The Effect of Reliability on Customer Repeat Patronage in the Hardware Industry

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ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken to investigate the effects of reliability on customer repeat patronage in Zimbabwe in Hardware Retail industry. The target population was 2000 Using the formula developed by Cochran, a target population of 2000 was chosen for this investigation and the sample was 330 which include different artisans such as carpenters, builders, welders, electricians and managers. The study used a cross-sectional survey research design. The total number of questionnaires that were administered by the research to customers was 330. The researcher managed to yield a total of 323 questionnaires successfully filled. This represented an overall response rate of 97.87%. The underpinning philosophy of this research was pragmatism. The research approach was a mixed method. Stratified and simple random sampling methods were adopted. Structured questionnaires and interviews were used as the collection instrument for data from the respondents. The collected data was collated, coded and entered Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The study found that the Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient $(r) = .718$ confirms the findings that reliability and customer repeat patronage have a significant positive relationship. It can be concluded that reliability promotes brand competitiveness in the market. The study recommends that hardware stores should fund extensive training initiatives for staff members that emphasize enhancing assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. Product knowledge, effective problem-solving methods, and active listening skills should all be covered in training. There is need to create a reliable system for gathering and evaluating customer feedback. This could involve social media monitoring, in-store feedback forms, and online surveys. There is need to increase reliability, concentrate on enhancing operational procedures. This entails putting in place reliable inventory management systems to guarantee product availability, expediting checkout processes to cut down on wait times, and creating transparent communication channels to deliver correct information. Hardware stores can foster trust and promote repeat business by continuously fulfilling their commitments and offering trustworthy service.

Keywords: Reliability, Customer repeat patronage. Hardware Industry

BACKGROUND

The hardware industry in Zimbabwe operates within a dynamic and often volatile economic environment, presenting a complex mix of challenges, opportunities, and threats. As the country continues to navigate macroeconomic reforms and infrastructure development, the hardware sector remains a critical player in supporting construction, agriculture, and industrial growth. The hardware industry in Zimbabwe faces significant challenges due to currency instability, limited access to credit, and high transportation costs. Currency fluctuations and partial dollarization complicate pricing strategies, erode consumer purchasing power, and affect import costs. Limited credit also hinders expansion, inventory procurement, and technological upgrades, stifling innovation and market response. Poor infrastructure and high transportation costs further exacerbate operational expenses. Coupled with **strict import regulations**, these factors restrict the availability of essential hardware products and materials, leading to delays and inflated prices.

Zimbabwe's hardware industry is thriving due to infrastructure development, housing projects, and road construction, resulting in increased demand for building materials and tools. The rise of digital platforms and e-commerce presents opportunities for hardware suppliers to expand their product lines and customer base. Additionally, growing interest in eco-friendly products like solar panels and energy-efficient building materials

further boosts the industry. Hardware retailers in Zimbabwe can capitalize on a niche market driven by environmental awareness and government incentives, while local manufacturing can reduce import dependence, create jobs, and stimulate industrial growth.

The hardware industry faces competition from the informal sector, obsolete technology, cybersecurity risks, policy unpredictability, and inconsistent regulatory enforcement. Informal vendors offer lower prices and questionable product quality, distorting market dynamics. Modernization is crucial to stay competitive and avoid falling behind regional and global players. The increasing reliance on digital platforms introduces cybersecurity risks, while policy unpredictability and inconsistent enforcement discourage long-term planning.

