

TOTAL QUALITY MARKETING AND CUSTOMER RETENTION OF BOTTLED WATER FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT

¹Okechukwu Agburum Ph.D. & ²Lebari Blessing Nwikinaka Ph. D

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this was to examine the relationship between Total Quality Marketing and customer retention of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt. The study was anchored on social exchange theory by George Homans 1958. The population of the study comprised of ten (10) bottled water firms in Port Harcourt. The entire population was adopted as the sample size for the study using census technique. 50 copies of structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale of Very Low Extent (VLE); Low Extent (LE); Moderate Extent (ME); High Extent (HE) and Very High Extent (VHE) were used to gather data from the respondents out of which 39 copies were retrieved and used for the analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (tables, frequencies, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics to test of hypotheses using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlational Coefficient (r) at a 0.05 level of significant and SPSS version 23.0. The analysis revealed a significant and positive relationship between Total Quality Marketing and customer retention. The study also revealed that continuous improvement and employee involvement correlated with customer retention. The study therefore concluded that total quality marketing has a positive influence on customer retention of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt. It was recommended among other things that the dimensions of total quality marketing (continuous improvement and employee involvement) used in this study should be adopted by management of bottled water firms in their customer retention strategies.

Author's Affiliation:

^{1,2} Department of Marketing
Faculty of Administration and
Management
Rivers State University
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Keywords:

Total quality Marketing,
Customer Retention, Continuous
Improvement. Employee
Involvement

Corresponding Mail:

¹Okechukwu.agburum2@ust.edu.ng

²blessing.nwikinaka@ust.edu.ng

INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Marketing is a marketing approach of an organization focused on quality, based on the participation of all its members working together to create, deliver and support value for customers, aiming at long term success through customer retention, satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organization and society. The post purchase behaviour of a consumer should depend on quality service also. Total quality marketing TQM functions on the premise that the quality of the products and processes is the responsibility of everyone who is involved with the creation or consumption of the products or services offered by the organization (Smith & Johnson, 2018). In other words, TQM capitalizes on the involvement of management, workforce, suppliers, and even customers, in order to meet or exceed customer expectations. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2020), TQM is an approach to improving the competitiveness, effectiveness and flexibility of an organization for the benefit of customer satisfaction. Excellent service affects the retention of existing customers and inducement of new customers.

Nnko and John (2023) describe customer retention as an obligation by customer to continue doing business or buying products and deal with a specific company or organization for a period without churning. They assert that customer retention refers to a certain point in the customer lifecycle. It is normally measured either monthly, quarterly, or annually depending on operations of a particular business. According to Artha, Zahara, Bhari and Sari (2022), customer retention rate reflects the percentage of customers a business retains relative to the initial number at the start of the cycle upon which the retention rate is being calculated and that it excludes new customer. Customer retention by bottled water firms can enhance customer satisfaction and repeat purchase. Mani (2023) stated that customer retention occurs when a customer keeps on buying the same market offering over a long period of time. Therefore, organizations are continually looking for innovative ways to acquire, increase and retain customers because the cost of losing customers is rising.

Despite the efforts of bottled water firms to attract, retain customers, and to manage supply, demand, and productivity in order to provide high quality product, their customers do not always satisfy and remain loyal. Bottled water firms must go beyond simply satisfying customers: they should focus on overall quality of the product and building relationships which will lead to customer retention (Ganaie & Bhat, 2020). Building these relationships is not an easy task because there is need to understand customer behaviours and to focus on those customers who deliver long term profit to the firm. However, no firm can hold on to all its customers and aim at full customer retention (Egan, 2004). Thus, this present study was necessary to ascertain how total quality marketing can be utilized to enhance customer retention of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Study variable/ Conceptual Framework

