

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE DYNAMICS: THE GOAD FOR COMPETITIVENESS OF REAL ESTATE FIRMS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The main aim of the study was to ascertain the relationship between business etiquette dynamics and competitiveness of real estate firms in Port Harcourt. The study employed the human relations theory by Elton Mayo as the baseline theory underlying the study. The study adopted the survey research design, using a cross sectional approach. The targeted population comprised the entire leadership of the fifteen (15) functional and operational real estate firms in Port Harcourt. As a macro study, the researchers adopted a census approach, however, six (6) managers were chosen from branch offices of the fifteen (15) functional and operational real estate firms in Port Harcourt, giving us a sample of ninety (90) managers. Data for the study was collected using structured close-ended questionnaire. Eighty-Six (86) copies of questionnaires was retrieved, cleaned and used for the analysis. Retrieved data was analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order of Correlation Coefficient, with the help of Scientific Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between business etiquette dynamics and competitiveness of real estate firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient at 95% confidence interval. From the foregoing, the study therefore recommended that; the tested attributes of business etiquette dynamics in this study should be adopted by real estate firms in Port Harcourt, so as to drive the competitiveness of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Keywords: *Business Etiquette Dynamics, Competiveness, Emotional Intelligence, Communication Style, Technology Adoption, Patronage, Market Share*

Introduction

Businesses naturally want to grow and expand. Small businesses desire to become bigger, big businesses strive to become bigger brands capable of dominating the market. As a result of these distinct desires, the world of business is dynamic and extremely competitive. Certain sectors are more competitive, especially the ones that literally offer the similar products or services; such as commercial banks. Competition as it were is not a bad thing, as long as it remains healthy and competing businesses continue to behave in an acceptable way towards competitors and suppliers. As a matter of fact; competition encourages individual businesses to innovate and find ways to work more efficiently in order to increase their profit margin, increase market share, retain customers, attract prospective clients, increase patronage, and expand in size, amongst other numerous reasons.

Competitiveness is a multidimensional concept. It means different things to different people depending on the context and level. It can be looked at three different but inter-related levels: Country, Industry and Firm level. Competitiveness originated from the Latin word, *Competere*, which means involvement in a business rivalry for markets. In simple terms, it is the ability to compete. It has become the name of the game today to describe economic strength of a country or industry or firm with respect to its competitors in the global market economy in which goods, services, people, skills and ideas move freely across geographical borders (Murths, 1998).

According to Akere & Nwinyokpugi (2024) firms level of competitiveness can be defined as the ability of firm to design, produce and or market products superior to those offered by competitors, considering the price and non-price qualities. Competitiveness processes are those processes, which help identify the importance and current performance of core processes such as strategic management processes, human resources processes, operations management processes and technology management processes. Competitiveness process can be viewed as a balancing process that complements traditional functional processes such as operations management and human resources management. It enhances the ability of an organization to compete more effectively. In essence, an organization's ability to effectively balance and complement traditional and functional processes such as; operations management and human resources management will definitely become competitive.

The need for etiquette has not disappeared just because we live and do business differently from the way we did 1,000 years ago. In fact, knowing how to treat other people well is more important now than ever. In the past 40 years, fundamental changes have occurred in the makeup of the workforce and the way people do business, and some of the rules have changed forever. By examining how good manners apply to the work world, you benefit yourself and everyone around you. After all, who you are shows in how you behave and in how you appear to others. How you look, talk, walk, sit, stand, and eat; in other words, how you present yourself speaks volumes about who you are and creates the impression you give other people, not only in your personal life, but in your professional life as well.

Although the basics of etiquette remain the same, many business situations now need redefinition and rethinking. How do you promote the right sorts of relationships in the global office? How do you foster general goodwill and success with your peers and managers? How do you handle gender, race, and sexual orientation in the boardroom and in the workplace? What are the new rules for interviewing, supervising, and changing jobs? Are there new rules about dressing and about conversing with colleagues, clients, and bosses? Do new rules apply to business entertainment, conferences, trade shows, and travel?