Globally, customer repeat patronage is a cornerstone of business sustainability, especially in retail sectors like hardware. Customer repeat patronage is the continued support and purchasing behaviour exhibited by loyal customers, often influenced by personalized marketing, exceptional service, and effective communication strategies. (Lion et al 2024).Ahmed et al. (2017) and Abdul Rehman (2012), reliability directly influences customer satisfaction, which in turn drives repeat patronage. According to Oliver (1999), loyalty is a deeply held commitment to repurchase a preferred product or service consistently despite situational influences. In the hardware industry, reliability is defined as consistent product availability, dependable service delivery and trustworthy brand experience. It is a key determinant of repeat patronage. Major retailers such as Home Depot and Lowe's have demonstrated that loyal customers contribute significantly to revenue and are less price sensitive. According to Business Dasher (2024), the expense of gaining a new client can be five to twenty-five times higher than that of keeping a current customer in the highly competitive global market of today. Furthermore, a recent statistic from Bain and Company (2020) indicates that just a modest increase of 5% in customer retention may result in profit growth between 25% and 95%. This demonstrates how reliability has a much greater effect on profitability than the price of bringing on new clients. In the context of saturated markets, reliability is crucial on customer retention as it is now treated as one of managerial tactic (Chikazhe et al., 2022a, b). Businesses have utilised reliability to increase long-term customer retention as well as profit margins, brand image and customer acquisition. Studies show that service quality, particularly reliability, directly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the hardware sector is growing due to urbanization and infrastructure development. However, repeat patronage is often hindered by supply chain inefficiencies, price volatility, and limited access to credit. A study in Ghana by Nyarko et al. (2016) emphasized that retention, advocacy, and patronage are key indicators of customer loyalty, and that reliability in service delivery enhances repeat purchases. In Nigeria, nostalgia marketing and customer relationship management have been shown to improve repeat patronage in retail sectors, including hardware. CRM practices such as personalized service and frequent communication are increasingly adopted to build trust and reliability. In addition, research in the FMCG sector by Patel (2018) found that brand awareness and product availability, both linked to reliability, significantly affect repeat purchases. These findings are transferable to the hardware industry, where stock consistency and product dependability are key drivers of customer retention

Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC**)**, the hardware industry benefits from regional trade protocols that facilitate movement of goods. However, logistics costs, digital gaps, and inconsistent service standards across member states affect customer retention. A study by Morgan et al. (2000) highlights that relationship marketing and customer retention programs must go beyond short-term incentives and focus on long-term reliability and trust. The SADC region's push toward industrialization encourages businesses to improve customer experience and service quality to remain competitive.

There is little specific research on Zimbabwe's hardware sector. Only research conducted in related fields, like banking and health, offers useful insights. Zimbabwe's hardware sector faces many obstacles that hinder its expansion and long-term viability. The nation's long-standing economic instability is the main obstacle which will cause other companies to be unreliable, affecting repeat business. ZIMSTAT (2022) reports that Zimbabwe's economic instability has led to a drop in investor confidence and consumer spending on non-essential items, making it more difficult for companies to raise capital and turn a profit. The lack of foreign currency is another issue facing Zimbabwe's hardware sector (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2022). Furthermore, Zimbabwe's hardware industry faces human capital issues. Businesses may find it challenging to locate qualified workers due

to the nation's scarcity of skilled workers, especially in technical fields. The lack of skills in Zimbabwe is a significant barrier to the nation's economic growth and maintaining standards which will attract repeat patronage, according to the International Labour Organisation (2022).

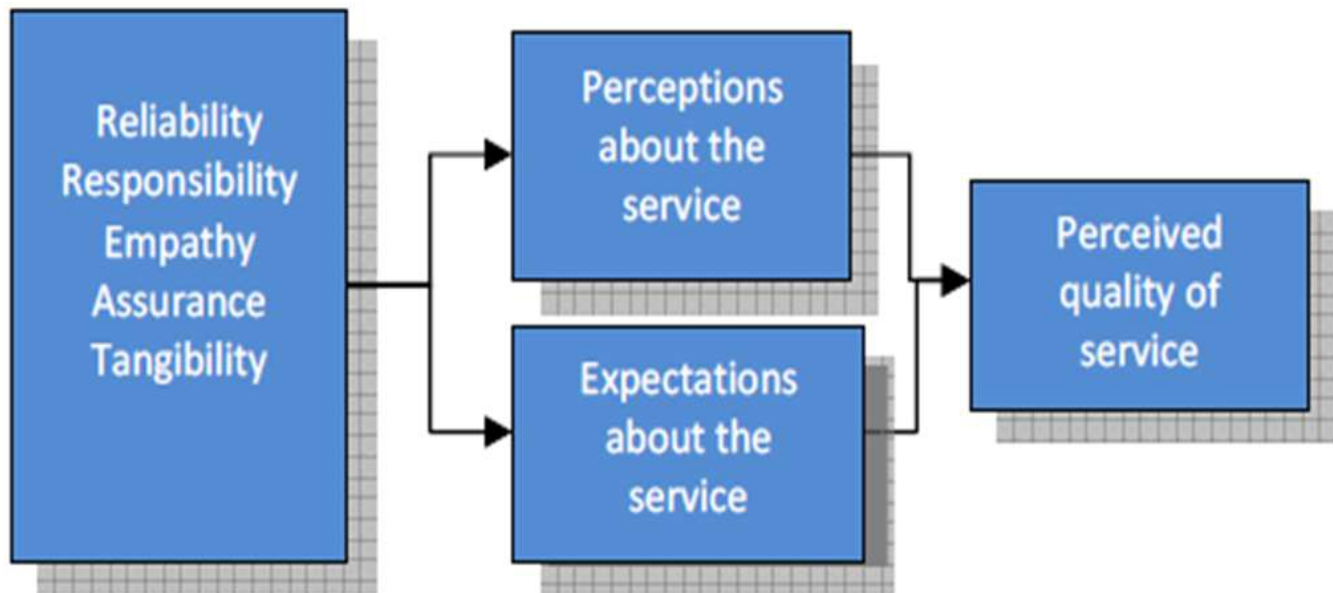**Theoretical Framework of reliability of services Servqual Model**