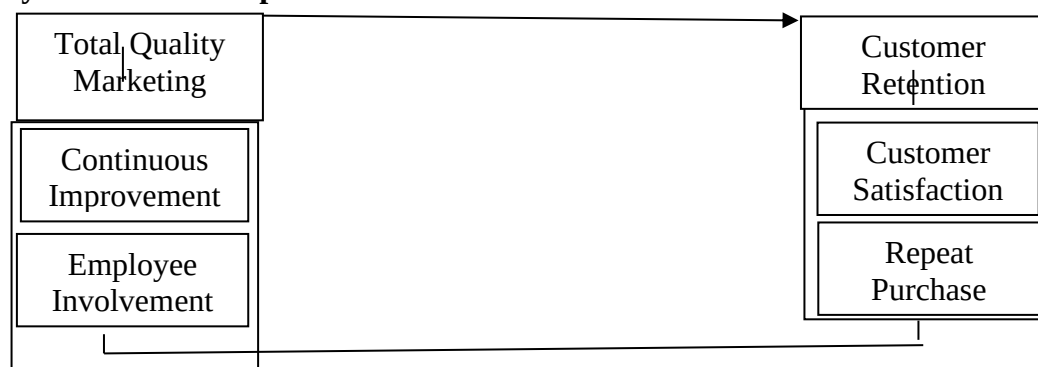


Fig 1.1 Conceptual Framework for Total Quality Marketing and Customer Retention.

Source: dimensions of total quality marketing adopted from Nwokah, Nwokah and Agburum (2024);

Research Hypotheses

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and customer satisfaction of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and repeat purchase of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between employee involvement and customer satisfaction of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between employee involvement and repeat purchase of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is underpinned by the social exchange theory, propounded by George C. Homans (1958) which based its foundation on the norm of reciprocity. This means that as the individual interact overtime, they experience the need to reciprocate the support and assistance of the other person. For instance, if one person helps a friend, this friend will see it as an obligation to reciprocate at sometimes in the near future, by giving a form of assistance that is equal in same degree. As we observe, if the principle of reciprocity is maintained, a trusting and a close relationship will take place. Connecting this theory to the study at hand, it suggests that customers of bottled water firms can only spend their incomes on bottled water which they considered to be of quality. And for the bottled water firms to improve customer retention there is the need to engage in total quality marketing activities which will ensure quality bottled water for customers to enhance their satisfaction and repeat purchases. Based on the above, the social exchange theory was appropriate theory for this present study.

Concept of Total Quality Marketing

Total Quality Marketing (TQM) is a comprehensive approach to marketing that emphasizes the importance of quality in all aspects of marketing activities, with the primary goal of achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nwokah, Nwokah & Agburum 2024). TQM integrates the principles of total quality management into marketing strategies and practices focusing on continuous improvement, customer centricity, and the delivery of high quality products and services. This approach recognizes that marketing is not solely about promoting products or services, but also about ensuring that the entire customer experience meets or exceeds customer expectations. TQM involves understanding customer needs, designing and delivering superior products and services, and fostering strong, long-term relationships with customers through consistent quality and excellence in marketing efforts (Nwokah et al, 2024; Utamil & Indrawati, 2024).

Dimensions of Total Quality Marketing

In this study, the dimensions of TQM adopted are continuous improvement and employee involvement.

Continuous Improvement

Endalanwa (2024) defined continuous improvement as a cyclical, ongoing, and systematic process that identifies performance gaps, generates and analyses data, implements improvement actions, evaluates outcomes, and continuously adjusts processes to improve organizational performance and quality. Ramírez-Zavala et al. (2024) described continuous improvement as a fundamental organizational philosophy that promotes constant progress through the ongoing optimization of processes, products, and services, enabling organizations

to enhance efficiency, quality, and competitiveness. Continuous improvement is an integral part of quality improvement and no one can deny its importance at the present time. There is an urgent demand to generalize a culture of continuous improvement more than ever, ensuring consistent quality and reliability of analytical results, creating high quality products that comply with standard specifications, and also reducing waste in time, personal effort and raw materials (Klein, 2022; Kolif et al., 2018). According to Klein (2022), continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve products, services, or processes through both incremental and breakthrough improvements, with the aim of increasing organizational effectiveness and operational excellence

