

## UNDERSTANDING MOTORIST PREFERENCES FOR FUEL STATIONS IN ADO EKITI METROPOLIS

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**Background:** The increasing competitive markets for petrol station services has made customers more selective on the quality of services they expect, thereby making the service providers more committed to service offerings. **Aims:** This study examined the determinants of patronage in filling stations in Ado Ekiti Metropolis. **Methods:** The study uses a sample size of 316 from the 1500 population of motorist chosen through a convenience sampling. The method of data analysis used was simple regression. **Results:** The study found out that there is a significant and positive relationship between service quality and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis, there is a significant relationship between price and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis, there is a significant relationship between location and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis and there is a significant relationship between trust and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis. **Conclusion:** The study concluded and implies that location, trust, service quality and price contributes to patronage in the highest ranking respectively.

**Keywords:** patronage, trust, price, location and service quality

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## Introduction

A petrol station, fueling station, or service station is a retail business which sells energy and lubricants for vehicles; the most common energy vended is petrol and kerosene. Petrol station is a retail establishment where motor vehicles are refueled, waxed, serviced, and occasionally repaired. Petrol stations should be located not only where they're in fact accessible but where they can be easily located, they should be situated where there will be little peril and traffic as possible. petrol stations vend petrol or diesel, some carry specialty energies similar as thawed petroleum gas (LPG), natural gas, hydrogen, biodiesel, kerosene, or butane while the rest add shops to their primary business, and convenience stores (Ayodele, 2011; Abdul Hamid, 2019).

Consumers make decisions every day concerning different aspects of their daily lives. In the most general terms (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2017), a decision is an option that is chosen from among two or more alternatives. Yet in the context of today's market environment fighting over scarce resources and keeping valuable customers for an extended time period has become simply too difficult (Dutsenwai, 2015). Competition, at the same time, has yielded more power and choice for consumers (PWC, 2017).

In fact, Consumers' elaborate nature is impelled by many factors (personal beliefs, purchasing experiences, marketing plans and communications) and then finally evolves into a decision making process or method (Posavac, 2017).

The market has become saturated with the same type of products and brands, so marketers are turning their attention to a cause for which reason people choose one brand over another (Khan & Rohi 2013). In consequence, most large companies compulsion in great depth the consumer buying decision so as to give answers to questions such as what do people buy, where do they buy it at and how much are they willing to pay (the price), when is the best time for them to make their purchase (timing) and lastly headache or trouble broke out soon after they started using what was ever bought: why? (Kotler, 2016).

Due to the increasing size of the population and greater numbers of people owning cars, there has been an unprecedented demand for petrol which is caused primarily by an increase in both the control- and black market price. As a result, more and more people have felt impelled to enter petrol stations business (Smart, 2012). For this reason, large numbers of oil marketers, having found themselves confronted with such a demand, have begun to build PFSs here and there scarcely weighing its location effects. In Keeble's words (2018), PFSs ought not only to be easy of approach but in a matter demanding more attention it is also called for that they should embrace places where danger potentialities can be both minimized and concentrated into short periods, so they are less pervasive and long-lasting.

One of the many demands created by the growing urban population and the rise in automobiles is for gasoline and diesel (Mohammed, Musa, and Jeb, 2014). The use of cars, bikes, tricycles, and generators has increased due to the fast population growth in the majority of Ekiti State's urban centers. As the most populated area, Ado-Ekiti metropolis' pitiful power situation has made the growing demand for diesel and petroleum products worse, which has resulted in an increase in gas stations (Afolabi, Olajide & Omotayo, 2016).

The demands of consumers have become more varied, complex, and dynamic. Threats and opportunities are presented by these shifts in consumer behavior, which are further supported by developments in the retail industry (Klaus, 2013). Additionally, consumers are now more assertive and pickier. They don't have time for goods and services that don't meet their needs; they want things that do.

Customers are therefore more discerning and resilient these days, and they are so sensitive to subpar service that they frequently leave and never return. To make matters worse, the average unhappy customer tells nine to ten other people about their bad experience (Muciimi and Ngumo, 2014). Therefore, in order to effectively market their goods, gas stations need to assess the variables that affect customer preference (Masese, 2014).

Customers now frequently purchase more than just fuel when they visit a retail fuel station (Netz and Taylor, 2012), and the industry seems to be driven by customer satisfaction. In this sense, convenience stores, car washes, and specialty shops boost a fuel station's market share, and fuel retail stations are increasingly setting themselves apart with the extra services they provide (Netz & Taylor, 2012). Nonetheless, the retail service stations in Ado Ekiti have been going through a difficult period lately. Rising pump prices, rising crude oil prices, the entry of new independent competitors into the market, and an increase in the number of retail service stations are a few of the difficulties (Masese, 2014). As a result, if customers are unhappy, they will quickly move to another gas station.

