

TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SHOPPING MALLS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between transportation management and operational performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between transportation management and operational performance of shopping malls in Rivers State. Operational performance is measured through service improvement, cost reduction, and foot traffic, and the objectives of this study were to ascertain the extent to which transportation management relate with service improvement, cost reduction, and foot traffic of shopping malls in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 34 shopping malls operating in Port Harcourt at the time of this study, and data were collected from 81 respondents across these malls. Operations managers, logistics managers and marketing managers constituted the respondents that provided data for the study through a semi-structured questionnaire designed in 5-point Likert scale from very high extent to very low extent. The data were analyzed using a statistical model. Specifically, the three hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Model, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 25. The analysis indicated that transportation management has positive and significant relationships with service improvement, cost reduction, and foot traffic. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between transportation management and operational performance of shopping malls in Rivers State. Particularly, transportation management was found to play a critical role in ensuring timely and reliable delivery of goods, thereby directly impacting service improvement and customer satisfaction. Therefore it is recommended that, shopping malls should adopt real-time transportation management systems to enhance route planning, delivery tracking, and fuel efficiency.

Keywords: Cost reduction, foot traffic, operational performance, service improvement, transportation management

Introduction

Transportation management is a critical aspect of supply chain operations that significantly influence overall performance and competitiveness of retail organizations. Effective transportation management ensures smooth flow of goods, reduce delays, minimize costs and enhances customer satisfaction (Bowersox et al., 2019). Transportation functions such as inbound logistics, delivery coordination and distribution scheduling determine timeliness and availability of products, which are vital for maintaining high service quality and operational efficiency (Chopra & Meindl, 2021). As Rivers State continues to urbanize and commercial activities expand, the ability of shopping malls to coordinate their transportation operations efficiently has become a decisive factor in sustaining performance outcomes like cost reduction, customer satisfaction and profitability.

Despite its importance, transportation management in Nigeria's retail sector, has received limited empirical attention. Existing studies on operational performance in Nigeria's retail landscape have largely emphasized inventory management, marketing strategies and customer experience (Eze & Chijioke, 2021; Okafor & Opara, 2022). Few have examined transportation systems as a determinant of operational efficiency, even though logistics bottlenecks such as

poor road networks, inconsistent delivery schedules and inadequate fleet management practices remain persistent challenges (Adebayo & Oyewole, 2020). This neglect presents a critical research problem because transportation inefficiencies contribute to increased operational costs, stock-outs, and reduced customer loyalty; issues that directly undermine sustainability of retail firms in competitive markets like Port Harcourt.

Thus, a research opportunity exists in the inadequate investigation of the nexus between transportation management and operational performance of shopping malls that depend heavily on coordinated logistics systems. The specific objectives are to determine the relationship transportation management has with service improvement, cost reduction and foot traffic. This study as conceptualized in a fig. 1, was underpinned by Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm.

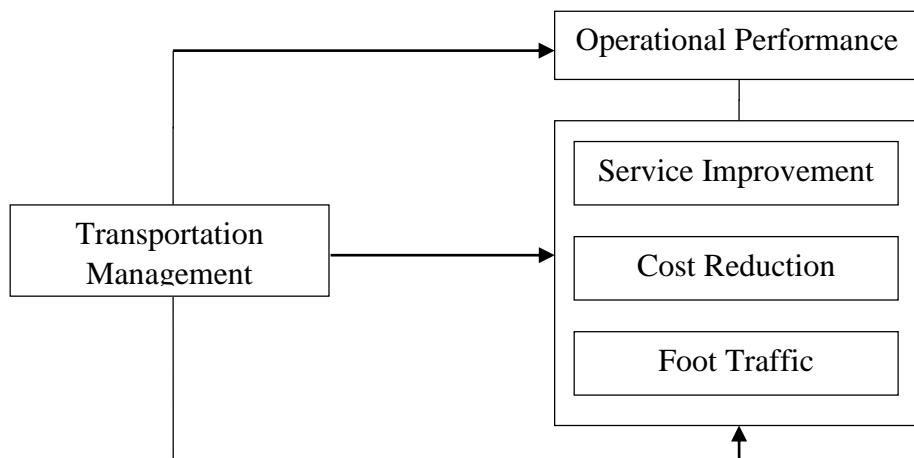


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of relationship between transportation management and operational performance of shopping malls in Rivers State

Sources: Munanira and Mulyungi (2018); Kan and Muhammed (2024).

