
SERVICE CONVENIENCE AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF GOVERNMENT OWNED HOSPITALS IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Healthcare service consumers (patients) make the choice of where to receive healthcare. They are very particular about the quality of services they receive. Service convenience is seen to be a great factor which entice and preserve customers. The study therefore, investigated the influence of service convenience on customer patronage of government owned hospitals (GOHs) in Abia State. The adaptation – level theory and the descriptive survey research design were adopted for the study. Three hundred copies of structured questionnaire were conveniently administered to adult patients who accessed the services of the general as well as specialist outpatients departments of the selected GOHs in Abia State. Frequency tables, simple percentages, and Kendal taub correlation were used to analyze data collected. The result revealed a positive significant relationship between service convenience and customer patronage of GOH in Abia State. Based on the result, we conclude that patients are satisfied with the services provided by the GOHs in Abia State. We therefore recommend, when hiring health personnel, managers should screen for knowledge competence and professional attitude.*

KEYWORDS: Service convenience, customer patronage, ease of access, ease of transaction.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of every business is to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction by providing client with value-added transaction through positive customer interactions. This indicates how successful a service provider can be in terms of quality service delivery, and customer patronage. Socio-economic changes, technological development, and competition in the business environment as well as rise in income play a role in increasing consumer demand for convenience. The ability for a service provider to deliver quality service in the manner as desired by the customer is considered an essential strategy for success and survival in today's competition.

Nowadays, consumers are looking for easy and quick services in this fast growing world. They seek goods and services that can save them time and efforts. Consumer's interest to save time, and effort, is a phenomenon that encourages the growth of convenience (ease or comfort) of goods and services. Service providers therefore, need to strategize and focus on those services that offer consumers convenience and speed. This is as a result of its effect on the firm's sustainability and profitability.

Services are delivered with recognition that consumer's experience is formed across all moments of contact with the firm (Sousa and Voss, 2006). Companies and service providers find out that the competitive battleground lies in staging experiences. They realize that

customer's patronage comes with repeatable, memorable experiences that match their wants and needs. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), "business success will be bestowed upon companies who are able to embrace and deliver compelling and emotionally engaging customer experience-everyday, for all customers, every time". Therefore, as patients behave like consumers, healthcare providers need to provide high level of personalized services or risk losing business to the competition. This is due to the fact that consumers rely heavily on personal recommendations when it comes to healthcare choices.

The service industry differs greatly among nations. In Nigeria for instance, especially in Abia State, services are delivered through hospitals. The hospital can be government-owned or private-owned. The service world expectations are well defined by service marketers as "meeting or exceeding customers' expectations" (Kong, 1996). Expectations role in consumer's evaluation of services has been widely acknowledged in the service quality literature (Bolton & James, 1991; Tse & Wilton, 1988). There is an intense competition in the service industry, and it is generally believed that the strategy to maintain a competitive advantage lies in continuous delivery of quality services to customers. It is therefore, important for service managers to understand and manage these expectations in order to satisfy clients. Like in the banking and travel industries, healthcare industry has adopted basic customer - oriented improvement as looking up physicians in a network, checking claims, making payments or booking appointments online (Amir, Hadi, Ebrahim & Hossen, 2014). Though, there is need to push beyond transaction to actual care delivery. They now realize that ease of use and ease of transaction are of essence in service delivery (e. g. purchasing drugs and /or choosing a doctor).

Convenience is acknowledged to be increasingly important to consumers, yet consumer convenience in buying and using services is not well understood. The specific types of convenience have not been established, and no comprehensive analytical framework has been presented in the literature (Berry, Seiders & Grewal, 2002). Service convenience in relation to healthcare service delivery is the patients' evaluation of the service in terms of whether that service met their needs and expectations (Babatunde and Kemi, 2011). Service convenience is simply concerned with providing the best possible medical care to patients. One of the factors that separate a health provider (hospital) from others (other hospitals) in the healthcare industry is its level and quality of services delivery which includes: waiting convenience, access convenience, affordability, high quality care, and transaction convenience. Health service providers' abilities to render quality services to their customers in a manner as desired by them offers a lot of advantages such as increasing loyalties, reducing the need to compete solely on price basis, and increasing new patients base by recommendations.