Think, too, of the enormous impact of computers and the Internet on the business world. Whether you work in the vortex of Silicon Valley or do business far from the high-tech tornado, the Information Age and its technologies have permanently changed most businesses. Do you know the rules for online etiquette; e-mail; and the use of cell phones, laptops, PDAs, and MP3 players? The essential soft skills of good manners are critical to advancing your career. Not only do they give you added credibility, but they also ensure that you are an exceptional representative of your company. Having these skills often means the difference between being pigeonholed in your current position and being offered an attractive promotion or the opportunity to start your own company. You may even find yourself becoming a model for others in your business by setting a standard of respectful behaviour and kindness toward others. People around you will appreciate

your graciousness and follow your lead. Scholars such as Akere & Nwinyokpugi, (2024), Murths (1998) have all studied competitiveness, however, to the best of our knowledge none has studied business etiquette dynamics and competitiveness of real estate firms in Nigeria. That is the gap in literature that this study intends to fill.

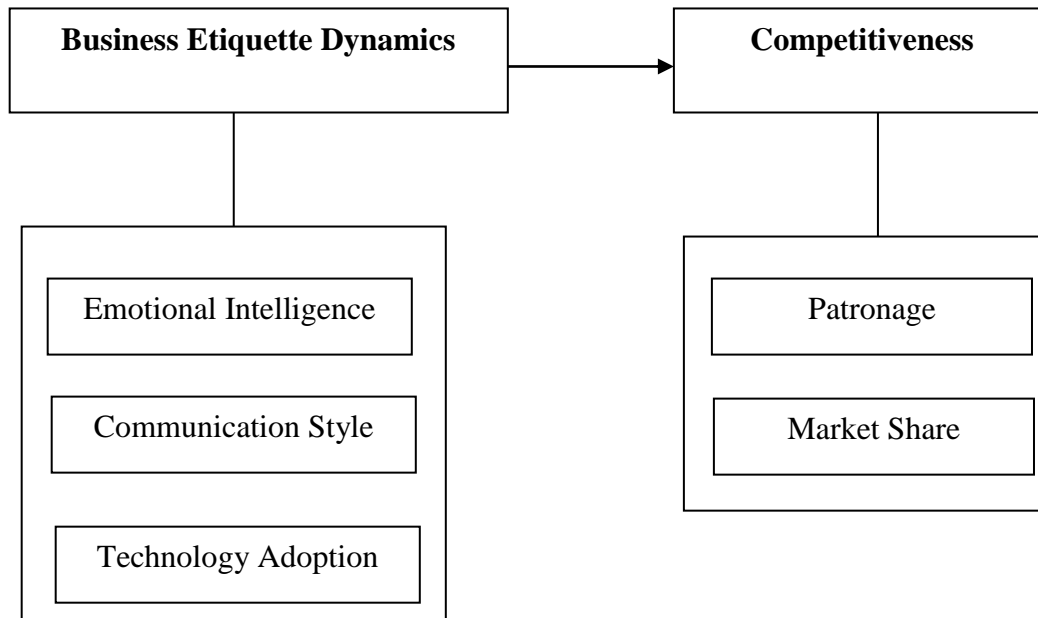


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework for Business Etiquette Dynamics and Competitiveness

Source: Researchers' Desk 2026

Theoretical Framework: Human Relations Theory

This study is anchored on the human relations theory by Elton Mayo. According to Nwinyokpugi & Modey (2019), the human relations theory is a school of thought characterized by the need to prioritize satisfaction among workers. It posited that the informal organization of the workplace structures and boosting employee morale may increase employee productivity. It emphasizes the need for managers to prioritize the interests of their employees, including appreciating and valuing their opinions. It stated that a better working environment will directly improve their productivity and job satisfaction., and that is because; human relations helps foster employee relationships, reduce conflicts, promote job satisfaction, and create a favourable working environment. It also helps promote diversity, with open relations and teamwork integral to increased organizational productivity.

Concept of Business Etiquette Dynamics

Business etiquette is essentially important for creating a harmonious work environment and for representing your company in the best manner possible. Although many people consider their technical skills and intelligence to be their most important job qualifications, many employers consider the ability to get along well with colleagues and clients even more important. Being well mannered means two things above all else; respecting others, and treating people with courtesy and kindness. Whether your company is a highly caffeinated start-up, a small gift boutique, or a large law firm, commercial bank or small scale business good manners at work are important because they emphasize your willingness to control your behaviour for the benefit of others.