Figure 2.1. SERVQUAL Model

Source: Parasuraman et al. (1988:56).

As of now, the SERVQUAL model, established by Parasuraman and colleagues in 1988, is the most widely used model for reliability measurement. Just Included in the SERVQUAL paradigm is a confirmation computation technique that subscribers use to identify how much disparity there existed between what service they were expecting to receive and what got delivered to them. These ten qualities tastes, convenience, dependability, concern for customers under fire and competence--constitute the quality of services in the highest sense, Parasuraman et al. 1985). These qualities were then reduced to a total of five dimensions through factor analysis (Reheul, Caneghem and Verbruggen 2019). These five characteristics became tools for evaluating the quality of services.

Reliability

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), it denotes the ability of one to provide accurate, prompt, convenient and dependable service. To this end one must honour agreements, promises made to customers, maintain regularity in providing services. This calls for adherence to agreements, commitments made to clients, and consistency in the provision of services. Dependability is defined as the accurate and consistent delivery of promised services. Consumers prefer to do business with companies or organisations that are trustworthy and fulfil their commitments, particularly when it comes to important support elements and service guarantees. Customers value and prioritise dependability in any business context (Ali et al., 2021).

Responsiveness

According to Ali et al. (2021), it is possible to define it as the capacity of the organisation to rapidly respond to the demands and aspirations of its customers. According to Danese et al. (2013), responsiveness is the extent to which a supply chain can meet changing customer needs and respond to external stimuli in a timely manner. Recent studies emphasize that responsiveness is a driver of customer development, which includes attracting, satisfying, and retaining customers. Widya Paramitha et al. (2023) found that supply chain responsiveness, particularly in logistics and supplier networks has a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty and firm

performance. In the hardware industry, where competition is intense and customer expectations are high, responsiveness enables firms to differentiate themselves, reduce churn, and build brand trust. Moreover, responsiveness contributes to resilience in the face of disruptions. As highlighted by Rincón-Guio et al. (2025), rapid responsiveness is one of the ten critical capabilities that empower manufacturing firms to adapt and thrive in volatile environments.

Tangibles

Tangibles refer to the physical elements of a product or service that can be seen, touched, or measured. In service quality frameworks such as SERVQUAL, tangibles are one of the five key dimensions used to assess customer perceptions. They include physical facilities, equipment, personnel appearance, and communication materials that shape the customer's experience (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The hardware industry heavily relies on tangibles, such as tools, building materials, plumbing fixtures, electrical components, and construction supplies, for product delivery and customer satisfaction. The quality, presentation, and accessibility of these items directly impact customer perceptions and repeat patronage. Recent studies highlight tangibles as strategic assets influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Ngaliman et al. (2019) found that while tangibles may not directly affect satisfaction in isolation, they interact with responsiveness and reliability to shape overall service quality. In the competitive hardware sector, tangibles like well-maintained storefronts and high-quality materials help businesses stand out and contribute to brand perception, encouraging repeat visits and word-of-mouth referrals. As Moon (2013) notes, tangibles serve as psychological anchors that customers associate with trust and professionalism.