Employment Involvement

Employee involvement is critical to any organization that differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to work. Cardenas-Cristancho, Monticolo, Muller and Lhoste (2021) opined that employment involvement concerns competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness which are psychological needs, motivate the individual to initiate behavior essential for psychological health and well-being of an individual and if satisfied may lead to optimal function and growth. The basic needs of satisfaction have been found to directly relate to dedication of employees (Jin, Zheng, Gao, Cao & Ni, 2022). Employee involvement has emerged as one of the greatest challenges in today's workplace. With complexities and stringent regulations in many organizations, employee involvement will continue to challenge organizations in the future (Zhang, Feng, Cheng, & He, 2022). This aspect challenges management because involvement is a critical element in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability (Elorza, Garmendia, Kilroy, Van de Voorde, & Van Beurden, 2022; Inegbedion, 2022; Zhang, Feng, Cheng, & He, 2022).

Concept of Customer Retention

Customer retention is concept in strategic marketing that describe organization's ability in keeping existing customers engaged, satisfied, and loyal over time by consistently delivering superior value, quality products, and excellent customer experiences. Rosário and Casaca (2024) defined customer retention as an organization's ability to maintain long-term relationships with customers by consistently meeting their expectations through relationship marketing practices such as trust, commitment, satisfaction, and effective communication. Muratcehajic and Loureiro (2024) described customer retention as the strategic process of developing and implementing initiatives that encourage customers to remain with a company, thereby maximizing customer lifetime value and organizational profitability. Gao, de Haan, Melero-Polo, and Sese (2023) defined customer retention as the continuous ability of a firm to keep customers through positive customer experiences, emotional attachment, and relationship-building strategies that foster repeat patronage.

Customer retention as a concept focuses on building long-term relationships with customers rather than merely acquiring new ones. Customer retention is considered a key determinant of business sustainability because retaining existing customers is generally more cost-effective than attracting new ones, and loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and contribute to higher profitability. From a relationship marketing perspective, customer retention involves implementing strategies that encourage customers to continue purchasing from a company despite competitive alternatives (Kim & Lee, 2022). These strategies may include personalized services, loyalty programs, effective complaint handling, superior customer service, and continuous customer engagement. Organizations that successfully retain customers often enjoy increased customer lifetime value, stronger brand loyalty, reduced marketing costs, and sustainable competitive advantage. Companies also need to be careful about the technological comfort of their customers so that

they will not end up alienating some customers, where service penetration is low, but on the other hand, based innovations will be a major success amongst customers (Tripathy & Jain, 2020).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a post-purchase evaluation that occurs when customers compare their expectations before consumption with their actual experience after using a product. Nassè (2024) defined customer satisfaction as the extent to which a firm's products fulfill or exceed customers' expectations, resulting in positive evaluations that strengthen customer relationships and improve organizational performance. Tedja et al. (2024) described customer satisfaction as customers' overall evaluation of their experiences with firm's products, which is significantly influenced by quality and perceived value. The authors further argued that higher levels of satisfaction increase customers' intentions to maintain long-term relationships with organizations. Kübler and Seggie (2024) viewed customer satisfaction as a multidimensional construct that reflects customers' evaluations of both core and supplementary aspects of products, demonstrating that customer satisfaction remains a significant predictor of customer loyalty, retention, and organizational performance across different industries.

Okan (2024) elucidate that customer satisfaction is a comprehensive psychological response resulting from customers' perceptions of product quality, trust, value, and overall customer experience. It suggested that organizations capable of consistently satisfying customers are more likely to achieve higher customer loyalty, repeat patronage, and sustainable business success. When perceived performance meets or surpasses expectations, customers become satisfied; when it falls below expectations, dissatisfaction occurs. Customer satisfaction is therefore regarded as a critical determinant of customer loyalty, repeat purchase, customer retention, and long-term organizational profitability.