Theoretical Framework

The Resource-Based View (RBV) was adopted as an adequate theoretical framework for this study. RBV explains that firms achieve sustained competitive advantage by leveraging internal resources and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). It posits that organizations differ in their resource endowments, and those possessing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources are better positioned to attain superior performance. These resources include both tangible and intangible assets such as technology, skilled personnel, and organizational know-how, while capabilities represent the firm's ability to deploy them effectively (Grant, 1996).

RBV emphasizes that firms can strengthen performance by aligning internal strengths with external opportunities. This inward-looking approach contrasts with market-based theories such as Porter's Five Forces, highlighting instead the strategic role of internal competencies (Teece et al., 1997). However, critics argue that RBV does not adequately address how firms can identify or build VRIN resources under changing market conditions (Priem & Butler, 2001).

RBV provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how transportation management enhance operational performance. Transportation management links warehousing and product delivery to deliver customer satisfaction. Effective transportation management may evolve into a VRIN resource that yield sustainable competitive advantages. Hence, RBV

Concept of Transportation Management

Transportation management is a vital pillar of modern logistics and a determinant of operational performance across industries. It involves the planning, execution, and optimization of goods movement to ensure efficiency, reliability, and customer satisfaction (Coyle et al., 2021). Efficient transportation minimizes lead times, reduces costs, and strengthens competitive advantage, whereas inefficiencies - such as delays or misrouting - undermine organizational performance (Rodrigue, 2020).

In today's digital economy, transportation management has evolved into a technology-driven discipline powered by transportation management systems (TMS), predictive analytics, and GPS-enabled tracking. These innovations enable data-driven decision-making, optimize routes, and enhance supply chain visibility (Crainic & Laporte, 2019). In developing regions, transportation challenges - including poor infrastructure, congestion, and regulatory inefficiencies - make strategic management crucial for operational success (Afolabi et al., 2019).

Transportation management can be viewed through three key dimensions: transportation planning, route optimization, and carrier management. Transportation planning involves strategically organizing logistics activities to ensure cost-effective and timely movement of goods. It integrates mode selection, demand forecasting, and delivery scheduling to align logistics objectives with business goals (Hugos, 2018).

Route optimization focuses on determining the most efficient paths to minimize time, cost, and emissions. Using AI, GIS, and real-time data, firms can dynamically adjust routes, improving delivery reliability and sustainability (Rodrigue, Comtois, & Slack, 2017). Carrier management entails selecting, contracting, and evaluating freight carriers. Effective carrier relationships enhance cost efficiency, flexibility, and delivery performance (Coyle, Langley, Novack, & Gibson, 2016).

In essence, transportation management is not merely an operational function. It is a strategic tool for achieving cost leadership, customer satisfaction, and supply chain resilience. For businesses in Rivers State, adopting technology-enabled, well-planned transportation systems is indispensable for overcoming infrastructural constraints and enhancing operational performance.

Concept of Operational Performance

Operational performance represents the effectiveness and efficiency with which an organization executes its processes to achieve strategic and operational goals. It reflects how well resources are utilized to deliver quality outputs that meet customer expectations (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). In shopping malls, operational performance involves managing resources, coordinating retail activities, and providing high-quality customer service. It directly influences profitability, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability in an increasingly dynamic retail environment.

According to Hill (2000), operational performance denotes a firm's ability to deliver goods or services at the desired quality and cost levels. Similarly, Slack et al. (2010) view it as the organization's capacity to meet customer requirements concerning cost, quality, and delivery.

These perspectives underscore that operational performance is not limited to production efficiency but encompasses broader dimensions such as responsiveness and service reliability. For shopping malls, this entails ensuring product availability, minimizing service delays, and maintaining efficient sales operations.

From a strategic standpoint, Porter (1985) defines operational performance as a firm's ability to achieve competitive advantage through superior cost efficiency and customer satisfaction. Tangen (2005) extends this by emphasizing alignment between operational processes and strategic goals, including sustainability and customer service. Kaplan and Norton (1996) further note that operational performance reflects how internal capabilities correspond to external customer requirements, suggesting that effective management of facilities, security, and logistics can enhance customer experience and operational success in malls.