Customer satisfaction predicts patronage, leading to brand loyalty and new consumers. The patronage by consumers on the services delivered by a given hospital, no doubt is dependent on the level of the satisfaction they so derive from it. Customers determine which hospital(s) meet their quality standards, and ignoring this, leads to them moving toward competing hospitals. For example, when we have a great experience with the health personnel (doctors and nurses) at a particular hospital, we usually want to go back. In this context, the consumers are patients, and the service personnel (doctors, paramedical staff, and nurses) who vary in terms of their intellectual skills, knowledge competence, and professional attitude. However, patient perceptions of the quality of services provided is a key factor in determining the choice

of healthcare facility (Gopal and Bedi, 2014). In other words, patients patronize hospitals based on significant interpersonal experiences they have with the doctors and nurses, and about the quality of services of the hospital.

Studies have been carried out on the service convenience with other construct and practices. For instance Chang, Chen, Hsu, & Kuo, (2010): studied the effects of service convenience on post purchasing behavior. Dai, SalaMI, & King, (2008); investigated the determinants and influences of service convenience in electronic mediated environment: an empirical study of Chinese consumers. Berry, Seiders, & Grewal, (2002); looked at understanding service convenience. It is therefore, evident from the literature that none of the studies shows relationship between service convenience and customer patronage in government owned hospitals. Hence, our point of departure is to investigate the influence of service convenience on customer patronage of government owned hospitals (GOHs) in Abia State.

Statement of Problem

It is the desire of every customer to obtain an efficient, prompt, and convenient service delivery from a service system. Customers decide what services to pursue and what resources to use based on ease of access, ease of use, and ease of transaction in almost all situations. Users of health services want and need simplification, clear and relevant information, and convenience, but worry about the constant difficulties in accessing appropriate health services. Government owned healthcare service delivery system in Abia State is sometimes interrupted by rowdiness of its patients, and randomness of their arrival or service time. This is a scenario where people travel distances for quality service encounter. This situation makes its patients to queue for an orderly service encounter and creates additional lines at the service points (eg. doctors' offices). Patients wait in line to get attention of the health personnel (doctors, nurses, or staff). This inconveniency is applicable in factually every service economy. In the banking industry for instance, customers wait in line to get the attention of the cashiers. Keeping customers requires customer service staff in health centres to be matured and experienced. Jegede, (2014) stated that as a global healthcare delivery, the only way to succeed is to develop an effective global healthcare management system with personnel capable of designing, and implementing transactional business strategies through the use of modern technology. It is in this light that the study investigates the influence of service convenience on customer patronage of government owned hospitals in Abia State.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between service convenience and customer patronage of government owned hospitals in Abia State. The study will specifically:

1. Examine the relationship between ease of access and recommendation of government owned hospitals in Abia State.
2. Determine the relationship between ease of transaction and intention to continue usage (ICU) of government owned hospitals in Abia State.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions to be addressed by this study;

1. What is the relationship between ease of access and recommendation of government owned hospitals in Abia State?

2. To what extent does ease of transaction influence intention to continue usage of government owned hospitals in Abia State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between ease of access and recommendation of government owned hospitals in Abia State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between ease of transaction and intention to continue usage of government owned hospitals in Abia State.