Assurance

Assurance is the systematic process of ensuring a product, system, or service performs as intended throughout its lifecycle, particularly in hardware systems, focusing on security, reliability, functionality, and integrity, especially in environments with significant consequences.According to Tehranipoor et al. (2024), hardware assurance involves using quantifiable methods to assess and mitigate vulnerabilities during early design stages, such as Register-Transfer Level (RTL) and gate-level development.

Hardware assurance is crucial in today's interconnected world, serving as a safeguard against technological and operational vulnerabilities. It protects sensitive data and vital infrastructure, preserving operational trust in sectors like finance, healthcare, and defense. A single compromised component can have catastrophic consequences. Hardware assurance also supports adherence to regulatory standards, demonstrating that hardware meets all necessary guidelines to avoid legal liabilities. Meeting data privacy laws and quality control frameworks builds credibility and reduces exposure to risk. It also plays a preventive role in reducing the likelihood of costly recalls and breaches. Proactive testing, certification, and monitoring help identify weaknesses early in the production cycle, mitigating potential financial and operational damage. Hardware assurance is the backbone of digital resilience, supporting trust, compliance, and long-term success in today's interconnected landscape.

Empathy

It entails providing clients with the highest care, attention, and preparation in order to make them feel as though they are "guests" of the company and to ensure that they are always welcome, regardless of where they are or when they visit. Zoysaa et al. (2024) emphasized that empathy supports ethical reasoning and social responsibility in engineering, especially when addressing global challenges. Empathy also contributes to brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. When users feel understood and valued, they are more likely to trust the product and the company behind it. This emotional connection can be a powerful differentiator in competitive hardware markets. Ribeiro et al. (2023) found that empathy-building practices among technical teams led to improved user experience outcomes and greater commitment to human-centered design.

The SERVQUAL model has been implemented in a selection of different organizational settings, even though it was initially developed for use in the marketing sector. The SERVQUAL has evolved as the most extensively

used tool and economical model for evaluating service quality across a variety of service organisations and sectors, including retail (Irfan, Shamsudin, & Hadi, 2016; Kofi & Wilberforce, 2018; Osman & Sentosa, 2018). This is a noteworthy development.

The Effect of Reliability on Customer Repeat Patronage

The reliability of a product, which is crucial to customer retention and repeat business, is a major aspect of quality. Consumers expect accurate and dependable service, and they will not forgive you if you don't deliver. Failure to provide what they expect will result in dissatisfaction and lower customer retention. Reliability is defined by Ali et al. (2021) as the ability of a service provider to offer what he claims consistently, accurately, and correctly. This demand keeping promises to customers, living up to commitments, and meeting service standards without fail.

Repeated patronage is when consumers return to a service provider, year after year, because they've been pleased with the quality of service received. It is a manifestation of customer loyalty and influenced by positive experiences of customer service. Also, accurate and reliable provision of promised service is a component of reliability. Customers are more likely to continue supporting a business that continually provides high-quality services, so dependable services have a positive effect on retention numbers for customer business itself. Customer opinions on a supplier's reliability and kindness have been shown by research to have quite a major impact on customers' intentions to make further purchases (Selnes and Gonhaug 2000). A company's business depends in part on repeat transactions. In addition to promoting sales, repeat purchases can also enhance the company's brand loyalty and build up good business relations. Many factors influence the decision of a customer to revisit a company. Customer perceptions about service quality and loyalty are greatly influenced by store attributes and tactile evidence. According to the findings of research from Perumal and Toh (2022), customer perception and repeat business are influenced by the store environment, product quality, and pricing. Customer satisfaction is a major part of repeat business. Customer satisfaction increases the chances that loyal customers will make repeat orders and become devoted advocates or opinion leaders for a company. Studies have shown the impact of pricing, product quality and service quality on customer satisfaction (Selnes and Gonhaug 2000). The research finds that customers who are satisfied with a company product are likely to use it again and to recommend it to other people.