The idea of business etiquette may have changed significantly in today's dynamic and connected business environment. In order to build fruitful professional connections and achieve economic success, it is now crucial to comprehend and adjust to changing etiquette conventions due to the rapid growth of technology, growing globalization, and the creation of varied workplace cultures. The expanding significance of cross-cultural communication and the diversifying nature of the global corporate world have had a considerable impact on the evolution of business etiquette in recent years. Business etiquette now encompasses more than just following set rules and procedures; it also takes into considerations cultural quirks, communication preferences, and interpersonal interactions.

Okoro (2013) posited that, managing corporate expansion in the global business landscape requires a strong grasp of cross-cultural etiquette and communication. In-depth knowledge of cultural conventions, beliefs, and practices is necessary for effective cross-cultural communication, as is the capacity to modify one's communication style to fit various cultural settings. This is especially crucial when it comes to international commercial discussions, since cultural variations have a big influence on how things work out (Kumar & Patriotta, 2011).

Yin (2013) asserted that employee engagement, which is influenced by both the degree of employee participation in decision-making processes and the calibre of internal communication, is a crucial component of an organization's financial success. A thorough grasp of the goals, values, and preferences of employees is necessary for effective employee engagement, as is the capacity to establish a welcoming, inclusive work atmosphere that encourages creativity and teamwork.

Craft (2013) stressed that moral judgment-action gaps, in which people know what is right yet act unethically, are a widespread problem in circumstances of unethical activity. In order to put in place systems that encourage employees to act morally more frequently and consistently, behavioural business ethics aims to identify the fundamental causes of both morally sound and immoral decision-making. Due to the emphasis on making moral decisions in business, new theories of moral decision-making have emerged. One such theory is the Neo-Kohlbergian approach, which highlighted the significance of moral judgment and reasoning in moral decision-making (Mora, 2013).

Attributes of Business Etiquette Dynamics

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence otherwise known as emotional quotient is the ability to perceive, use, understand, manage and handle emotions. Your level of emotional intelligence determines how you can successfully coach teams, manage stress, deliver feedback and collaborate with others. Drawing from this cooperative combination of intelligence and emotion, emotional intelligence may be defined as a generic ability in perceiving emotions in oneself and in others, in managing emotions, and in coping effectively in emotional-laden situations (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009).

The concept of emotional intelligence can be traced to John Dewey's conception of social intelligence in 1909: The "ultimate moral motives and forces are nothing more or less than social intelligence; the power of observing and comprehending social situations and social power-trained capacities of control-at work in the service of social interests and aims" (Landy, 2006). Similarly, Thorndike in 1920 described social intelligence as "the ability to manage and understand men and women, boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations" (as cited in (Zeidner et al., 2009).

Thorndike's 1937 social intelligence refers to one's ability to understand and deal with other people and to engage in meaningful, adaptive interaction with them (Thorndike, 1920, as cited in Zeidner et al., 2009). This is thought to be the individual's ability to process and utilize emotional information related to key areas of effective functioning in everyday life (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). It is a combination of factors that is found to be related to motivation (Christie, Jordan, Troth, Lawrence, 2007); impulse control (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001); mood regulation (Gohm) 2003 and the ability to persist in the face of frustration (Yoo & Salovey, 2008). Evidence reveals that emotional intelligence is a predictor of academic (Downey, Mountstephen, Lloyd, Hansen, & Stough, 2008) and professional (Abraham, 2005) success.

Communication Style

Communication styles refer to how individuals express themselves and respond to others in everyday conversations and interactions. It encompasses a person's tone, language choice, nonverbal cues and overall approach to communication. It is a combination of personality traits, cultural influences and learned behaviours, and it significantly impacts the success of personal and professional relationships.

According to toastmasters (2016), communication is a two-way process for reaching mutual understanding through verbal, non-verbal, and written messages. Communication style is defined as the way in which individuals interact with one another and the messages they send, intentionally or not, through their behaviours. Determining your own communication style can help you improve how you share information with others (Alikornwo & Nwinyokpugi, 2025). Learning how to effectively communicate with styles different from your own will enable you to establish effective relationships and create better understanding.