Overall, operational performance is pivotal to business success. It ensures optimal resource use, reduced operational costs, and improved customer satisfaction. For shopping malls, consistent monitoring and enhancement of operational performance enable adaptability to evolving consumer demands, increased profitability, and sustained competitiveness in the retail landscape. Measures of operational performance accommodated in study are service improvement, cost reduction and foot traffic.

Service improvement

In today's customer-driven economy, service improvement has evolved from a competitive advantage into a strategic necessity. It represents a structured, ongoing effort to enhance service quality, exceed expectations, and ensure satisfaction at every customer interface (Zeithaml et al., 2020). Service is not merely a terminal stage of the value chain - it is where trust, reputation and loyalty are forged. Organizations that invest in continuous service improvement unlock sustainable value and strengthen competitive positioning (Grönroos, 2015).

The essence of service enhancement lies in anticipating customer needs, reducing service variability, and delivering seamless experiences. This requires redesigning processes, empowering employees, and using data-driven feedback to promote agility and adaptation (Fitzsimmons et al., 2022). Customer feedback serve as a critical mirror that reveal service gaps and improvement opportunities (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Employee empowerment further anchors this process; trained and motivated staff personify brand value and directly influence satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007).

Technology also serves as a catalyst for improvement. Tools like customer relationship management systems, automation and artificial intelligence personalize interactions and optimize responsiveness (Laudon & Laudon, 2020). Likewise, frameworks like total quality management and lean six sigma minimize waste and reinforce process reliability (George et al., 2005).

Service quality directly affects customer retention and profitability. Modern shoppers demand convenience, safety and experiential value in every visit (Bitner, 1992). Service improvement enhances operational efficiency, reduces rework and builds reputation, whereas service failures erode trust and profitability (Heskett et al., 2008). Thus, a culture of continuous improvement must be embedded in leadership vision, staff engagement, and technology integration. In a world defined by choice, consistent service excellence remains the enduring foundation of organizational success.

Cost reduction

Cost reduction has been a front-burner issue for firms because low cost of operation is pivotal to competing favourably (Ben-Caleb et al., 2019, as cited in Ateke et al., 2025). This means that ability to control costs is an imperative to business survival and growth (Ateke et al., 2025). Porter (2008) argue that cost reduction involve systematically minimizing expenses without undermining quality, productivity or customer satisfaction. This view has shifted cost reduction from being a fiscal tactic to being a strategic imperative for organizational survival and competitiveness.

In today's volatile business environment, characterized by digital disruption and economic uncertainty, the ability to manage costs efficiently distinguishes thriving enterprises from those in decline. Effective cost reduction reflects how well an organization optimizes its resources, processes, and technologies to achieve sustainable value creation (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Modern cost management transcends expense cutting - it focuses on eliminating inefficiencies, reengineering operations, and leveraging technology to enhance performance (Womack & Jones, 2003).

Digital transformation, through artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and data analytics, has redefined cost control by offering real-time insights that improve decision-making and operational agility (Deloitte, 2021; Langley & Capgemini, 2021). Also, incorporating lean management and continuous improvement frameworks fosters a culture of efficiency and accountability, ensuring that every process adds value (Womack & Jones, 2003). Moreover, sustainability initiatives like energy efficiency, waste reduction and eco-friendly have challenged firms to merge environmental responsibility with cost optimization (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

In Nigeria's retail sector, cost reduction is vital to offset challenges such as high utility expenses, inefficient logistics, and rising labor costs. Implementing energy-saving technologies, automating operations, and renegotiating supplier contracts can significantly enhance profitability (Eze & Nwagwu, 2020). Ultimately, cost reduction is not a one-time exercise but a continuous strategic pursuit. When embedded in corporate culture, it strengthens operational performance, sustains competitiveness, and positions firms for long-term success.

Foot traffic

Foot traffic is the lifeblood of physical retail spaces, serving as a tangible indicator of consumer interest, engagement, and purchasing intent. Beyond counting visitors, it represents the vibrancy and competitiveness of shopping malls - transforming movement into measurable commercial value (Dixon & Marston, 2021). For malls in dynamic but infrastructure-challenged regions, increasing foot traffic is essential for profitability, brand relevance and sustainable growth (Eze & Nwagwu, 2020).

