



Customer-centric strategies and operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between customer-centric strategies and operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Objectives of the study were to examine how dimensions of customer-centric strategies such as service personalisation and customer feedback management relate with operational performance in terms of operational efficiency and process reliability. Using a correlational research design, data were collected from 80 respondents across 20 supermarkets using structured questionnaire designed in four response options. In the course of administering the questionnaires, the researcher was able to retrieve 68 copies. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was used for the test of hypotheses via SPSS Version 25.0. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between customer-centric strategies and operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study concluded that customer-centric strategies enhance operational performance. Among others, the study recommends that supermarkets should analyse purchase histories and shopping patterns to personalise product assortment and promotions, to improve demand forecasting, reduce stock-outs and waste, and enhance operational efficiency.

Keywords: Customer-centric strategies, operational performance, service personalization, customer feedback management, supermarkets

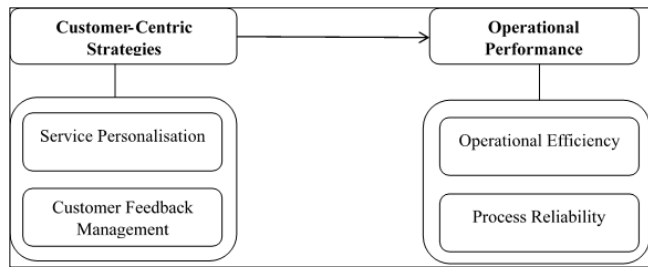
Introduction

The operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, is increasingly dependent on how efficiently and reliably they execute core processes such as product sourcing, stocking, checkout, and after-sales problem resolution. Operational efficiency which entails doing more with fewer resources while minimizing waste, delays, and errors is vital for profitability and competitiveness in Nigeria's challenging retail environment, where rising costs, infrastructure gaps, and intense rivalry already pressure margins (Okoh *et al.*, 2025; ThankGod & Ebiwari, 2024; Agbaeze *et al.*, 2020) ^[1, 18, 25]. Process reliability which pertains to consistently having the right products available, functional facilities, and responsive staff directly shapes customer satisfaction, repeat patronage, and market share (Okoh *et al.*, 2025; ThankGod & Ebiwari, 2024) ^[18, 25].

Evidence from Nigerian and African retail contexts show that supermarkets that fail to maintain clean, safe, well-managed facilities and dependable operations suffer low customer satisfaction and weak business performance (ThankGod & Ebiwari, 2024; Nwinyokpugi & Lah, 2021) ^[16, 25]. Recent studies also indicate that operational performance is strongly linked to customer-oriented practices: supermarkets that deliberately build customer satisfaction through better problem-solving, knowledge sharing, and feedback systems tend to record higher sales growth, profitability, and market share (Okoh *et al.*, 2025) ^[18]. Likewise, research on customer centricity in Nigerian firms finds that integrating customers into processes and aligning internal activities around customer needs

significantly improves operational performance, especially in fast-moving consumer goods and retail settings (Ogunmuyiwa & Agbaje, 2023; Lovemore *et al.*, 2023) ^[12, 17]. Within this logic, service personalisation (tailoring services, product offerings, and interactions to specific customer preferences) and customer feedback management (systematically collecting, analyzing, and acting on complaints, suggestions, and reviews) can become critical levers for boosting both efficiency and reliability. Personalised service helps reduce wasted inventory, mismatched assortments, and service failures by aligning operations with what customers actually demand (Ogunmuyiwa & Agbaje, 2023; Rodríguez-Ardura *et al.*, 2024) ^[17, 22]. Effective feedback systems, in turn, support continuous improvement, enabling supermarkets to detect process bottlenecks, facility issues, and service gaps early and to adjust swiftly, thereby improving process reliability and overall performance (Okoh *et al.*, 2025; Godana *et al.*, 2025; Okon *et al.*, 2024) ^[7, 18, 19].