Scope of the study

The study strictly focused on adult patients (≥ 18 years) who accessed services at the general as well as specialist outpatient departments (OPDs) of the selected government-owned hospitals in Abia State between 8:00a.m. and 4:00p.m. on week days. The selected hospitals and OPDs are Abia State University Teaching Hospital, General Hospital, Cottage Hospital, and Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G), Heart-2-heart unit respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of service convenience

In the early marketing literature, the concept of convenience proposed by Copeland (1923) classifies the consumer products into convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods. Convenience goods are taken as the savings in time and efforts that consumers spend in purchasing products rather than as a characteristics or an attribute of product itself. A number of studies have investigated convenience as a motive in the areas of electronic banking, online shopping, and product choice in retail (Woodside and Trappey, 2001). Convenience is generally viewed as one of the most important factors to consumer behavior (Chen, Chang, Hsu & Yang, 2011). Convenience has become an important product benefit for time - constrained consumers and, as such, is increasingly of interest to marketers (Farquhar & Rowley, 2009).

Consumers desire convenience and value for their time (Osuna, 1985; Taylor, 1994; Hui and Tse, 1996; Pruyn & Smidts, 1998). Time-poor consumers are looking for providers offering value that is convenient in terms of search, access, purchase, and use. It has been reported that 52percent of consumers surveyed want to spend less time shopping in the future (Seiders et al., 2000), thereby highlighting the importance of convenience. Service convenience is defined as the judgment made by consumers according to their sense of control over the management, utilization, and conversion of their time and effort in achieving their goals associated with access to and use off the services (Thuy, 2011). A service is therefore viewed as convenient when it fulfils one's expectation.

Study Variables and Research Framework

In this study, service convenience is our predictor variable while customer patronage is our criterion variable. The attributes of these variables are ease of access, ease of transaction, recommendation, and intention to continue usage respectively.

OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

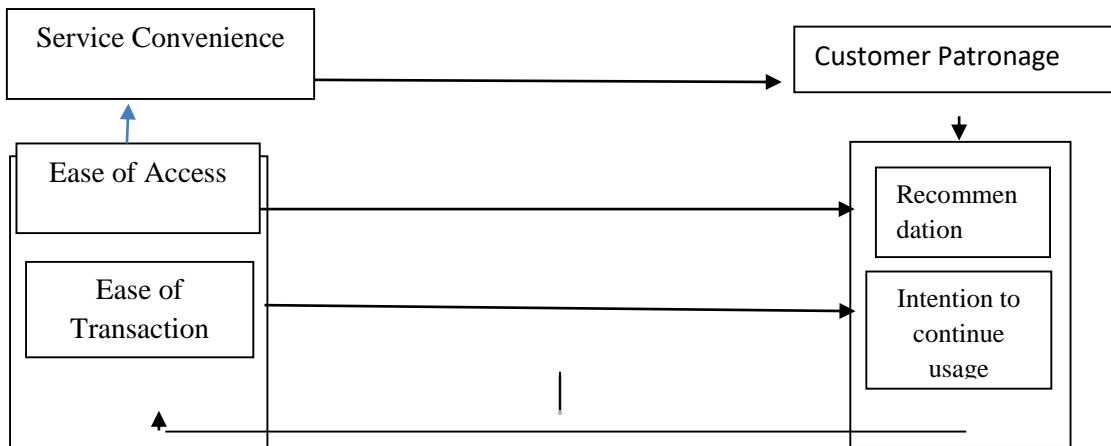


Figure 1: Operationalization of the relationship between service convenience and customer patronage of government owned hospitals in Abia State.

1. **Source:** Desk Research 2020

Dimensions of service convenience

Ease of Access

Ease of access refers to how accessible the service provider is in terms of distance, and/or operating hours (Seiders, Voss, Godfrey & Grewal, 2007). In operational terms, it is the degree to which healthcare services are unrestricted by demographic, geographic, economic or linguistic barriers. It involves consumers' required actions to request services and, if necessary be available to receive it. It is the consumer's ability to reach the health personnel whenever s/he visits, and the ease to locate the service provider. Consumers may initiate service in person (going to the restaurant), remotely (telephoning a take-out order), or through both means.