Foot traffic both drive and reflect operational performance. It stems from efficient logistics, consistent product availability, clean environments, and superior customer experiences (Pantano et al., 2017). Simultaneously, higher traffic amplifies sales, strengthens vendor confidence, and provides management data for strategic decision-making. As e-commerce continues to expand, malls that deliver experiential value—through social engagement, ambiance, and sensory satisfaction - retain a distinct advantage over digital platforms (Alexander & Cano, 2020).

Efficient logistics is a key enabler of foot traffic. When goods are well-stocked and deliveries timely, customer trust and repeat visits increase (Langley & Capgemini, 2021). Likewise, digital marketing, loyalty programmes, and promotional efforts attract new visitors, but such efforts must align with operational readiness to prevent service lapses (Shankar et al., 2021). Aesthetic appeal also plays a crucial role - clean, well-lit, and organized spaces enhance comfort, prolong dwell times, and boost spending (Ogbonna & Okoro, 2019).

In the post-pandemic era, consumers expect hybrid experiences combining safety, convenience, and technology. Through data analytics, AI, and IoT, mall operators can track visitor flows and optimize layouts and staffing (Grewal et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021). Ultimately, increased foot traffic signifies more than consumer movement—it embodies relevance, operational excellence, and the resilience of physical retail in an evolving marketplace.

Transportation Management and Operational Performance

Empirical evidence underscores the pivotal role of transportation management in enhancing operational performance. Li et al. (2024) explored how developing operational resilience enables firms to navigate transportation disruptions effectively. Their study revealed that resilience-oriented transportation systems enhance continuity and recovery during unforeseen events, thereby sustaining operational performance.

Similarly, Chukwu et al. (2024) investigated logistics planning and transportation firm performance in Enugu State, Nigeria. Their results showed that effective logistics demand planning significantly influences safe and timely deliveries—an essential aspect of performance in customer-facing sectors like shopping malls.

Adelwini et al. (2023) also reported that transportation and warehouse management positively influence performance among Ghanaian manufacturing firms, highlighting that efficient logistics coordination supports timely distribution and customer satisfaction. In Nigeria, Odunjo (2022) found that inbound and outbound logistics operations significantly improve organizational performance in the cement industry, reinforcing the view that structured transportation management enhances overall operational outcomes.

Based on the foregoing renditions, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested to achieve the objective of the study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between transportation management and service improvement of shopping malls in Rivers State.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between transportation management and cost reduction of shopping malls in Rivers State.
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between transportation management and increased foot traffic of shopping malls in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted correlational research design with a cross-sectional approach. The population of the study comprised 34 shopping malls in Rivers State. All the 34 shopping malls were studied because the population is small. However, 81 respondents comprising operations managers, logistics managers and marketing managers from each of the 34 shopping malls provided data for the study through semi-structured questionnaire consisting 16 measurement items. The instrument was designed in 5-point Likert scale.

Again, to determine the reliability of the research instrument, a pilot study (pretest) was conducted and the data were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, subject to a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). Furthermore, the construct validity of the instrument was determined through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). See Table 1 for results of reliability and validity tests. In establishing the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variables, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted, and the 3 hypotheses were tested at 0.05 critical level. The analysis was done with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Results of the hypotheses are shown in the tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 1: Results of Reliability and Validity Tests

S/N	Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients	Factor Loadings
1	Transportation Management	4	0.769	0.748
2	Service Improvement	4	0.878	0.942
3	Cost Reduction	4	0.708	0.602
4	Foot Traffic	4	0.739	0.905

Source: SPSS Output form field data (2025).

Results of Cronbach's alpha analysis in Table 1 revealed that all the variables in the study produced high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. This is an evidence to show that, there is inter-item consistency among the variables in the study. In other words, if this study is conducted again in a similar condition the results will be similar to the results of this study. Again, all the variables have high factor loadings greater than 0.4, indicating that the items and variables in the questionnaire measured what they were supposed to measure. These loadings indicated that there is no cross-loading hence there is discriminant validity.

Test of Hypotheses and Interpretation of Results

Table 2: Correlation between Transportation Management and Service Improvement

		Transportation Management	Service Improvement
Transportation Management	Pearson Correlation	1	.601**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	81	81
Service Improvement	Pearson Correlation	.601**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	81	81

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

Source: SPSS Output form field data (2025).