The consumers' loyalty and shopping experiences are strongly influenced by their emotions. Toh and Perumal (2022) stated that research has proven emotions like delight and excitement which customers feel will affect their satisfaction - and hence whether they keep on using your business or go elsewhere. It also discovered that when customers have a positive shopping experience and reliable service, they are more likely to return for repeat business. Subject: Market and Profit Related Factors A. Customer Loyalty B. A flower business with impressive hardware or good quality materials often sees its profit grow as the result of retention from existing customers who want more of the same. Guaranteeing national customers one hundred percent satisfaction is our aim. Consequently, we have sales throughout China and all of them are successful. The organization must work out a process for providing quite a few services without mistakes and ensure that all customer demands - whether they be handing over goods or money, checks, deposits inquiries etc. - will be performed professionally. In the study, customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the market. Customers who believe that hardware services are good more likely to buy from the company again.

Though some researchers contend that the relationship between reliability and repeat customer patronage is intricate and multifaceted, studies have demonstrated that customers who receive dependable services are more likely to return and engage in repeat business. Other elements that affect consumer behaviour include perceived value and expectations (Dr. Shuchi Sinha 2018). According to Ladhari, Brun, and Morales (2018), dependability has little bearing on repeat business from customers. The authors also questioned the role that dependability plays in the manufacturing industry. In a similar vein, Dabholkar (2000)'s panel data analysis on brand loyalty in Indian clothing retailers revealed conflicting evidence regarding the influence of dependability on repeat business.

While dependability is an essential component of service quality, its effects on repeat business from customers are intricate and multidimensional. Several variables, including perceived values and customer expectations,

affect its effect on repeat business. Therefore, more research on the topic is required in the Harare hardware industry.

Pragmatism philosophy The study used pragmatist philosophy. In the first case, pragmatism places an emphasis on practical outcomes and the application of concepts in real-world contexts, which aligns with the study's goals of examining the effects of reliability tactics on client retention. Understanding the intricate relationships that exist in the hardware industry sector is made easier by this line of thinking, which enables the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Goldkuhl, 2012). Furthermore, pragmatism acknowledges how the environment shapes the study's conclusions. By taking into account the opinions of numerous stakeholders, pragmatism enhances the calibre of data gathered and the relevance of the findings (Muchaendepi et al., 2019). It emphasizes workable solutions that are needed under the particular circumstances of Harare to present practical insights which would lead to the better performance of hardware industry. Furthermore, pragmatism promotes continuous investigation and adjustment-which is particularly called for with respect to the pace of evolution in both the areas of reliability and customer repeat patronage. In fact, pragmatism can actually serve as a path toward the constant discovery of new ways for strategy evaluation and improvement concerning service quality for dynamically arising issues such as assurance and responsiveness amongst consumers.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey research design was employed in the study. Because the study examines how reliability affects customer repeat patronage in the hardware industry, a cross-sectional survey research design was used. The design was quite useful in acquiring a snapshot of any given community which could, in return, allow the researcher to effectively obtain a lot of data from various respondents. To this end, the cross-sectional survey enables one to obtain quantitative information about reliability dimensions in terms of the present status and also regarding their perceived impacts on customer repeat business (Fowler, 2014).Cross-sectional survey enables the study of relationships that may exist among multiple variables. Such correlations can be measured and assessed for their statistical significance in leading towards improvement in reliability by using the structured questionnaires. This method is very helpful for finding the trends and connections in the data that can help with the creation of practical suggestions for professionals working in the hardware industry (Bryman, 2016).The cross-sectional design has the added advantage of allowing a wide variety in the inclusion of individuals, which enhances generalizability. In surveying various hardwares in Harare, therefore, the research can capture a wide range of views and practices that strengthen the findings.

Research approach

The study used a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, the mixed-method approach was used in this study to investigate how reliability affects customer repeat patronage in the hardware sector. This method was especially well-suited for this study since it combined qualitative and quantitative data, which would enhance the research's understanding. Focus groups and in-depth qualitative interviews would enable the study to examine the diverse experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders, while also gathering quantitative data via questionnaires to assess the impact of service reliability on customer repeat patronage.

Furthermore, using a mixed-method approach makes data triangulation easier, which improves the validity and reliability of the results. The effect of reliability on customer repeat patronage in Harare was better understood by combining quantitative data with qualitative observations. The study can investigate in-depth the factors influencing customer repeat patronage in the hardware industry because it can identify patterns and associations that are not readily apparent when using a single method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Furthermore, in a field that is changing quickly, like service reliability, the flexibility of the mixed-methods approach makes it possible to explore novel concepts and themes.