Ease of Transaction

Ease of transaction is a consumer's perceived time and effort to effectively complete the trade or purchases (Seiders et al., 2002; Berry et al., 2002; Jiang, Yang & Jun, 2012). It is the ability of the patients to handle their expenses. It involves the ease to complete purchases quickly, and without difficulties. When a consumer decides to buy a product, an exchange must occur usually in money for the promise of service performance. Transaction convenience involves flexibility in payment. Consumers do not have to make much an effort to pay for the services. The waiting time literature reveals the negative consequences for companies that make consumer's wait too long to pay (Larson, 1987; Tom and Lucey, 1997).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been a popular topic in marketing practice and academic research. Within the marketing literature, satisfaction is a key post-consumption construct. According to Zeithaml, et al.,(1996), customer satisfaction is based on the balance between customer's expectations and customer's experiences with the product and service. They also indicated when a company was able to lift a customer's experience to a level that exceeds its expectations, then that customer is satisfied. Kotler (2000), defined customer satisfaction as a customer's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing the products' perceived performance in relation to customer's expectations. It is said that customer's satisfaction with a service provider will affect the intention to use its services again, improve word-of-mouth or produce any other loyalty expression (Bravo et al., 2009).

Customer patronage

Patronage refers to impulses, desire, and consideration within the consumer which induce the purchase of goods and services from certain outlets or company (Ozor, 2002). According to the new Webster Dictionary (1994), patronage means the material help and encouragement given by a patron. In this instance, the patron is seen to be a customer in an exchange transaction. Customer patronage therefore, is the approval or support provided by customers with respect to a particular brand. It also means the act of being a regular customer to a shop. In a highly competitive industry such as healthcare, satisfying their customers should be the primary focus of firms that which to sustain patronage (John and Tyas, 1996; Sulek and Hensley, 2004). It is important to note that consumer's decision making is a process consisting of five stages that s/he goes through when deciding on what product to buy, use, or patronize (Grewal & Levy, 2010). In other words, positive evaluations result in patronage, and brand loyalty.

Service convenience and customer patronage of healthcare system

Service convenience is seen to be a great factor which entice and preserve customers. Currently, consumers of products are very particular about the additional elements of the service they receive. Healthcare service consumers are bound to make choice of where to receive healthcare based on the quality of services provided, easy access to the health provider and personnel, out-of-pocket costs, and communication skills and courtesy of health personnel. Handling patients' feedbacks and soliciting their complaints regularly influence patronage behaviour. An interplay of the availability and affordability of drugs, geographical accessibility to the hospital as well as appropriate operating hours are also contributors to choice of care providing facilities (Tembon, 1996; Williams and Jones, 2004). According to Kwashie (2012), customers feel hurt when there is nobody to assist them to resolve their issues. Patients therefore, feel valued when prompt attention is given to their problems, and they become happy and spread good information about the particular hospital.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study is anchored on adaptation-level theory. The theory by Helson (1964) simply posits that "one perceives stimuli only in relation to an adapted standard. The standard is a function of perceptions of the stimuli itself, the context, and psychological and physiological characteristics of the organism. Once created, the adaptation-level serves to sustain subsequent evaluations in that positive and negative deviations will remain in the general vicinity of one's

original position. Only large impact on the adaptation-level will change the final tone of the subject's evaluation".

According to the adaptation-level theory, exposure to earlier stimuli serves as a frame of reference by which later stimuli are judged. In other words, an individual's basis of judgement of a stimulus is based on their prior experiences as well as their recollection of how they perceived similar stimuli in the past. This theory is quite applicable to the present study on service convenience and customer patronage. Every consumer is a psychological being and is influenced by what they perceive to positively impact their buying behaviour. This theory gave us an understanding of how customers respond to services being provided by a service provider.

