage of the bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant relationship between sales personalisation and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis. The results show that there was a significant relationship between sales personalisation and customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis ($\beta = 0.165$; $p = 0.046$). The t-statistic of 1.948 and p-value less than 5% confirmed the result. Based on the result, we rejected the null hypothesis. We therefore concluded that there was a significant relationship between sales personalisation and customer patronage of the bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis.

Discussion of Findings

The study's first key finding reveals a positive and significant relationship between customer relationship building and customer patronage ($\beta= 1.059$, $t = 11.839$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This implies that actively fostering and enhancing customer relationships plays a crucial role in influencing customer patronage among bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis. This aligns with Khan et al (2022) indicating the pivotal impact of strong customer relationships on patronage, underlining the enduring importance of customer-centric strategies for businesses in this industry.

The second noteworthy discovery identifies a positive and significant relationship between product knowledge and customer patronage among bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis ($\beta= 1.059$, $t = 11.839$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This implies that a well-informed customer base positively correlates with higher patronage. This aligns with Simons (2016) highlighting the influence of product knowledge on consumer behavior, emphasising the importance of providing accurate and comprehensive information to customers in the bakery industry.

Additionally, the study uncovers a positive and significant relationship between feedback handling and customer patronage ($\beta= 0.295$, $t = 2.870$, $p = 0.004 < 0.05$). This suggests that effective management of customer feedback significantly predicts increased patronage among bakery operators in Metropolis. This finding aligns with Oly (2007) emphasising the significance of responsive and constructive feedback handling in building customer trust and loyalty.

Moreover, the study identifies a positive and significant effect of sales personalisation on customer patronage of bakery operators in Asaba Metropolis ($\beta= 0.165$, $t = 1.948$, $p = 0.046 < 0.05$). This implies that tailoring sales approaches to individual customer preferences positively influences patronage. While limited, this aligns with Darian et al (2001) highlighting the impact of personalised sales strategies in various industries, suggesting a potential avenue for enhancing customer patronage in the bakery sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of various factors in influencing customer patronage within the bakery industry in Asaba Metropolis. The positive and significant relationships identified between customer relationship building, product knowledge, feedback handling, and sales personalisation with customer patronage emphasise the multifaceted nature of customer preferences and decision-making in this sector. These results affirm the necessity for bakery operators to invest in robust customer relationship management, ensure comprehensive product knowledge dissemination, handle feedback effectively, and personalise sales strategies to foster sustained customer patronage. The alignment of these findings with existing literature reinforces their validity and emphasises the universal relevance of these factors in driving customer loyalty and engagement.

1. To capitalise on the positive relationship between customer relationship building and patronage, bakery operators should prioritise efforts in establishing and nurturing strong connections with their customers. This involves implementing customer-centric initiatives,

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such as loyalty programs, personalised communication, and continuous engagement to foster lasting relationships. By understanding and addressing customer needs, operators can strengthen the bond with their clientele, thereby positively impacting patronage.

2. Considering the significant association between product knowledge and customer patronage, bakery operators should focus on comprehensive and accessible information dissemination. This involves not only ensuring that staff possesses in-depth knowledge but also implementing strategies to effectively communicate this information to customers. Utilising various channels, such as online platforms and product packaging, can enhance consumer awareness, contribute to better-informed decision-making, and consequently influence patronage positively.
3. Recognising the positive impact of feedback handling on customer patronage, bakery operators should establish efficient feedback handling mechanisms. This involves actively seeking customer feedback, responding promptly, and implementing constructive changes based on customer suggestions. By demonstrating a commitment to customer satisfaction and continuous improvement, operators can enhance customer trust and loyalty, ultimately influencing patronage.
4. Building on the positive effect of sales personalisation on customer patronage, bakery operators should invest in tailoring their sales approaches to individual customer preferences. This can involve leveraging customer data to provide personalised recommendations, exclusive offers, or targeted marketing campaigns. By acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of each customer, operators can create a more meaningful and engaging customer experience, fostering increased patronage over time.

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APPENDIX

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

INSTRUCTION: Please tick (✓) and fill in the necessary information as may be appropriate.

1. Gender: Male []; Female []
2. Age: []; 16-25yrs []; 26-35yrs []; 36 - 45yrs []; 46yrs and above []
3. Locality in Asaba _____

SECTION B: Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement using Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Undecided (UD), Agree (A) and strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	Customer Relationship Building	SD	D	UD	A	SA
4	The bakery staff makes an effort to greet and engage with customers when they visit.					
5	The customers feel valued when the bakery staff remembers their preferences.					
6	The bakery provides information about promotions and special offers, enhancing our connection.					
7	There is a sense of personalized service, making the customers to feel like a valued customer.					
Product Knowledge						
8	The bakery effectively communicates information about the ingredients used in their products.					
9	Customers are well-informed about the nutritional content of the bakery items I purchase.					
10	The bakery staff demonstrates a good understanding of the products they offer.					
11	Clear details about product quality and uniqueness are readily available.					
Feedback Handling						
12	The bakery actively seeks feedback from customers regarding their experiences.					
13	I believe that the bakery addresses customer feedback in a timely and effective manner.					
14	There are clear channels for customers to provide feedback on their experiences.					
15	The bakery takes customer suggestions into account when making improvements.					
Sales Personalisation						
16	The bakery offers customized products based on individual preferences.					
17	I feel that the bakery tailors its services to meet the					

S/N	Customer Relationship Building	SD	D	UD	A	SA
	customers' specific needs.					
18	Personalized recommendations are provided to enhance customer shopping experience.					
19	The bakery understands and caters to customers unique preferences in their offerings.					
Customer patronage						
20	Customers revisit the bakery due to positive customer relationships.					
21	A good understanding of the bakery's products encourages a repeat customer.					
22	Effective feedback handling positively influences customer decision to patronize the bakery.					
23	The bakery's personalized services contribute to the customer loyalty and continued patronage.					

THANK YOU