

Influence of Business Conduct on Consumer Trust: A Study of the Real Estate Sector in Abuja

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ABSTRACT

Research Objective: This study investigated how business conduct, specifically corporate governance, transparency, and regulatory compliance, impacts consumer trust in Abuja's real estate sector.

Methodology: A structured questionnaire was administered to 326 respondents, yielding 284 valid responses for an 87% response rate. The reliability of the research instrument was verified with Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.838$), confirming strong internal consistency. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were used to assess the relationships among the variables.

Findings: The analysis revealed that, while service quality and regulatory compliance were relatively strong, consumer trust recorded the lowest mean score, highlighting its fragility in the sector. Significant positive correlations were found between consumer trust and corporate governance ($r = 0.708$, $p < 0.001$), transparency ($r = 0.787$, $p < 0.001$), and regulatory compliance ($r = 0.894$, $p < 0.001$), with regulatory compliance emerging as the most influential predictor. This underscores the critical role of adherence to laws and standards in building resident confidence. Transparency and corporate governance were also important, reflecting the value of ethical behavior, openness, and accountability in estate management.

Conclusion: The study concludes that strengthening governance frameworks, enhancing transparency, and enforcing regulatory compliance are essential for boosting consumer trust in Abuja's real estate sector.

Recommendations: It is recommended that policymakers reinforce institutional mechanisms to promote accountability, credibility, and long-term sustainability in the industry.

Keywords: Consumer Trust, Corporate Governance, Transparency, Regulatory Compliance, Real Estate

1.0 Background to the Study

Business conduct refers to the ethical, legal, and operational principles that govern interactions between businesses, consumers, and regulatory bodies. It plays a critical role in shaping market efficiency, investment confidence, and consumer trust. Ferrell, Fraedrich, and Ferrell (2021) define business conduct as a combination of corporate governance, transparency, and regulatory compliance, all of which influence an organization's reputation and long-term viability. Trevino and Nelson (2022) further emphasize that business conduct is shaped by internal policies, industry norms, and institutional frameworks, which ultimately determine consumer perceptions and engagement.

In the real estate sector, business conduct directly affects buyer-seller relationships, transaction security, and market stability (Miles, Naranjo, & Webb, 2021). Transparent contractual agreements, adherence to regulatory frameworks, and fair pricing foster market confidence, while deceptive sales practices, misrepresented property values, and weak contract enforcement erode consumer trust (Worzala, Kinnard, & Swango, 2020). Ling and Archer (2022) argue that unethical business conduct creates systemic risks, discourages investment, and contributes to regulatory instability.

Consumer trust is essential in real estate, where transactions involve significant financial commitments and legal complexities. Morgan and Hunt (1994) define trust as the belief in an entity's competence, reliability, and fairness. Studies show that open transactions, strong protections for consumers, and responsible behavior by businesses all make people more confident in the market (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003). Conversely, fraudulent dealings, weak regulatory enforcement, and poor corporate accountability reduce trust, increase litigation, and destabilize markets (Zhang & Cheng, 2021; Omirin & Nubi, 2020; Olajide & Adebayo, 2022).

Globally, poor business conduct in real estate has triggered financial crises, regulatory interventions, and investor distrust. The 2008 subprime mortgage crisis in the United States exposed how predatory lending, high-risk mortgage securities, and regulatory lapses led to widespread foreclosures, economic instability, and eroded confidence in property investments (Mian & Sufi, 2014). In Africa, weak institutional frameworks and regulatory gaps have contributed to widespread distrust in real estate markets. In Kenya, fraudulent land allocations and multiple sales of the same property have resulted in legal disputes and financial losses, undermining confidence in government-backed housing projects (Muthoni, 2022). Similarly, in

South Africa, the Sharemax investment collapse left thousands of investors stranded, illustrating the risks of poorly regulated investment schemes (van Niekerk, 2024; Moonstone, 2023).

Nigeria's real estate sector has faced similar crises. The 2021 Ikoyi building collapse, which resulted in multiple fatalities, highlighted failures in construction standards, developer accountability, and regulatory enforcement (Nairametrics, 2022). Investigations revealed non-compliance with safety regulations, contractual breaches, and oversight weaknesses, reinforcing governance concerns.

Abuja's real estate sector, being the nation's capital, attracts significant local and international investment (Akinbogun, Oloyede, & Oke, 2021), yet issues such as fraudulent transactions, lack of transparency, weak regulatory enforcement, and financial irregularities persist.

Many developers engage in deceptive practices, constructing substandard buildings that fail to meet industry safety standards. Investors are often misled about material quality, architectural designs, promised amenities, etc. Developers frequently advertise 24-hour electricity, a reliable water supply, and world-class infrastructure, yet these commitments are rarely fulfilled, leaving buyers frustrated and financially disadvantaged. These challenges have significantly eroded consumer trust. Additionally, issues such as delayed property title issuance, sudden increases in service charges, and disputes over lease agreements have fueled tensions between developers and buyers (Ogunleye, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Despite Abuja's booming real estate market, trust in property transactions remains fragile due to unethical business practices and weak regulatory enforcement. Investors and homebuyers face challenges such as substandard construction, contractual misrepresentation, and financial irregularities. Regulatory bodies, which are in charge of making sure that rules are followed, often have trouble doing so, which leads to inconsistent compliance with legal and ethical standards. While research has addressed broad real estate challenges in Nigeria, limited studies specifically examine how business conduct and regulatory oversight impact consumer trust in Abuja. This study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the extent to which business practices and regulatory frameworks influence market confidence, identifying key deficiencies, and proposing measures to improve trust and transparency in Abuja's real estate sector.