Sample size

Creswell and Creswell (2017) assert that a sample is a smaller group that is taken from the larger population that is available. It indicates the proportion of the population's respondents who were representative of the entire

assemblage. When calculating the sample, a margin of error of 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and a level of significance of 5% are all taken into consideration. Using the formula developed by Cochran, a sample size of two thousand participants was chosen for this investigation.

$$n = N/(1+(No-1/n))$$

Whereas:

n = sample size, at 95% confidence level, 5% level of significance

N = the total target of infinite population

No = desired sample size

$$No = ((1.96)2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)) /(0.05)^2$$

$$= 384.16.0.5.0.5/0.0025$$

$$=384.16$$

$$n = 384.16 /[1+((384.16 -1)/2000)]$$

$$n = 384.16/1.19158$$

$$n = 330$$

Probability sampling refers to a technique that ensures that every component of the population is eligible for selection and that this selection is accompanied with a particular probability. The method of stratified sampling was utilized in this investigation.

Probability sampling's stratification. It is best suited for stratified sampling in an environment like Harare where the goal of the study is to enhance customer retention through better service quality. This entails separating the population into discrete subgroups or strata with comparable traits. The bases could be behaviour, loyalty levels, location, or business size. Therefore, stratified random sampling can help in giving insights into how reliability affect customer repeat patronage because each subgroup is well represented in the sample. Such a detail becomes relevant to comprehend the several opportunities and challenges faced by the various hardwares in the region (Lee et al., 2022). Stratified sampling would ensure its validity and reliability features also for the study. It's potential to any sort of bias would be at minimum, too, as the researcher shall select all relevant strata representative systematically rather than merely relying upon random sampling. Stratified sampling strengthens research output by allowing efficient processing of data and comparison between the strata. Segmentation of the samples into relevant categories allows the researcher to further achieve a more successful exploration in investigating the differences in service quality. This would go a long way in bringing out best practices within the specific strata that could then be diffused into the wider community of Harare. The knowledge from this study would, therefore, consolidate our understanding in reliability in the hardware industry.

FINDINGS

Reliability was found to be a strong predictor of repeat patronage in the hardware industry. Customers are more likely to return to hardware stores that consistently deliver on their promises, provide accurate information, and perform services correctly the first time. This underscores the importance of building a reputation for dependability and trustworthiness. Hardware stores can enhance reliability by implementing robust quality control measures, ensuring accurate inventory management, and empowering employees to resolve customer issues effectively. By consistently meeting or exceeding customer expectations, hardware stores can cultivate repeat patronage and establish a loyal customer base.

Response rate

Table 4.1: Questionnaire Response Rate

Respondents	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate%	Non-Response Rate%
Customer	330	323	98	2%
Totals	330	323	98	2%

Source: Primary data.

The response rate was 98 percent when customers were given questionnaires to fill out at their own pace (Table 4.1). Two percent of the respondents did not return the questionnaires, even though the researcher encouraged them to do so. Insightful analysis was made possible by the high response rate.

Reliability on customer repeat patronage

The study aimed to find how dependability affected hardware industry consumer repeat business. Table 1.0 shows the descriptive statistic results of the respondents.

Table 1.0 Descriptive statistics on reliability on customer repeat patronage

Descriptive Statistics	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Consistent product quality encourages customer repeat patronage in the hardware industry.	323	1	5	3.96	.921
The hardware's reliable delivery services strengthen customer trust and loyalty.	323	2	5	3.71	.931
The hardware's dependable service enhances customers' willingness to return for future purchases.	323	1	5	3.21	.890
Timely fulfillment of promises builds long-term customer relationships.	323	1	5	3.90	.883
The company maintains error-free and up-to-date customer records, kept with confidentiality	323	2	5	3.84	.908
The reliability of hardware products positively impacts customer retention.	323	3		3.74	.910
Valid N (list wise)	323				