In Port Harcourt, where studies already highlight the importance and current weaknesses of operational and facility management practices in retail markets (ThankGod & Ebiwari, 2024; Ndamati *et al.*, 2025; Nwinyokpugi & Lah, 2021) ^[15, 16, 25], there is a clear need for empirical investigation into how customer-centric strategies such as service personalisation and feedback management shape the operational efficiency and process reliability of supermarkets. This study is therefore designed to examine the relationship between customer-centric strategies and operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.



Source: Adopted from Tuominen *et al.* (2023) [26]; Čavlin *et al.* (2024) [25]; Latuconsina (2021) [11]; Melo *et al.* (2018) [14].

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework Showing Relationship between Customer-Centric Strategies and Operational Performance

Aim and Objectives

The “aim of this study was to determine the relationship between customer-centric strategies and operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The specific objectives were to:

1. investigate the relationship between service personalisation and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
2. examine the relationship between service personalisation and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
3. investigate the relationship between customer feedback management and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
4. examine the relationship between customer feedback management and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What is the “relationship between service personalisation and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State?”
2. How does service personalisation relate with process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between customer feedback management and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State?
4. How does customer feedback management relate with process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.01.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between service personalisation and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between service personalisation and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between customer feedback management and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between customer feedback management and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Customer-Centric Strategies

Customer-centric strategies refer to an overarching business philosophy in which the customer’s needs, preferences, and

lifetime value are placed at the core of every organizational decision and process. Rather than starting from products or internal efficiencies, a customer-centric firm begins with understanding individual customers through systematic gathering and analysis of customer intelligence, then designs offerings, processes, and communications around that insight (Čavlin *et al.*, 2024; Lamberti, 2013; Inversini *et al.*, 2020) [8, 10, 25]. This philosophy extends beyond frontline marketing to shape corporate culture, structure, metrics, and technology investments, requiring cross-functional integration so that all departments share a unified view of the customer and coordinate to deliver superior, consistent experiences across touchpoints (Čavlin *et al.*, 2024; Lamberti, 2013; Frank *et al.*, 2020; Kreuzer *et al.*, 2020) [6, 9, 10, 25].

Customer-centric strategies typically combine customer orientation (deep understanding of needs) with customer relationship orientation (long-term relationship building), which together drive innovativeness and, through innovation, business growth (Tuominen *et al.*, 2023) [26]. They also reframe the traditional 4Ps of marketing into more customer-focused logics such as personalization, journey facilitation, and inbound value creation, particularly in digital and content marketing contexts (Terho *et al.*, 2022; Inversini *et al.*, 2020) [8, 24]. Implementing such strategies involves redesigning business processes with customer satisfaction and interaction quality as key criteria, using design heuristics and customer journeys to improve interaction-intensive processes (Frank *et al.*, 2020) [6]. Technological capabilities analytics, CRM systems, omnichannel platforms, AI, and hyper-personalization are central enablers, allowing firms to integrate feedback, anticipate needs, and provide tailored experiences at scale (Frank *et al.*, 2020; Al-Shammari, 2023; Lamberti, 2013) [3, 6, 10].

Empirical studies show that customer-centric strategies enhance customer loyalty, retention, and satisfaction by emphasizing product quality, service personalization, effective communication, and holistic experience management (Čavlin *et al.*, 2024; Tuominen *et al.*, 2023) [25, 26]. At a strategic level, customer-centricity is linked to sustainable competitive advantage and even organizational sustainability, as aligning corporate purpose, values, and culture with customer expectations strengthens long-term performance and stakeholder relationships (Frank *et al.*, 2020 [6]; Al-Shammari, 2023; Pardo-Jaramillo *et al.*, 2025) [3, 20]. However, the literature also stresses that customer centricity is not merely a slogan: it requires leadership commitment, changes in metrics and incentives, breaking down organizational silos, and carefully evaluating contextual factors to ensure that a highly customer-centric model is both feasible and profitable in a given environment. To this end, the study elaborated on service personalization and customer feedback management as dimensions of customer-centric strategies.