It is important to recognize how effective communication can impact your interactions with others. It can lead to higher efficiency and good morale in the workplace, increased innovation and creative potential in groups, and satisfactory personal and familial relationships. Communication styles are often situational. Be sure to monitor your application of communication styles. Decide if your current style is effective based on feedback and outcomes. If necessary, adjust your behaviour and adopt new styles to fit a situation, team, or person. There is much research and many theories about communication styles and their impacts.

Technology Adoption

These days, information technology (IT) is universally regarded as an essential tool in enhancing the competitiveness of the economy of a country (Adiele & Alikornwo, 2025). It is commonly accepted today that IT has significant effects on the productivity of firms. These effects will only be fully realized if, and when, information technologies (IT) are widely spread and used. It is crucial, therefore, to understand the determinants of IT adoption and the theoretical models that have arisen addressing IT adoption. This element of business etiquette dynamic in this study will be explained further using the diffusion of innovations theory (DOI) popularized by Everett Rogers in his book diffusion of innovations.

Diffusion of innovations (DOI) is a theory of how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures, operating at the individual and firm level. DOI theory sees innovations as being communicated through certain channels over time and within a particular social system (Rogers 1995). Individuals are seen as possessing different degrees of willingness to adopt innovations, and thus it is generally observed that the portion of the population adopting an

innovation is approximately normally distributed over time (Rogers 1995). Breaking this normal distribution into segments leads to the segregation of individuals into the following five categories of individual innovativeness (from earliest to latest adopters); innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards (Rogers 1995). The innovation process in organizations is much more complex. It generally involves a number of individuals, perhaps including both supporters and opponents of the new idea, each of whom plays a role in the innovation-decision.

Nature of Competitiveness

Business competition has become tougher; business people must continuously find ways and strategies to overcome competition in their respective fields (Schymik, 2018). In choosing the business models and concepts to be used, ideally, business people should be able to combine internal factors, particularly resources, and look at the structure of the industry externally. After analyzing the industry structure based on external factors, the company might have maximized all components of internal resources (resources) by creating various advantages. Competitive advantage factors are those that are gained or can be developed/created. Competitive advantage stems from a company's strategic choices to seize market opportunities (Friesenbichler & Reinstaller, 2022). A business strategy, also called competitive strategy, is usually developed at the divisional level, and emphasizes improving the competitive position of a company's products/services in the specific industry/market segment served by the division. The division's business strategy may focus on increasing profits in the production and sale of products and services. Business strategies should integrate various functional activities to achieve divisional goals.

The concept of a company's competitive advantage was developed using the generic strategy proposed in earlier studies. Measurements that show competitive advantage variables are imitability, durability, and ease of matching (Correia, Dias & Teixeira, 2020). Competitive advantage is at the heart of a company's performance in a competitive market. A company's advantage grows from the value or benefits that the company can create for its buyers. If the company can create an advantage over one of these three generic strategies, it may gain a competitive advantage. Competitive advantage can be understood by looking at the company stemming from the many activities that a company undertakes in designing, producing, marketing, delivering, and supporting sales (Farhikhteh et al, 2020). Thus, competitive advantage is a position in which the organization is still working to beat competitors.

Patronage

According to Nwieve & Ateke (2016) firms' crave customers' patronage because patronage is the bedrock of the continued existence and success of a business. Firms are thus always challenged to contrive initiatives that elicit customers' patronage. It has also been established that caring for current customers is key to securing their continued patronage. Consumers make decisions daily. Sometimes less thought is given to the decision making process, nonetheless, every decision is affected by basic rational and emotional states of being. Consumers initiate and conclude purchase based on the perceived value of the products. Thus, patronage is influenced by psychological principles developed to harness an understanding of needs. Customer patronage is a combination of psychological factors that influence purchase behaviour and these factors are considered important by consumers as yardsticks in determining which firm to patronize. It has been measured by various authors in different dimensions, including store traffic flow; willingness, word of mouth, repeat purchase, customer retention and customer referrals, customer satisfaction and referrals. In this study however, we take a one-dimensional view of customer patronage.

Customer patronage has been argued to ensue from several personal and social factors. Studies also show that media, product and brand related factors account for customer patronage.