Source: SPSS Output Data

The statistics emphasises how important dependability is to encourage hardware industry customer repeat business. Consistent product quality, achieving a score of 3.96, stands out as the most influential factor, demonstrating that customers prioritize dependable and consistent performance from the hardware they purchase. Closely following are timely fulfilment of promises (3.90) and the maintenance of accurate and confidential customer records (3.84), emphasizing the importance of trust and integrity in building strong customer relationships. Reliable delivery services (3.71) and the inherent reliability of the hardware products themselves (3.74) further solidify the significance of dependability in the customer experience. While dependable service (3.21) also contributes, its lower score suggests an area where improvements could further enhance customer loyalty. The findings highlight that a multifaceted approach to reliability, encompassing product performance, service delivery, ethical practices, and promise-keeping, is essential for cultivating lasting

customer relationships and driving repeat business within the competitive hardware market. The results confirm the claims of Selnes and Gonhaug (2000), who assert that consumer satisfaction has been shown by research on pricing, product quality, and service quality. The results of the research indicate that satisfied customers of a company are more likely to use it once more and suggest it to others. Emotions directly affect consumer loyalty and shopping experiences. Another aim of the research was to find the link among the variables.

H2: There is a positive relationship between reliability and customer repeat patronage in retail industry.

The findings of the correlation analysis are displayed on table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Correlation between reliability and customer repeat patronage

Correlations			
		Reliability	Customer Repeat Patronage
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	1	.718**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	323	323
Customer Repeat Patronage	Pearson Correlation	.718**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	323	323
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

 Source: SPSS Output Data

Reliability and customer repeat behaviour show a strong, statistically significant link according the correlation analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient of .718 (p <.001) shows that customer repeat patronage also typically rises as dependability rises and vice versa. This implies that repeat business and customer loyalty are greatly driven by dependability. The significance level of .000 shows that this link is quite improbable to have happened by accident, so reinforcing the conclusion that customer repeat behaviour is much influenced by dependability. The study is predicated on a 323 sample size of 323. This is in line with studies showing that consumer emotions such as pleasure and excitement influence customer satisfaction and repeat business, claim Toh and Perumal (2022). The study also found that consumers who have a good shopping experience and get consistent, reliable service are more likely to return and engage in repeat business.

From interviews it was noted that

"Reliability is the foundation of repeat business in hardware. Customers need to know that the products we sell are durable and perform as expected. If they consistently experience issues with our hardware, they'll quickly lose faith and switch to a more reliable supplier. We prioritize quality control and partner with reputable manufacturers to ensure our products meet the highest standards."

Another respondent added that

"In the hardware industry, reliability extends beyond just the products themselves. It also includes the reliability of our service. We strive to provide accurate information, timely deliveries, and dependable support. When customers can consistently rely on us to meet their needs, they're much more likely to return for future purchases."

It follows that reliability is about building a reputation for consistency. It helps to deliver the same high-quality products and service every time, so customers know exactly what to expect. This consistency builds confidence

and encourages customers to choose us again and again, knowing they can rely on us to deliver on our promises. Studies have shown that consumers who get consistent services are more likely to return and participate in repeat business, even if some analysts claim that the link between dependability and repeat customer patronage is complex and multifarious. Additional factors influencing consumer behaviour are expectations and perceived value. According to Ladhari, Brun, and Morales (2018), dependability has little bearing on repeat business from customers. The authors also questioned the role of dependability in the manufacturing industry.

Empirical studies consistently validate the connection between reliability and customer repeat patronage across various industries. For example, Shariff et al. (2025) demonstrated that in the Nigerian banking sector, prompt service delivery and accurate execution of transactions significantly improved customer satisfaction, which subsequently led to increased repeat patronage. Arlia et al. (2024) found that in the context of online food delivery services, reliability significantly contributed to customer loyalty and the intention to reuse the service, underscoring its critical influence on digital consumer behavior.

Eresia-Eke et al. (2021) explored informal retail environments, focusing on street food vendors in South African townships. Their findings revealed that positive perceptions of reliability were strongly linked to increased repeat patronage, even within resource-limited settings. This underscores the notion that reliability is a universally critical determinant of customer retention, transcending business scale and formality. Ogah et al. (2024) highlighted that effective customer service and responsive complaint resolution are both key dimensions of reliability that plays a significant role in fostering repeat patronage within retail organizations. These insights reinforce the perspective that reliability extends beyond technical competence; it functions as a relational construct that cultivates trust and supports enduring customer engagement.

Researchers, the hardware industry, regulators, and customers are all expected to benefit greatly from this timely study that advances our understanding of the effect of reliability on customer repeat patronage in the hardware industry.