Service Personalisation: Service personalisation focuses on tailoring products, services, and interactions to meet the specific needs and preferences of individual customers. It involves understanding customer behaviour, expectations, and feedback through data analysis and direct engagement. By personalising services, organisations can deliver more relevant and meaningful customer experiences. This approach enhances customer satisfaction by making customers feel valued and understood (Inversini *et al.*, 2020

[8]; Lamberti, 2013; Frank *et al.*, 2020) [6, 10]. Service personalisation also strengthens customer loyalty and long-term relationships. It enables organisations to respond proactively to changing customer needs. Through personalised communication and service delivery, organisations can differentiate themselves from competitors. Personalisation improves service efficiency by reducing unnecessary or generic offerings. It supports higher customer retention and positive word-of-mouth.

Customer Feedback Management: Customer feedback management is an essential component of customer-centric strategies that involves systematically collecting, analysing, and using customers' opinions and experiences to improve organisational offerings. It provides organisations with valuable insights into customer needs, expectations, and areas of dissatisfaction. By actively listening to feedback, organisations can identify service gaps and opportunities for improvement (Frank *et al.*, 2020; Al-Shammari, 2023) [3, 6]. Effective feedback management enhances service quality and product innovation. It also demonstrates to customers that their voices are valued and respected. Prompt response to feedback helps build trust and credibility with customers. Customer feedback management supports informed decision-making and continuous improvement. It enables organisations to adapt quickly to changing market demands. Through structured feedback systems, organisations can strengthen customer relationships.

Concept of Operational Performance

Operational performance refers to the extent to which an organisation effectively and efficiently carries out its core activities to achieve set goals and deliver value to customers. Operational performance in supermarkets pertains to how efficiently and effectively a store uses its resources and processes to deliver products and services, while controlling costs and achieving strategic goals. It is commonly conceptualized along dimensions such as cost, quality, flexibility, and delivery, capturing how well day-to-day operations support the supermarket's mission and customer requirements (Latuconsina, 2021) [11]. Key indicators include ordering costs, reliability of purchased materials, order cycle time, and the ability to detect and respond to poor supplier performance. Financially, operational performance is reflected in metrics like profitability, liquidity, solvency, and efficiency ratios, which together indicate the overall operational health of supermarket chains (Shivani, 2024; Wanyoike *et al.*, 2021) [23, 27].

In practice, performance depends heavily on supply chain integration, inventory management, and working capital practices: better integration with suppliers and partners, along with robust e-inventory and activity-based costing systems, is associated with higher supermarket performance (Arasa & Achuora, 2020 [4]; Latuconsina, 2021; Wanyoike *et al.*, 2021) [11, 27]. Efficient in-store logistics and replenishment processes, especially for fast-moving and perishable items, are also central, as they improve on-shelf availability, reduce waste, and support sales and customer satisfaction (Reiner *et al.*, 2013; Marques *et al.*, 2022) [13, 21]. Studies using tools like data envelopment analysis show that store format, scale, and logistics design significantly influence operational efficiency and productivity growth in supermarket networks (Reiner *et al.*, 2013 [21]; Melo *et al.*, 2018; Aggelopoulos *et al.*, 2023) [2, 14]. Operational

performance in supermarkets is a multi-dimensional construct linking internal process efficiency, supply chain capabilities, and financial outcomes in a highly competitive retail environment. However, operational efficiency and process reliability were discussed as measured of operational performance.

Operational Efficiency: Operational efficiency focuses on achieving maximum output with minimum input in an organisation. It involves the optimal use of resources such as time, labour, technology, and materials to reduce waste and costs. By streamlining processes and eliminating redundancies, organisations can improve productivity. Operational efficiency enhances the speed and accuracy of service or product delivery. It supports consistent quality while lowering operational expenses (Reiner *et al.*, 2013; Latuconsina, 2021) [11, 21]. Efficient operations enable organisations to respond quickly to customer demands and market changes. It also improves coordination across departments and workflow integration. High operational efficiency contributes to better profitability and competitiveness. It promotes sustainability by minimising resource wastage.