Empirical review

Kaura, (2015) investigated on service convenience, price and fairness customer loyalty, and the mediating role of customer satisfaction. The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which service quality, perceived price and fairness, and service convenience influenced customer satisfaction and customer loyalty of Indian retail banking sector. It further explored the role of customer satisfaction as a mediating variable between service quality dimensions, perceived price and fairness, service convenience dimensions and customer loyalty. A cross sectional research on 445 retail banking customers through questionnaire is conducted. Population of the study is valued retail urban customers off banks in Rajasthan, India, who's frequently visit the bank premises for transactions, have accounts in at least two banks and have availed of at least one information technology-based services. Responses were analysed using factor and regression analyses. Results revealed that service quality dimensions, perceived price and fairness, and service convenience dimensions have positive impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This study took into account a specific category of retail banking customers. Thus, it limits generalization of results to other banking population. Uchendu, Ilesanmi, & Olumide, (2013) studied the choice of healthcare providing facilities among workers in the South-Western Nigeria. The study aimed to assess the factors influencing choice and satisfaction with health service provider among local government staff. A cross sectional survey of 312 workers in a local government secretariat was conducted with the aid of a questionnaire. Chi square and regression analysis were used to analyze data collected. Results revealed that many utilized public health facility attributing the choice to the lowest cost of services, and competencies of health personnel. Respondents who described the quality with ease of getting care /short waiting time utilized private facility. In conclusion private facilities though costlier, do not appear to be providing better services than public facilities. Therefore, to increase access to healthcare, the cost of services and waiting time are important factors that need to be addressed.

Olise, Okoli & Ekeke, (2015) worked on customer patronage of fast food restaurants: a study of selected customers of fast food in Anambra State. The aim was to examine factors influencing customers' patronage of fast food restaurants: a study of selected customers of fast food in Anambra State, Nigeria. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the linear regression model. Findings revealed that service quality, atmospheric quality, perceived value, environment, consumer demographics, and modernity are significant factors influencing the behavior of customers towards patronizing the fast food restaurants. To attract more patronage, the study recommends that fast food restaurants operating in Anambra State, Nigeria should endeavour to improve their environment, perceived value and service quality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design and adopted the survey research method of gathering information from a representative sample of the population.

This study is carried out in Aba Metropolis .Aba is a city in the southeast of Nigeria and the commercial centre of Abia State. Aba is at the intersection of roads leading to Port-Harcourt, Owerri, Umuahia, Ikot-Ekpene, and Ikot-Abasi. Therefore, Aba is a significant urban settlement and commercial centre in a region that is surrounded by villages and towns.

The study population was defined as adult patients attending the general as well as specialist OPDs of the selected GOHs in Abia State. A structured questionnaire based on the five-point Likert scale questions of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree(A); Undecided (U); Disagree (D);and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used in data collection. A sample size of three hundred (300) respondents was conveniently drawn from our population of interest (100 copies of questionnaire for each of the three selected GOHs). The questionnaire was conveniently administered to adult patients who were available in the respective units/departments of the selected GOHs in Abia State.

In this study, we adopted a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical tools with statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 facilitating the analysis. Frequency tables, means as well as percentages constituted the descriptive statistical tools used to conduct the necessary demographic and univariate analysis. Kendall tau b was employed in analyzing the hypotheses formulated.

Data Analysis, Findings and Discussions

A statistical analysis of the collected questionnaire was computed based on the two hundred and fifty (250) usable responses out of the three hundred copies distributed. The response rate is 83%.

Demographic Profile of the respondents

Table 1: Demographic Information on Gender

	Frequency	Percent
MALE	100	40.0
FEMALE	150	60.0
Total	250	100.0

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

Table 1 above revealed that 100(40%) of the responses were from male patients, while 150(60%) of them were females.

Table 2: Demographic Information on Age

	Frequency	Percent
18-26years	30	12.0
27-35years	60	24.0
36-44years	80	32.0
45-53years	50	20.0
Above 53years	20	12.0
Total	250	100

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

From Table 2, the result indicated that (12%) of the respondents were within 18-26yrs; (24.0%) of the respondents were within 27-35yrs; (32.0%) of the respondents were within 36-44yrs; (20.0%) of the respondents were within 45-53yrs while (12.0%) of them were above 53yrs.