Policy Significance

The study is important from a policy perspective because it can help shape and impact Zimbabwe's laws and regulations pertaining to reliability and customer repeat patronage. Policymakers can use the information gathered from this study to develop incentives, support systems, and training programs that are specifically tailored to the needs of the hardware industry. By aligning policy frameworks with the needs and challenges faced by these businesses, the study can help create a more favourable environment for the adoption of reliability. In the end, this strengthened the hardware industry's overall resilience and sustainability.

Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the reliability knowledge base which already exists with a kind of yardstick to measure it because it relates specifically how people view good comparative practice in developing nations. The inquiry identifies certain factors that affect takes-up and operation of service management systems. For example, there is probably an argument for Harare city to try out things that are successful as well as suitable in practice; it is not enough just doing what looks good on paper. The findings of this study may also offer prospects for further investigation, including comparative analyses among different sectors or regions or the development of more comprehensive theoretical models that consider the challenges of providing high-quality services in environments with limited resources.

Practical significance

Customer repeat patronage and reliability are closely related since they serve as the cornerstone for establishing enduring client relationships and promoting the viability of businesses. As a result of the practical significance of service quality, the hardware business has the potential to acquire a competitive advantage over its rivals by increasing market share through the use of service quality dimensions. Providing the best customer reliability service in the hardware sector increases customer lifetime value, which raises purchase volume and frequency. Customer satisfaction increases the likelihood that they will make additional purchases from the company in the

future and refer it to others, which boosts sales. According to this study, giving staff members the abilities and information necessary to provide dependable, prompt, and passionate service can lead to excellence in reliability. Employees should receive the necessary training to enable them to promptly and effectively address customer concerns. Additionally, Google analytics and ongoing customer feedback measurement can be used to pinpoint customer preferences and study areas that need improvement. Hardware industry should create and implement uniform service standards that meet changing customer demands. Last but not least, technology has made the hardware sector dynamic. To improve reliability and convenience, digital tools like self-service platforms and mobile apps must be integrated with in-store pickup.

Methodological significance

By using quantitative techniques, the study offers empirical support for the link between customer repeat patronage and reliability, enabling data-driven decision-making. Data on reliability is analysed using statistical techniques to produce conclusions that can be applied to larger populations. In order to help businesses, make well-informed decisions, the significance is also utilised to forecast customer repeat patronage outcomes based on reliability metrics.

CONCLUSIONS

The research finds that in the hardware sector customer behaviour is much influenced by repeat patronage. According to the results, customer repeat behaviour is much influenced by dependability. Reliability was found to be a strong predictor of repeat patronage in the hardware industry. Customers are more likely to return to hardware stores that consistently deliver on their promises, provide accurate information, and perform services correctly the first time. This underscores the importance of building a reputation for dependability and trustworthiness. Hardware stores can enhance reliability by implementing robust quality control measures, ensuring accurate inventory management, and empowering employees to resolve customer issues effectively. By consistently meeting or exceeding customer expectations, hardware stores can cultivate repeat patronage and establish a loyal customer base. The study comes to the conclusion that consumers are more likely to visit hardware stores that regularly meet their expectations and offer trustworthy service. The correlation study reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.718 ($p < 0.001$), so underlining the need of keeping high standards of service quality to inspire repeat visits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to increase reliability, concentrate on enhancing operational procedures. This entails putting in place reliable inventory management systems to guarantee product availability, expediting checkout processes to cut down on wait times, and creating transparent communication channels and to deliver correct information.

Hardware stores can foster trust and promote repeat business by continuously fulfilling their commitments and offering trustworthy service. The Hardware industry should also invest in staff development, conducting regular trainings on reliability focusing on service standards. The working environment should have an automated routine processes to reduce human error and ensure consistency.

The study on reliability on customer repeat business has a strategic impact in business. It improves customer confidence and brand reputation of the organization. In addition to that, it reduces customer churn and increases lifetime value. The hardware industry should monitor customer feedbacks and use it to identify reliability gaps. This will enable them to implement quick corrective actions and inform customers of improvements. Finally, the hardwares should offer guarantees to signal dependency and follow ups to reinforce trust and encourage repeat business. This will consequently foster loyalty, advocacy, and word-of-mouth referrals to the organization.

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