Repeat Purchase

Repeat purchase concerns customer's behavior of buying the same product from the same brand or company on multiple occasions after the initial purchase. Yi et al. (2024) defined repeat purchase as the customer's willingness to repurchase a product from the same seller based on previous satisfactory experiences. Customers who perceive high product quality and value are more inclined to maintain their relationship with a firm through repeated transactions. Therefore, Koll and Plank (2022) firms that successfully encourage repeat purchases are more likely to achieve sustainable revenue growth, lower customer acquisition costs, and stronger competitive advantage. Martínez-Ruiz (2024) described repeat purchase as a behavioral outcome influenced by relationship quality, customer experience, and trust. Thus, he further stated that customers who enjoy positive interactions with a firm are more likely to develop favorable attitudes that translate into repeated buying behavior which aligns with relationship marketing theory, that argues that firms should focus on creating long-term relationships rather than maximizing single transactions.

Kountur, Hidayati and Suwanda (2024) described repeat purchase as customers' continued buying behavior resulting from satisfaction with product quality, pricing, and overall value received. This demonstrates that satisfied customers are more likely to purchase repeatedly because they perceive lower risk and greater confidence in future transactions, which suggests that organizations seeking to improve repeat purchase must continuously enhance customer experiences through quality improvement initiatives, effective service delivery, and customer-oriented marketing strategies. From a strategic marketing perspective, repeat purchase contributes significantly to organizational performance by increasing customer lifetime value, reducing the cost of attracting new customers, generates stable revenue streams, and

strengthens brand loyalty (Koll & Lee, 2022). Generally, repeat purchase represents both a behavioral outcome of customer satisfaction and a strategic objective of relationship marketing. However, organizations that consistently meet or exceed customer expectations through high-quality and excellent products, trust-building, and value creation are more likely to achieve higher levels of repeat purchasing, thereby ensuring long-term profitability and sustainable competitive advantage

Empirical Review

Continuous Improvement and Customer Retention

Ahmed, Ashrafi, Ahammad, Rahman and Sakib (2026) examines the indirect influence of governance on patient safety in private hospitals through teamwork and continuous improvement in Dubai province. The study employed a descriptive survey research design to study a sample size of 251 personnel working in private hospitals who were directly engaged in patient services. Data collected from the respondents were analysed with hypothesized path coefficient were evaluated using smartpls-4 software. The findings showed governance significantly and positively impacts teamwork, continuous improvement and patient safety within private hospitals.

Al-Dhaafri, & Alosani, (2026) examined the collective effect of leadership, continuous improvement and benchmarking on organizational performance. descriptive research design was adopted for the study to analyse a population of 565 police office in Dubai province. A sample of 355 respondents were used for the study. Survey Research questionnaire was used to distribute questions to study respondents and data were collected and analysed with structural equation modelling methods and SMARTPLS. The findings showed a significant effect of leadership, continuous improvement and benching marking on organizational performance.

Employee Involvement and Customer Retention

Orucho (2020) conducted a study on who is king: customer or employee? effect of customer vs. employee focus strategies on customer retention by selected small enterprises in Nakuru Central Business District, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to examine the role of the customer or employee which affect customer retention more. The findings revealed that employee involvement significantly influences customer retention

Anitha (2014) in his study the determinant of employee involvement and their impact on employee performance. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the influence of employee engagement and its impact on employee involvement. The findings shows that employee engagement significantly influences employee productivity and performance.

Osborne et al. (2017) acknowledge that organizations that incorporate strategic employee engagement behaviors experience higher employee productivity.

Lowe (2012) conducted a study on how employee engagement matters for hospital performance. The objective of the study was to evaluate the correlation between employee engagement (involvement) on the performance of hospitals. The findings revealed that employee engagement has a significant influence on the performance of hospitals.

Methodology

The focus of this study investigated the relationship between total quality marketing and customer retention. The population of the study comprised of ten (10) bottled water firms in Port Harcourt. The entire population was adopted as the sample size for the study using census technique. 50 copies of structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale of Very Low Extent (VLE); Low Extent (LE); Moderate Extent (ME); High Extent (HE) and Very High Extent (VHE) were used to gather data from the respondents out of which 39 copies were retrieved

and used for the analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (tables, frequencies, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics to test of hypotheses using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlational Coefficient (r) at a 0.05 level of significant and SPSS version 23.0. The analysis revealed a significant and positive relationship between total quality marketing and customer retention.