Table 3: Demographic Information on Education

	Frequency	Percent
Primary	50	20.0
Secondary	100	40.0
Tertiary	80	32.0
Vocation/ technical	20	8.0
Total	250	100.0

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

From the table above, (20.0%) of the respondents had primary education; (40.0%) indicated secondary; (32.0%) indicated tertiary while (8.0%) of the respondents indicated vocation /technical.

Table 4: Demographic Information on Occupation

	Frequency	Percent
Job seeker	20	8.0
Self employed	60	24.0
Government worker	100	40.0
Company worker	50	20.0
Employer of labour	20	8.0
Total	250	100

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

From the above table, most of the respondents were government workers 100(40.0%); 50(20.0%) were company workers; 60(24.0%) self-employed; while 20(8.0%) each are job seekers and employers of labour respectively.

Table 5: Demographic Information on visitation periods

	Frequency	Percent
Weekly	30	12.0
Monthly	50	20.0
Yearly	55	22.0
When sick	115	46.0
Total	250	100.0

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

From the above table, 30 (12.0%) of the respondents visit weekly; 50 (20.0%) monthly; 55 (22.0%) yearly; while 115 (46.0%) visit the hospital when they are sick.

Table 6: Percentage response on ease of access

S/N	QUESTIONS	SA/A	%	U	%	D/SD	%	Total
Section A: ease of access								
1.	I was able to get to the hospital quickly	200	80	10	4.0	40	16.0	250
2.	I can easily reach the doctors whenever I visit	220	88	10	4.0	20	8.0	250
3.	I do not spend much a time before being attended to.	190	76.0	25	10.0	35	14	250
4.	The hospital was easy to locate	180	72.0	30	12.0	40	16.0	250
Grand Total		790	79.0	75	7.5	135	13	1000

Table 6 findings above shows the total response of strongly agree (SA), and Agree (A) for the four questionnaire items is 790 (79.0%); 75 (7.5%) indicated Undecided (U); while 135 (13.5%) indicated Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). This is an indication that the respondents have access to the services of GOHs in Abia State.

Table 7: Percentage response on ease of transaction

S/N	QUESTIONS	SA/A	%	U	%	D/SD	%	Total
Ease of Transaction								
5.	I was able to complete my purchases quickly.	200	80.0	22	8.8	28	11.2	250
6.	There is flexibility in payment methods	220	88.0	5	2.0	25	10.0	250
7.	I was able to complete my purchases without difficulty	200	80.0	22	8.8	28	11.2	250
8.	I did not have to make much an effort to pay for the services.	200	80.0	10	4.0	40	16.0	250
Grand Total		820	82.0	59	5.9	121	12.1	1000

Table 7 above shows the total response of strongly agree (SA), and Agree (A) for the four questionnaire items is 82 (82.0%); 59(5.9%) indicated Undecided (U); while 121 (12.1%) indicated Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). This is an indication that the respondents effectively complete their purchases with ease.

Table 8: Percentage response on customer patronage

S/N	QUESTIONS	SA/A	%	U	%	D/SD	%	Total
Customer patronage								
9.	My choice to this hospital is a wise one	200	80.0	10	4.0	40	16.0	250
10.	I encourage friends and family to the services of this hospital	210	84.0	20	8.0	20	8.0	250
11.	I will choose this hospital services whenever I have need for medical interventions	201	80.4	31	12.4	18	7.2	250
12.	I will recommend this hospital services to others	200	80.0	10	4.0	40	16.0	250
Grand Total		811	81.1	71	7.1	188	11.8	1000

Table 8 findings shows the total response of strongly agree (SA), and Agree (A) for the four questionnaire items is 811(81.1%); 71(7.1%) indicated Undecided (U); while 118(11.8%) indicated Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). This is an indication that the respondents are satisfied with the quality of services they received from the government owned hospitals in Abia State.

Hypotheses Testing

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between ease of access and recommendation of government owned hospitals in Abia State.