Furthermore, the general consensus is that most drivers prefer filling stations with reliable fuel pumps, and most drivers also frequent filling stations with consistent service. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence drivers' use of the Ado-Ekiti gas station.

## Theoretical Background

### Customer Patronage

The term "customer patronage" may be used interchangeably in this study because client patronage precedes loyalty (Ogbojafor et al., 2019). Patronage is burned out of a desire to contribute to a company based either on the quality of service or assumed qualities of service (Norizan & Zulhaimi, 2017). Hence, the degree to which a customer patronises the network provider's services reflects how the audience evaluates the organisation's physical environment (Onuoha & Nnenanya, 2017; Sheppard et al., 2018). According to Reichheld and Detrick (2018), customer patronage is the unit of purchase made by a buyer and the sales volume captured by a company.

Egan (2017) argued that consumer patronage is the act of constantly or frequently bargaining for the purchase of a company's product or service. It is commonly identified through purchasing products or services and interaction. Thus, Fogli (2016; 2018) asserted that the purpose of every business organisation is to create value by maintaining a good relationship with customers. Therefore, satisfying them in socio-economic interaction justifies a firm's existence. In the 21st century, petrol filling stations often face stiff competition for customers to increase their market share. The success of these network providers in accomplishing their stated goals depends on their ability to innovate products (services) that suit their target customers' needs and expectations better than their competitors (Swan et al., 2018). The quality of service and distribution approaches should also be enhanced when searching for new ways to attract and keep their customers regularly. Regular customer patronage is vital because a rise in sales volume can eventually and substantially affect the company's profitability (Morgan & Knights, 2014; Cronin & Taylor, 2018).

### Petroleum Products

Petrol otherwise called Gasoline is a byproduct of petroleum or say Crude oil. The word was borrowed from French petrol which in turn came from Latin petroleum (itself taken over directly into English in the 16<sup>th</sup> century). It is also called Benzene in Germany which is derived from a chemical named Benzene Desulphurization can be defined as the extraction of sulphur from fossil fuels which, if it were to remain, would oxidize and react with water to create acid rain. Desulphurization is a chemical process for the removal of sulphur from a material; this involves either the removal of sulphur from a molecule or the removal of sulphur compounds from a mixture such as oil refinery streams. The Nigerian economy was greatly characterized by the dominance of exports and commercial activities. There was no viable industrial sector. According to Eromosele (2017) observed that after almost half a century of oil exploration in Nigeria, the oil industry is earning a mature status in comparison to other industry in the country such that significant progress has been made in terms of oil exploration and sales of crude oil abroad.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey design. Survey as a research technique is questionnaire to gather information from a sample of people (Zikmund, 2003; Pickard, 2007). Fowler (2008) suggested that if one is going to use self-administered questionnaire, one must reconcile oneself to close-ended questions, which can be answered by simply checking a box or circling the proper response from a set provided by the researcher.

## Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of total number of motorist customers of petroleum in Ado Ekiti. The exact population of motorist that patronize this filling station cannot be ascertained. 1500 motorist was chosen conveniently.

## Sample Size

The population of the study is a total of 1500 motorist which is considered too large for this study. The researcher has resolved to draw a sample representative of the whole population. The simplified formula for determining sample size is that of Tao-Yamane (1967). This formula assumes a 95% confidence level and a 5% level of precision. The formula is as stated below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

, where  $n$  is the sample size,  $N$  is the population size, and  $e$  is the level of precision. When the formula is applied, we get the following figures:

$$\frac{1500}{1 + 1023 (0.05)^2} = 316$$

A total of 316 questionnaires was spread and administered to motorist patronizing fuel filling stations in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State.

## Source of Data

This study will use primary data sources by using a structured questionnaire as the research instrument. Questionnaires are centered on the various objective of the study.

## Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

### Research Instruments

The research instrument is a four-point Likert scale structured questionnaire to obtain responses from the respondents. The reason for the use of the scale instrument is because it is to be administered to respondents who are, as a necessity, patronize filling stations in Ado Ekiti. The questionnaire is divided into six sections. Section (A) consists of items to get information on demographic characteristics. Section (B) consists of five items to measure the effect of service quality on motorists' patronage of petrol station. Section (C) consists of five items to measure the effect of price on motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti. Section (D) consists of five items to measure the effect of location on motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado Ekiti. Section (E) consists of five items to measure the effect of trust on motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado Ekiti.