Market Share

Marketing professionals have been feeling the increasing pressure to justify why companies need marketing. "Researchers in marketing have cautioned that the inability of marketing to demonstrate its contribution to firm performance has weakened its standing within firms" (Gao, 2010). Therefore, measures to evaluate the marketing performance have received much more attentions than ever. Among those financial or non-financial measures, market share has been the one which researchers and business managers focus on the most. The biggest reason why market share got the most attention is that it has been empirically proved that market share can lead to profitability (Bhattacharya et al., 2021).

With the advancement of marketing discipline, "scholars have been developing and evaluating schemes for measuring the performance of marketing activities for the past half century (Clark, 2001). Even though research on marketing performance has been very well established, there is no clear and explicit definition of marketing performance (Gao, 2010). The only agreement that has been reached in the strategic marketing literature is that marketing performance is multidimensional in nature (Gao, 2010). However, there are many different measures that have been utilized in marketing literature and a superior marketing performance may differ between businesses (Vorhies & Morgan, 2003).

METHODS

The study population consisted of all registered and functional real estate firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, while the accessible population for the study comprised fifteen (15) real estate firms in Port Harcourt Nigeria. As a macro study it adopted the entire population (census) since the study's motive was measuring the competitiveness of real estate firms in Port Harcourt. However, six (6) leaders were randomly selected from the fifteen (15) operational real estate firms in Port Harcourt leaving us with a sample of ninety (90). The study utilized structured-close ended questionnaire as a means of generating primary data from the respondents of the study. The validity of the instrument was determined by experts in the field of measurement and evaluation studies. Reliability in this study was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 23. Ninety (90) copies of structured questionnaire were administered to the participants while eighty six (86) copies were retrieved, cleaned and qualified for use. Measures of central tendencies and measures of dispersions were used in analyzing the respondent's demographics. More so, the simple Regression Analysis was used in testing the various hypotheses in other to ascertain the relationship between the predictor variable (Business Etiquette Dynamics) and the criterion variable (Competitiveness).

Data Analysis and Result

To empirically evaluate the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables of this study (including their dimensions and measures), the spearman's rank order of correlation coefficient (RHO) was adopted. As a tool, it is considered to be more flexible and it is not limited or confined to parameters statistical assumption such as applicable in the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient. The analysis was executed using the scientific package for social sciences (SPSS) version 23 software.

We begin by showing evidence of a relationship between the variables.