Result and Findings

Table 1 Questionnaire Administration and Retrieval

	Number of Cases	Percentage
Copies of questionnaire administered	50	100
Copies retrieved	39	78.0
Not retrieved	11	22.0
Completed and usable copies of questionnaire	39	78.0

Source: Field work (2026).

From table 1, it is observed that 50 copies of questionnaire were administered to 45 respondents 39 copies representing 78.0 percent were retrieved. However, 11 copies representing 22.0 percent were net retrieved. The 39 copies retrieved formed the basis of our analysis.

Demographic Analysis

Here, the outputs of the demographic analysis were presented. These presentations further help the understanding of demographic distribution of the sample.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Less than				
20-25 yrs	3	7.7	7.7	7.7
25 -30yrs	10	25.6	25.6	33.3
30-35yrs	15	38.5	38.5	71.8
35-40yrs	5	12.8	12.8	84.6
40-45 yrs	6	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	39	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data July 2024 and SPSS Output version 23.0

Age Distribution of Respondents

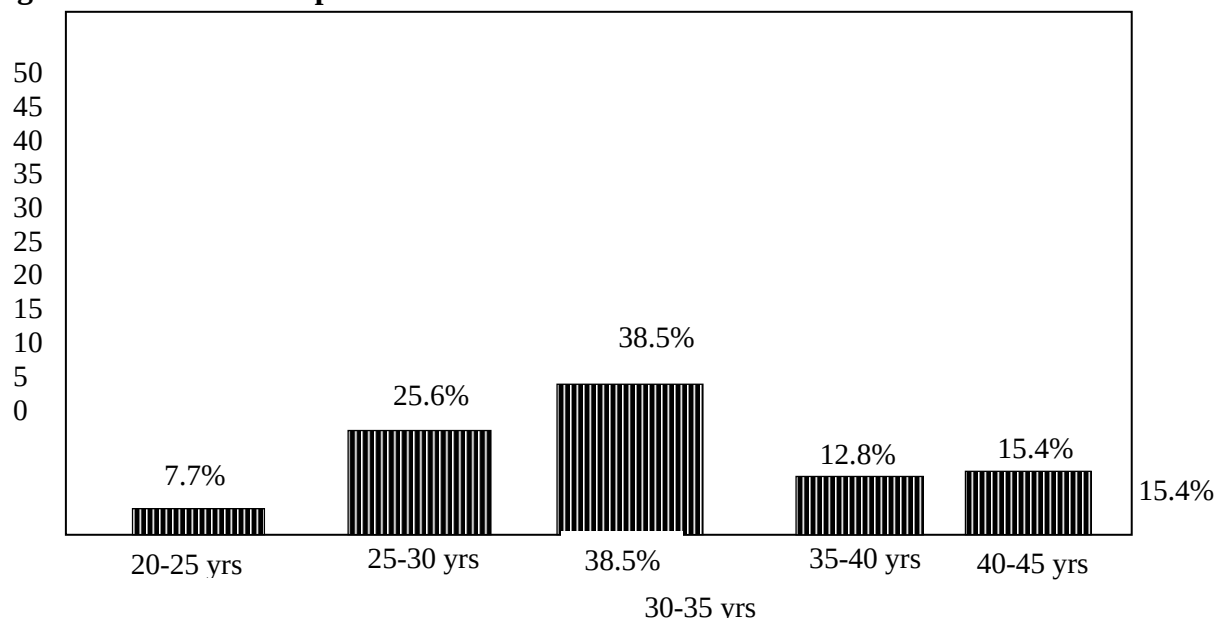


Figure 1 Bar chart showing age distribution of respondents

The data in table 2 and figure 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents. From the results above, 3 respondents representing 7.7 percent are 20-25 years. 10 respondents representing 25.6 percent are from 25yrs to 30 years, 15 respondents representing 38.5 percent are from 30years to 35 years, 5 respondents representing 12.8 percent are from 35-40 years and 6 respondents representing 15.4 percent and 50 years are from 40 – 45 yrs.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Customer Retention

Customer Retention	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
Customer satisfaction	39	0.62	1.14	3.3271	.6654	Moderate
Repeat Purchase	39	1.2	1.14	3.8698	.77396	High
Valid N (Listwise)	39					