### Reliability of Research Instrument

According to Foxcroft and Roodt (2002) the reliability of a measure refers to the consistency with which it measures whatever it measures. In suooort, Colin and Sulie (2005-2006) state that reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistence result. The Cronbach alpha coefficient indicates that consistency of responses to items in a measure (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2002). Reliability is the ability of a research instrument to consistently measure characteristics of interest over time. It is the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials, (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009).

Table 1: Variable and Measurement Scales

S/N	Variables	Measurement	No of items	Source
1	Service Quality	Affective Service Quality	5	Onyeizugbe (2018)
2	Price	Affective Price	5	Onyeizugbe (2018)
3	Location	Affective Location	5	Onyeizugbe (2018)
4	Trust	Affective Trust	5	Onyeizugbe (2018)

*Authors Compilation, 2024*

## Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed and presented using descriptive and simple regression analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to present the result of the data collected in sections A and B, the data collected in sections C to F.

## Method of Testing Hypotheses

Chi-Square Statistics: A chi-square ( $X^2$ ) statistic is a measure of the difference between the observed and the expected frequencies of the outcomes of a set of events or variables. Chi-square is useful for analyzing the differences in categorical variables, especially those nominals. It can be used to test whether two variables are independent of one another, and it can also be used to test the goodness of fit between an observed distribution and theoretical distribution of frequencies.

## Results

### Service Quality and Motorists' Patronage

To test this hypothesis, the respondents' scores on two variables of service quality and motorist patronage were computed and subjected to simple regression analysis. From Table 1.2, the R (correlation Coefficient) gives a positive value of 0.851; this indicates that there is a very strong and positive relationship between service quality and motorist patronage. The  $R^2$  is a portion of the total variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the variation in the independent variables. From the results obtained,  $R^2$  is equal to 0.724, this implies that service quality brought about 72.4% variance in motorist patronage, this is further proven by the adjusted  $R^2$  that shows the goodness of fit of the model which gives a value of 0.723, implying that when all errors are corrected and adjustments are made, the model can only account for 72.3% by service quality; while the remaining 27.7% are explained by the error term in the model as shown in Table 2. The unstandardized beta co-efficient of service quality is 0.1680 with  $t = 27.129$  and ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ).

From the Table 1.2 discussion in objective one, and by F-Stat.  $p\text{-value} < .05$ , it showed that the null hypothesis, there is no significant positive relationship between service quality and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis is not true therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. Based on this, we accepted the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between service quality and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

Table 2: Service Quality and Motorist Patronage

Variables	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	-0.266	0.088	-3.030	0.003
Service quality	1.680	0.062	27.129	0.000
R	0.851			
R Square	0.724			
Adj. R Square	0.723			
F Stat.	735.990 (0.000)			

*Result Computation, 2024*

## Price and Motorist Patronage

To test this hypothesis, the respondents' scores on two variables of price and motorist patronage were computed and subjected to simple regression analysis. From Table 1.3, the R (correlation Coefficient) gives a positive value of 0.762; this indicates that there is a strong and positive relationship between price and motorist patronage. The  $R^2$  is a portion of the total variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the variation in the independent variables. From the results obtained,  $R^2$  is equal to 0.581, this implies that price brought about 58.1% variance in motorist patronage, this is further proven by the adjusted  $R^2$  that shows the goodness of fit of the model which gives a value of 0.579, implying that when all errors are corrected and adjustments are made, the model can only account for 57.9% by price; while the remaining 42.1% are explained by the error term in the model as shown in Table 3. The unstandardized beta co-efficient of product colour is 0.529 with  $t = 19.689$  and ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ).

From the Table 3 discussion in objective two, and by F-Stat.  $p$ -value  $< .05$ , it showed that the null hypothesis, there is no significant relationship between price and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis is not true therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Based on this, we accepted the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between price and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

Table 3: Price and Motorist Patronage

Variables	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.471	0.085	5.555	0.000
Price	0.529	0.027	19.689	0.000
R	0.762			
R Square	0.581			
Adj. R Square	0.579			
F Stat.	387.654(0.000)			

Results Computation, 2024

There is no significant relationship between location and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

## Location and Motorist Patronage

To test this hypothesis, the respondents' scores on two variables of location and motorist patronage were computed and subjected to simple regression analysis. From Table 1.4, the R (correlation Coefficient) gives a positive value of 0.877; this indicates that there is a very strong and positive relationship between location and motorist patronage of filling stations in Ado Ekiti. The  $R^2$  is a portion of the total variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the variation in the independent variables. From the results obtained,  $R^2$  is equal to 0.769, this implies that location brought about 76.9% variance in motorist patronage of filling station, this is further proven by the adjusted  $R^2$  that shows the goodness of fit of the model which gives a value of 0.769, implying that when all errors are corrected and adjustments are made, the model can only account for 76.9% by consumer purchase decision of petrol; while the remaining 23.1% are explained by the error term in the model as shown in Table 4. The unstandardized beta co-efficient of product convenience is 1.047 with  $t = 30.560$  and ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). From the Table 4.4 discussion in objective three, and by F-Stat.  $p$ -value  $< .05$ , it showed that the null hypothesis, there is no significant relationship between location and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis is not true therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Based on this, we accepted the alternative hypothesis that There is a significant relationship between location and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