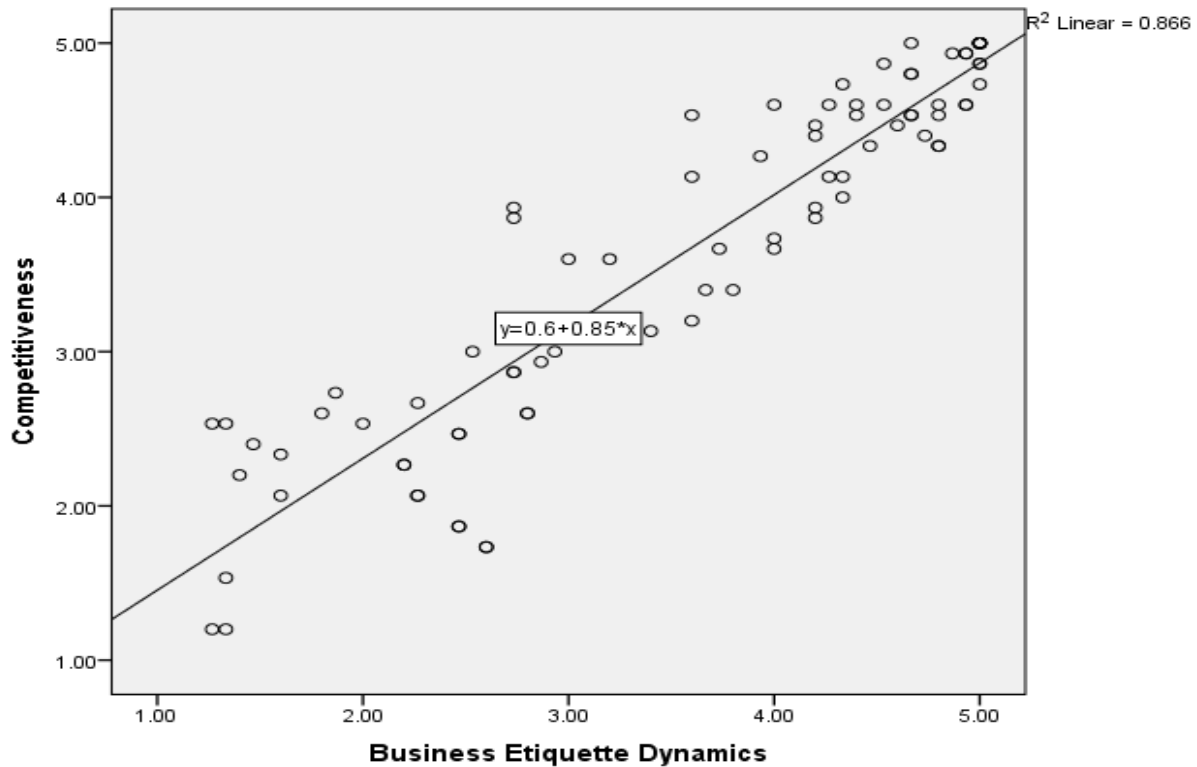


Figure 1: Scatter plot for business etiquette dynamics and competitiveness

Figure 1 shows a strong relationship between business etiquette dynamics (independent variable) and competitiveness (dependent variable). The scatter plot graph shows that the linear value of (0.866) depicting a very strong viable and positive relationship between the two constructs. The implication is that an increase in business etiquette dynamics simultaneously brings about an increase in the level of competitiveness. The scatter diagram has provided vivid evaluation of the closeness of the relationship among the pairs of variables through the nature of their concentration.

Table 1: Correlation for emotional intelligence and measures of competitiveness

			Emotional Intelligence	Patronage	Market Share
Spearman's rho	Emotional Intelligence	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.851**	.621**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	86	86	86
	Patronage	Correlation Coefficient	.851**	1.000	.625**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	86	86	86
	Market Share	Correlation Coefficient	.621**	.625**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	86	86	86

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

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and patronage of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 1 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.851 on the relationship between emotional intelligence and patronage. This value implies that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in patronage was as a result of the emotional intelligence. Table 1 also shows the statistical test of significance (p-value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and patronage of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and market share of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 1 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.621 on the relationship between emotional intelligence and market share. This value implies that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in market share was as a result of the emotional intelligence. Table 1 also shows the statistical test of significance (p-value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and market share of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Correlation for communication style and measures of competitiveness

			Communication Style	Patronage	Market Share
Spearman's rho	Communication Style	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.839**	.545**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	86	86	86
	Patronage	Correlation Coefficient	.839**	1.000	.625**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	86	86	86
	Market Share	Correlation Coefficient	.545**	.625**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	86	86	86

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

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between communication style and patronage of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.839 on the relationship between communication style and patronage. This value implies that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in patronage was as a result of the communication style. Table 2 also shows the statistical test of significance (p-value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained the sig- calculated is less than

significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between communication style and patronage of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between communication style and market share of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ) of 0.545 on the relationship between emotional intelligence and market share. This value implies that a moderate relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in market share was as a result of the communication style. Table 2 also shows the statistical test of significance (p -value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between communication style and market share of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 3: Correlation for technology adoption and measures of competitiveness

			Technology Adoption	Patronage	Market Share
Spearman's rho	Technology Adoption	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.823**	.634**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	86	86	86
	Patronage	Correlation Coefficient	.823**	1.000	.625**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	86	86	86
	Market Share	Correlation Coefficient	.634**	.625**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	86	86	86

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

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between technology adoption and patronage of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 3 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ) of 0.823 on the relationship between technology adoption and patronage. This value implies that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in patronage was as a result of the technology adoption. Table 3 also shows the statistical test of significance (p -value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between technology adoption and patronage of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Ho₆: There is no significant relationship between technology adoption and market share of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 3 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ) of 0.634 on the relationship between technology adoption and market share. This value implies that a strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that an increase in market share was as a result of the technology adoption. Table 3 also shows the statistical test of significance (p -value) which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtained the sig- calculated is less than significant level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between technology adoption and market share of real estate firms in Port Harcourt.