Source: Research Data 2026 and SPSS Output version 23.0

Table 3 above, showed the descriptive statistics for the measures of customer retention which customer retention are customer satisfaction and repeat purchase with the mean scores of 3.3271, and 3.8698 respectively.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and customer satisfaction of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 4: Correlation for the relationship between continuous improvement and customer satisfaction

			Continuous improvement	Customer Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Continuous improvement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.708**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	39	39
	Customer Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.708**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	39	39

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

Source: Research Data 2026 and SPSS output version 23.0

The correlation coefficient (r) 0.708 shows positive significant relationship between continuous improvement and customer satisfaction. The relationship is significant at $P0.000 < 0.05$. Based on this, the null hypothesis earlier stated was rejected and the alternate upheld that there is a significant relationship between continuous improvement and customer satisfaction in bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and repeat purchase of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 5: Correlation for the relationship between continuous improvement and repeat purchase

			Continuous Improvement	Repeat Purchase
Spearman's rho	Continuous improvement	Correlation	1.000	.715**
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Repeat purchase	N	39	39
			.715**	
		Correlation	.000	1.000
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		
		N	39	39

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

Source: Research Data 2026 and SPSS output version 23.0

The correlation coefficient (r) 0.715 shows a significant relationship between continuous improvement and repeat purchase. This is significant at $P0.000 < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate upheld that there is a significant relationship between continuous improvement and repeat purchase of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between employee involvement and customer satisfaction of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 6: Correlation for the relationship between employee involvement and customer satisfaction

			Employee Involvement	Customer Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Employee involvement	Correlation	1.000	.719**
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Customer satisfaction	N	39	39
			.719**	
		Correlation	.000	1.000
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)		
		N	39	39

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

Source: Research Data 2026 and SPSS output version 23.0

The correlation coefficient (r) 0.719 shows a significant relationship between employee involvement and customer satisfaction. The relationship is significant at $P0.000 < 0.05$. Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between employee involvement and customer satisfaction of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Hypothesis Four

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between employee involvement and repeat purchase of bottled water firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 7: Correlation for the relationship between employee involvement and repeat purchase

			Employee Involvement	Repeat Purchase
Spearman's rho	Employee Involvement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.743**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	39	39
	Repeat Purchase	Correlation Coefficient	.743**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	39	39

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

Source: Research Data 2026 and SPSS output version 23.0

The correlation coefficient (r) 0.743 shows a positive and significant relationship between employee involvement and repeat purchase. This indicates a strong relationship between the two variables. Based on the above, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant and positive relationship between employee involvement and repeat purchase in bottled water firms in Port Harcourt was accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The result from our analysis showed that continuous improvement had a significant correlation with customer retention. This position is in line with the findings of Ahmed et al.. (2026) who reported that governance significantly and positively impacts teamwork, continuous improvement and patient safety within private hospitals. Al-Dhaafri, & Alosani, (2026) found that leadership, continuous improvement and benching marking significantly influences organizational performance. The third result from our analysis indicated that employee involvement had a significant correlation with customer satisfaction (an antecedent of customer retention). This position is consistent with the report of Orucho (2020) who study revealed that employee involvement significantly influences customer satisfaction an antecedent of customer retention. We find more support for this position from the report of Anitha (2014) who reported that employee involvement significantly influences employee productivity and performance. The fourth analysis revealed that employee involvement had a significant correlation with repeat purchase (an antecedent of customer retention). This position is consistent with the report of Osborne et al. (2017) who reported that employee engagement behaviour experiences higher employee productivity. We find more support for this position from the report of Lowe (2012) who reported that that employee engagement has a significant influence on the performance of hospitals.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study we therefore conclude that total quality management enhances their customer retention in bottle water firms in Port Harcourt.

Recommendation

1. Management should adopt continuous improvement, used in this study as tools in their customer relationship management as it was found to have a significant and positive relationship with customer retention.
2. Management should adopt employee involvement used in this study a stool in their customer retention strategy focus as it was found to have significant and positive correlation with customer retention.

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