Table 9: Kendall's taub Tests Output

Correlations

		Ease of Access	Recommendation
Ease of Access	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.953**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	250	250
Recommendation	Correlation Coefficient	.953**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	250	250

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.953$) between ease of access and recommendation of GOHs in Abia State, Nigeria is strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r = 0.91$) indicates that 91% recommendation can be explained by ease of

access. The significant value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between ease of access and recommendation of GOHs in Abia State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between ease of transaction and intention to continue usage of GOHs in Abia State.

Table 10: Kendall's tau Tests Output Correlations

		Ease of Transaction	Intention to continue usage
Ease of Transaction	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.825**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	250	250
Intention to continue usage (ICU)	Correlation Coefficient	.825**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	250	250

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.825$) between ease transaction and intention to continue usage of GOHs in Abia State is strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r = 0.68$) indicates that 68% intention to continue usage can be explained by ease of transaction. The significant value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, ease of transaction significantly influences intentions to continue usage of GOHs in Abia State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Tables 9 and 10 show that the correlation coefficient between ease of access (0.953) and customer patronage; ease of transaction (0.825) is strong and positive. The significant value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypotheses were rejected. This is an indication that healthcare service consumers (patients) are very particular about the additional elements of the service they receive. Patients evaluate a service as convenient when it is useful, effective, beneficial, or fulfils their expectations (Coutler, 2003; Babatunde and Kemi, 2011; Tembon, 1996). Therefore, adequate access to a well organised healthcare system is very important for economic growth and development.

Summary of Findings

1. There is a significant relationship between ease of access and recommendation to GOHs in Abia State.
2. There is a significant relationship between ease of transaction and intention to continue usage of GOHs in Abia State.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the influence of service convenience on customer patronage of government owned hospitals in Abia State. The result revealed that access to adequate healthcare system and ease of transaction predicts customer patronage. We therefore conclude that patients who accessed the services of the general OPD, Obstetrics & Gynaecology OPD, and Heart-2-heart OPD feel valued when prompt attention and individual care were given to their problems, and they become happy, and spread good information about the hospital.

Recommendations

1. When hiring healthcare personnel, managers, should screen for intellectual skills, knowledge competence and professional attitude. These traits are likely to lead to a high level of courtesy, friendliness, empathy and responsiveness in patients -hospital personnel relationships.
2. Healthcare personnel should go for training from time to time on how best to interact and serve their patients. This is to enable them understand their impact on patients assessment of service quality.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Please tick (✓) or fill where appropriate.

Section A**Bio Data of Respondent**

1. Indicate your gender: (a) Male [] (b) female []
2. Indicate your age bracket (a) 18-26 year [] (b) 27-35 year [] (c) 36-44 years [] (d) 45-53 years [] (e) 54 years and above []
3. What is your highest level of education (a) Primary [] (b) Secondary [] (c) Tertiary [] (d) vocational/technical []
4. Which of these appropriately describes your occupation? (a) Job seeker [] (b) Self employed [] (c) Government worker [] (d) Employer of labour [] (e) company worker []
5. How often do you visit the hospital? (a) weekly [] (b) monthly [] (c) daily [] (d) Yearly [] (e) When I fall sick []

Please tick (✓) the option that best describe the situation

SA (Strongly Agreed), A (Agreed), U (Undecided), D(Disagree), SD (Strongly disagreed).

Section B (Service convenience)

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SA
	Ease of Access					
1	I was able to get to the hospital quickly					
2	I can easily reach the doctors whenever I visit					
3	The hospital was easy to locate					
4	I did not spend much a time before being attended to					
	Ease of Transaction					
5	I was able to complete my purchases quickly					
6	There is flexibility in payment method					
7	I was able to complete my purchases without difficulties.					
8	I did not have to make much of an effort to pay for the services					
	Customer patronage					
9	My choice to this hospital is a wise one					
10	I encourage friends and acquaintances to the service of this hospital					
11	I will choose this hospital if I have need for medical intervention.					
12	I will recommend this hospital services to others					