Discussion

The result of this study revealed a positive and significant relationship between business etiquette dynamics and the competitiveness of real estate firms in Port Harcourt. This finding suggests that real estate firms that demonstrate high standards of professional conduct, ethical interaction, and respectful business practices are more likely to achieve superior competitive positioning within the market.

Business etiquette dynamics—such as professionalism in client relations, ethical negotiations, effective communication, punctuality, and respect for contractual obligations—play a critical role in shaping customer perceptions and trust. In the real estate industry, where transactions are often high-value and relationship-driven, adherence to proper business etiquette enhances credibility and strengthens long-term client relationships. This finding is consistent with the argument of Goman (2018), who asserted that professional etiquette directly influences organizational reputation and customer loyalty, both of which are essential components of competitiveness.

The positive relationship identified in this study aligns with Porter's (1985) competitive advantage framework, which emphasizes differentiation through non-price factors such as service quality, reputation, and relationship management. Business etiquette contributes to differentiation by improving service delivery standards and fostering positive client experiences, thereby enabling firms to attract and retain clients in a highly competitive real estate market. Firms that consistently exhibit courteous behavior, transparency, and ethical conduct are more likely to stand out from competitors who focus solely on pricing or property availability.

Empirical studies also support this finding. Okpara and Wynn (2017) found that ethical business practices and professional conduct significantly enhance firm competitiveness by improving stakeholder trust and organizational image. Similarly, Akanbi and Ofoegbu (2019) reported that service-oriented behaviors, including courtesy and professionalism, positively influence customer satisfaction and repeat patronage in service-based industries in Nigeria. These outcomes translate into improved market share and competitive strength, particularly in sectors such as real estate that rely heavily on interpersonal interactions.

In the context of Port Harcourt, where the real estate market is characterized by intense competition, regulatory scrutiny, and informed clients, business etiquette becomes a strategic asset. Proper etiquette reduces disputes, minimizes reputational risks, and enhances negotiation outcomes. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), firms that build strong relational capital through ethical and professional conduct are better positioned to sustain competitiveness even in volatile markets. This reinforces the finding that business etiquette dynamics are not merely social norms but strategic tools that influence firm performance.

Furthermore, the finding is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that positive interpersonal interactions foster trust, reciprocity, and long-term relationships. When real estate

firms consistently demonstrate respectful and ethical behavior, clients are more likely to reciprocate through loyalty, referrals, and continued patronage, thereby enhancing firm competitiveness (Blau, 1964). This is particularly relevant in Port Harcourt, where word-of-mouth and professional reputation significantly influences business success.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that business etiquette dynamics have a positive and significant influence on the competitiveness of real estate firms in Port Harcourt. The findings clearly demonstrated that real estate firms that uphold high standards of professionalism, ethical conduct, effective communication, punctuality, and respect for contractual obligations are better positioned to achieve and sustain competitive advantage in the marketplace. Business etiquette enhances client trust, strengthens organizational reputation, and fosters long-term relationships, all of which are critical success factors in the real estate industry. Therefore, based on the foregoing

- i. The study recommends that: Real estate firms should formalize business etiquette policies that emphasize professionalism, ethical conduct, respectful communication, and accountability. Clear codes of conduct should be developed and communicated to all employees to ensure consistent behavior in dealings with clients, partners, and regulatory bodies.
- ii. Management should invest in regular training programmes focused on professional etiquette, customer relations, ethical negotiation, and communication skills. Continuous capacity-building will equip employees with the interpersonal competencies required to enhance client trust and organizational reputation.
- iii. Business etiquette should be deliberately integrated into firms' competitive strategies as a differentiation tool. Firms should leverage professionalism, transparency, and ethical conduct as part of their brand identity to attract and retain clients in a competitive real estate market.
- iv. Top management should lead by example by consistently demonstrating high standards of ethical and professional behavior. Such leadership commitment will reinforce organizational values and encourage employees to align their conduct with expected etiquette standards.
- v. Real estate firms should prioritize relationship-building through courteous service delivery, timely communication, and respect for client interests. Strengthening relational capital through proper etiquette will enhance repeat patronage, referrals, and long-term competitiveness.
- vi. Professional bodies and regulatory agencies in the real estate sector should promote ethical standards and business etiquette through guidelines, certifications, and compliance mechanisms. This will help improve industry-wide professionalism and competitiveness.

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