Table 4: Location and Motorist Patronage

Variables	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.336	0.060	5.561	0.000
Location	1.047	0.034	30.560	0.000
R	0.877			
R Square	0.769			
Adj. R Square	0.769			
F Stat.	933.888 (0.000)			

Result Computation, 2024



## Trust and Motorist Patronage

To test this hypothesis, the respondents' scores on two variables of trust and motorist patronage were computed and subjected to simple regression analysis. From Table 5, the R (correlation Coefficient) gives a positive value of 0.873; this indicates that there is a very strong and positive relationship between trust and motorist patronage of filling stations. The  $R^2$  is a portion of the total variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the variation in the independent variables. From the results obtained,  $R^2$  is equal to 0.763, this implies that trust brought about 76.3% variance in motorist patronage, this is further proven by the adjusted  $R^2$  that shows the goodness of fit of the model which gives a value of 0.762, implying that when all errors are corrected and adjustments are made, the model can only account for 76.2% by students' enrolment; while the remaining 23.8% are explained by the error term in the model as shown in Table 5.

The unstandardized beta co-efficient of product design is 1.062 with  $t = 30.008$  and ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). From the Table 5 discussion in objective three, and by F-Stat.  $p$ -value  $< .05$ , it showed that the null hypothesis, there is no significant relationship between trust and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis is not true therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Based on this, we accepted the alternative hypothesis that There is a significant relationship between trust and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

Table 5: Trust and Motorist Patronage

Variables	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.229	0.065	3.553	0.000
Trust	1.062	0.035	30.008	0.000
R	0.873			
R Square	0.763			
Adj. R Square	0.762			
F Stat.	900.491(0.000)			

Result Computation, 2024

## Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between service quality and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis, there is a significant relationship between price and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis, there is a significant relationship between location and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis and there is a significant relationship between trust and motorists' patronage of petrol station in Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

This finding aligns with Ribbink, Liljander and Streukens (2014) findings, which revealed that customer trust is a means to buy a product or service. That customer trust has a linear relationship with the customers' patronage. Customer trust boost up when the trust worthy branded item is placed at the trust admirable environment and sells by a trustworthy individual. The finding of significant relationships is also consistent with extant studies of (Guenzi, Johnson & Castaldo, 2019; Ribbink, Liljander, & Streukens, 2014).

According to their findings, customer trust increases the customer patronage. When the customers have trust on services and products of a company then it leads to loyalty which will eventually lead the customer to patronize the organisation's products or services. The study discovered that trust as proxied by staff civility, pump accuracy and quality of product is crucial and important in determining customers' patronage. Rauyruen and Miller (2017) opine that trust has greater impact over patronage, that when the level of trust is greater on the supplier, then loyalty will increase and customer would want to retain the supplier by increasing the level of commitment.

## Implication of Findings

The implication of the findings of the study showed that customers' trust plays a significant role in motorist patronage. The study also established that price of the product, trust, the location of the filling station and trust are determinants of the motorist patronage of filling station.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study it was concluded that location, trust, service quality and price contributes to patronage respectively. All these factors are tools for improving customer repurchase intention with an organisation. Also, after conducting this study and validating it through various data and quantitative analysis, it can be effectively stated that trust is needed in the petrol filling stations, which can results in optimising customer patronage as one of the utmost variable that provide customers' patronage. Finally, the study concluded that there are several determinants of customer patronage, but the role of location and trust is crucial, as evident by the analysis conducted.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommended the following:

- i. Petrol filling stations need to ensure that their staff are civil while dealing with customers in other to encourage customers to revisit the station for further patronage.
- ii. Also, filling stations need to maintain an accurate fuel pump in dispensing fuel to customer as it will build customers' confidence in their filling stations.
- iii. Entrepreneurs and business owners should make sure to make location one of the paramount factors as a determinant of patronage of filling stations

## Limitations of the Study

The small sample size of this study will limit the generalizability of the findings, which means that the result of this study may not be applicable to the larger population. This study was only carried out in a metropolis among all the other local governments in the state. Other factors not accounted for in the study may have also influence the outcome. These variables may create false relationships or mask real ones, affecting the validity of the conclusions.

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