Process Reliability: Process reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of organisational processes in delivering expected outcomes. It ensures that tasks and activities are carried out accurately and according to established standards. Reliable processes minimise errors, delays, and operational disruptions. They enhance the predictability of outputs and service quality. Process reliability supports customer satisfaction by ensuring timely and consistent service delivery (Melo *et al.*, 2018; Aggelopoulos *et al.*, 2023) [2, 14]. It also reduces rework and operational costs associated with failures. Through standardisation and quality control, organisations can strengthen process reliability. Reliable processes improve coordination across units and functions. They enable better planning and resource utilization.

Theoretical Review

The "study theoretically anchored on Service-Profit Chain Theory, propounded by James L. Heskett, W. Earl Sasser Jr., and Leonard A. Schlesinger in 1994. The theory assumes that employee satisfaction drives service quality, which leads to customer satisfaction and loyalty. This loyalty then results in increased profitability and growth. It emphasizes the direct link between internal organisational factors and financial performance (Okoh *et al.*, 2025; Ogunmuyiwa & Agbaje, 2023) [17, 18].

In the context of this study, the theory implies that customer-centric strategies are crucial for enhancing the operational performance of supermarkets. By focusing on employee satisfaction and engagement, supermarkets can improve service quality, which is a core aspect of customer-centric strategies like service personalisation and feedback management. Improved service quality leads to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty, driving repeat business and positive word-of-mouth. This, in turn, motivates supermarkets to optimise operational processes to meet customer expectations consistently, boosting operational efficiency and process reliability (Tuominen *et al.*, 2023; Inversini *et al.*, 2020) [8, 26]. The theory suggests that satisfied customers create a demand for reliable and

efficient services, encouraging supermarkets to streamline workflows and reduce errors. It also highlights the importance of investing in employees who deliver personalised and responsive customer experiences. Therefore, the theory links customer-centric strategies directly to improved operational outcomes and financial performance.

Methodology

The study adopted the correlational research design. The population of the study was 20 supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. A sample size of 80 managers was purposefully drawn from the population. These managers include operations managers, customer service managers, marketing managers and store managers. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Customer-Centric Strategies and Operational Performance Index

(CSOPI). The questionnaire was designed in four-point likert rating scale format with the following response options: Strongly Agreed (SA) 4, Agreed (A) 3, Disagreed (D) 2, and Strongly Disagreed (DS) 1. The instrument was validated by two industrial relations experts and one measurement and evaluation expert. The reliability coefficient of the instrument (0.74) was elicited using Crombach Alpha. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was used for the test of hypotheses. In the course of administering the questionnaires, the researcher was able to retrieve 68 (85%) copies. A bivariate analysis (test of hypothesis) was done using SPSS Version 25 at 0.01 level” of significance.

Results

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between service personalisation and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlation between Service Personalisation and Operational Efficiency

		Service Personalisation	Operational Efficiency
Service Personalisation	Pearson Correlation	1	.749 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	68	68
Operational Efficiency	Pearson Correlation	.749 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	68	68

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

Table 1 above shows r value of 0.749 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.01. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.01, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) which states that there is no significant relationship between service personalisation and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This implies that there is a very strong

significant relationship between service personalisation and operational efficiency supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between service personalisation and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Table 2: Correlation between Service Personalisation and Process Reliability

		Service Personalisation	Process Reliability
Service Personalisation	Pearson Correlation	1	.733 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	68	68
Process Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.733 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	68	68

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

Table 2 above shows r value of 0.733 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.01. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.01, the null hypothesis (Ho₂) which states that there is no significant relationship between service personalisation and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