Table 2 reveals the product of the Pearson correlation analysis done to assess the correlation between transportation management and service improvement of shopping malls in Rivers State. Using data gathered from 81 respondents, drawn from 34 shopping malls in Rivers State, the analysis revealed that transportation management has a strong, positive and significant relationship with service improvement of shopping malls in Rivers State. This result is evident in the correlation coefficients of 0.601 and probability value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Thus, we rejects the hypothesis which states that '*there is no significant relationship between Transportation Management and Service Improvement of Shopping Malls in Rivers State*'.

Table 3: Correlation between Transportation Management and Cost Reduction

		Transportation Management	Cost Reduction
Transportation Management	Pearson Correlation	1	.833**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	81	81
Cost Reduction	Pearson Correlation	.833**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	81	81

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

Source: SPSS Output form field data (2025).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis on correlation between transportation management and cost reduction of shopping malls in Rivers State is displayed in Table 3. The analyses was on data obtained from 81 respondents that were drawn from 34 shopping malls in Rivers State. The analysis revealed that transportation management has very strong, positive and significant correlation with cost reduction of shopping malls in Rivers State. This is by virtue of the correlation coefficients of 0.833 and probability value of $0.000 < 0.05$ produced by the test. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4: Correlation between Transportation Management and Foot Traffic

		Transportation Management	Foot Traffic
Transportation Management	Pearson Correlation	1	.744**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	81	81
Foot Traffic	Pearson Correlation	.744**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	81	81

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

Source: SPSS Output form field data (2025).

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the correlation between transportation management and foot traffic of shopping malls in Rivers State. Using a data gleaned from 81 respondents drawn from 34 shopping malls in Rivers State, the analysis revealed - as shown in Table 4 - that, transportation management has strong, positive and significant relationship with foot traffic of shopping malls in Rivers State. This result is based on the correlation coefficients of 0.744 and probability value of $0.000 < 0.05$ that was produced by the test. In view of this result, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the connection between transportation management and operational performance of shopping malls in Rivers State. The statistical tests conducted, showed that transportation management has significant relationship with operational performance of shopping malls in Rivers State revealed that, transportation management has strong, positive and significant relationship with service improvement of shopping malls in Rivers State.

These findings are in line with findings of Li et al. (2024) who explored the development of operational resilience to navigate transportation disruptions. The study aimed to identify strategies that enhance the ability of transportation systems to withstand and recover from disruptions. Through empirical analysis, the research highlighted the importance of building

The findings also align with the findings of Ogbolu and Okpighe (2024) that there is a strong and positive correlation between inventory management, warehousing management, transportation management, logistics management information system, and supply chain performance. The findings also align with the findings of Chukwu et al. (2024) who studied effect of logistics on the performance of transportation Firms in Enugu State Nigeria. The empirical results showed that logistics demand planning has significant effect on safety delivery of transportation firms in Enugu State.

Also, results of this study confirmed the results of Kan and Muhammed (2024) that 3PL providers leverage advanced technologies, prioritize customer satisfaction, and adopt innovative logistics solutions to remain competitive. The results of this study further confirm the results of Juma and Basheer (2023) that third-party logistics (3PL) provider, facilitate the identification of service enhancements and cost-reduction opportunities.

The results are also in agreement with the results of Adelwini et al. (2023) who examined the effects of logistics management on organizational performance in Ghanaian roofing sheet manufacturing companies. Specifically, the study sought to determine how inventory management, warehouse management, transportation management, physical distribution and information flow management affects the organizational performance. The findings showed that the aspects of logistics management that have a beneficial impact on organizational performance include inventory management, physical distribution, and warehouse management.

Findings of this study further confirmed the results of Odunjo, (2022) who examined the impact of logistic inbound and outbound operations on organizational performance in Dangote Cement Company. Findings revealed that logistics inbound and outbound operations positively and significantly affect organizational performance. These studies highlight how Transportation Management could improve Operational Performance in the retail sector, including Service Improvement, Cost Reduction, and Foot Traffic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between transportation management and operational performance of shopping malls in Rivers State. Particularly, transportation management was found to play a critical role in ensuring timely and reliable delivery of goods, thereby directly impacting service improvement and customer satisfaction. Therefore it is recommended that, shopping malls should adopt real-time transportation management systems to enhance route planning, delivery tracking, and fuel efficiency.

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