This implies that there is a strong significant relationship between service personalisation and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between customer feedback management and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Table 3: Correlation between Customer Feedback Management and Operational Efficiency

		Customer Feedback Management	Operational Efficiency
Customer Feedback Management	Pearson Correlation	1	.710 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	68	68
Operational Efficiency	Pearson Correlation	.710 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	68	68

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

Table 3 above shows r value of 0.710 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.01. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.01, the null hypothesis (Ho₃) which states that there is no significant relationship between customer feedback management and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State was rejected and the

alternate hypothesis accepted. This implies that there is a strong significant relationship between customer feedback management and operational efficiency of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between customer feedback management and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Table 4: Correlation between Customer Feedback Management and Process Reliability

		Customer Feedback Management	Process Reliability
Customer Feedback Management	Pearson Correlation	1	.752 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	68	68
Process Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.752 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	68	68

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

Table 4 above shows r value of 0.752 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.01. Since the significance value 0.000 is less than the alpha level of 0.01, the null hypothesis (Ho₄) which states that there is no significant relationship between customer feedback management and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This implies that there is a strong significant relationship between customer feedback management and process reliability of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed significant positive relationships between customer-centric strategies and operational performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. These findings are in line with the view of Ogunmuyiwa and Agbaje (2023) [17] and Čavlin *et al.* (2024) [25] which averred that customer centricity enhances firm operational performance. In lien with the findings, importantly, service personalisation enables supermarkets to understand customers’ purchasing patterns, preferences, and shopping behaviours. This understanding supports better demand forecasting and inventory planning, which reduces overstocking, stock-outs, and wastage, thereby improving operational efficiency.

Personalised promotions and product assortment also streamline shelf management and reduce unnecessary operational activities. In addition, service personalisation helps supermarkets design faster and more convenient service processes, such as targeted checkout options and tailored customer support (Inversini *et al.*, 2020; Al-Shammari, 2023; Kreuzer *et al.*, 2020) [3, 8, 9]. Customer feedback management further strengthens operational performance by providing real-time information on service gaps, process failures, and customer dissatisfaction. Feedback allows supermarkets to identify inefficiencies in checkout systems, inventory handling, and staff responsiveness. By addressing these issues promptly, supermarkets can reduce errors, delays, and service disruptions, thereby improving process reliability. Continuous feedback analysis supports process standardisation and quality improvement. When customer insights are integrated into operational decisions, supermarkets achieve more efficient workflows and

consistent service delivery (Pardo-Jaramillo *et al.*, 2025; Ogunmuyiwa & Agbaje, 2023; Lovemore *et al.*, 2023; ThankGod & Ebiwari, 2024) [12, 17, 20, 25].

Conclusion

Customer-centric strategies enhance the operational performance of supermarkets by aligning operations with customer needs and expectations. Through service personalisation, supermarkets improve demand forecasting, inventory control, and service speed, which increases operational efficiency. Customer feedback management helps identify process gaps and operational inefficiencies. Addressing feedback improves process reliability and reduces errors and delays. Finally, customer-centric strategies support efficient, consistent operations and higher customer satisfaction.

Recommendations

1. Supermarkets should analyse purchase histories and shopping patterns to personalise product assortment and promotions, to improve demand forecasting, reduces stock-outs and waste, and enhance operational efficiency.
2. Management of supermarkets should tailor service processes across options such as targeted checkout lanes, customised loyalty programmes, and location-specific product displays as such would help streamline service delivery, minimise errors, and ensure consistent and reliable operational processes.
3. Supermarkets should use digital platforms such as point-of-sale surveys and mobile feedback tools to quickly capture customer complaints and suggestions, thereby enabling prompt corrective actions to reduce delays, errors, and operational inefficiencies.
4. There should be regular analysing of customer feedback and integrating the insights into operational planning to help identify recurring process failures, improve standard procedures, and strengthen process reliability.

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