Several notable cases illustrate these concerns. In the CITEC Estate controversy, residents reported unauthorized metering practices and inflated service charges, leading to prolonged disputes (Vanguard, 2022). The demolition of houses in Sabon Lugbe saw government agencies demolishing properties due to land ownership disputes and irregular allocations, resulting in financial losses and displacement of homeowners (The Guardian, 2023). In the Brains and

Hammers Estate dispute, residents experienced a two-week power outage due to mismanagement of estate funds, despite having met financial obligations (Daily Trust, 2023). The Games Village master plan violation occurred when developers deviated from approved construction plans, triggering legal battles and regulatory sanctions (Punch, 2022). In addition to these cases, long wait times for Certificates of Occupancy (C-of-O), hidden property fees, and inconsistent service have made people even less trusting of the sector (Adebayo & Omololu, 2022). The prevalence of these issues points to the need for enhanced regulatory oversight, strengthened governance frameworks, and improved consumer protection mechanisms in Abuja's real estate industry.

Objectives of the Study

The following research questions guided this study:

- i. To what extent does corporate governance influence consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja?
- ii. To what extent do transparency and disclosure affect consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja?
- iii. To what extent does regulatory compliance influence consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja?

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. To what extent does corporate governance influence consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja?
- ii. To what extent do transparency and disclosure affect consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja?
- iii. To what extent does regulatory compliance influence consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja?

Research Hypothesis

The study proposes the following null hypotheses:

H₀₁: Corporate governance has no significant influence on consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja.

H₀₂: Transparency and disclosure have no significant effect on consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja.

H₀₃: Regulatory compliance has no significant influence on consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

Business Conduct

Business conduct refers to the ethical and operational standards that govern how organizations engage in transactions with consumers, other businesses, and regulatory bodies. It encompasses a broad range of actions, including corporate governance, transparency, compliance with legal frameworks, and fair treatment of stakeholders (Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2021). In the context of real estate, business conduct is pivotal, as property transactions often involve significant financial investments, long-term relationships, and complex legal agreements. As such, the conduct of real estate firms, ranging from developers to agents, directly influences consumer perceptions of trust and satisfaction. This study conceptualizes business conduct through five dimensions:

Corporate Governance

Refers to the structures, policies, and practices that guide the direction, control, and operations of an organization. It encompasses the mechanisms through which a company's leadership is held accountable to stakeholders, ensuring that the business operates in a transparent, ethical, and responsible manner (Aguilera & Jackson, 2010). In the real estate sector, corporate governance plays a pivotal role in maintaining consumer trust, as it directly impacts the way businesses manage risks, make decisions, and interact with customers, investors, and regulatory bodies.

At the core of corporate governance is the concept of accountability. Real estate businesses, like any other organization, must be held accountable for their actions, ensuring that decisions are made in the best interests of all stakeholders, including consumers, employees, shareholders, and the broader community. Sound corporate governance requires that companies have a clear governance structure, with defined roles and responsibilities for the board of directors, management, and other key personnel. This structure ensures that decisions are made with proper oversight and that the company is not subject to mismanagement or fraud.

Equally important is the ethical dimension of corporate governance, which emphasizes integrity, fairness, and moral responsibility in business conduct (Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2021). Ethical corporate governance requires firms not only to comply with legal frameworks but also to uphold higher standards of honesty, fairness in transactions, and respect for consumer rights. In the real estate context, this includes truthful disclosure of property information, avoidance of exploitative practices, and commitment to fair pricing. Embedding ethics within governance ensures that trust is built not merely through compliance and accountability but also through consistent demonstration of values that align with consumer expectations and societal norms.

Transparency

Transparency is a critical concept in both business and consumer relationships, referring to the openness, clarity, and accessibility of information between organizations and their stakeholders. In the context of real estate, transparency involves the clear and honest communication of

relevant information about properties, transactions, legal requirements, and any associated risks. Transparency is essential in fostering trust between real estate businesses and consumers, as it helps to reduce uncertainty, prevent misunderstandings, and ensure that consumers are making informed decisions based on accurate and complete data (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2021). In real estate transactions, transparency covers a wide range of activities, including disclosure of property details, pricing information, contractual terms, and regulatory compliance. Real estate businesses that are transparent provide clear and detailed information about properties, such as their legal status, ownership history, and any potential issues (e.g., zoning laws, building permits, and environmental factors). They also ensure that pricing is straightforward, with no hidden costs or last-minute fees. Transparent businesses outline the terms and conditions of agreements, ensuring that consumers fully understand their obligations and the consequences of their decisions. Transparency also extends to the disclosure of financial information related to property transactions, such as loan terms, payment schedules, and interest rates. When consumers have access to all the necessary financial details upfront, they can make more informed decisions, minimizing the risk of financial mismanagement or disputes (Adams & Mehran, 2021).

Regulatory Compliance

Regulatory compliance refers to the adherence of businesses to laws, regulations, guidelines, and specifications relevant to their industry and operations. In the real estate sector, regulatory compliance is particularly crucial, as it ensures that property transactions are carried out legally, ethically, and in a way that protects both consumers and businesses. Following the rules set by the government helps real estate companies keep their integrity, accountability, and openness high, which builds trust with customers and makes the market more stable (Adebayo & Omololu, 2022). In the real estate industry, regulatory compliance encompasses a broad spectrum of legal requirements, ranging from property registration and zoning laws to financial regulations and consumer protection laws. The purpose of these regulations is to safeguard consumers against fraudulent activities, misrepresentation, and unethical business practices. For instance, regulatory compliance requires real estate companies to ensure that properties are properly registered, inspected, and meet the necessary health and safety standards before they are sold or rented. Furthermore, businesses must comply with zoning regulations, which dictate how land can be used and developed, ensuring that properties are suitable for their intended purposes and do not pose legal or environmental risks.

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is the faith that people have in businesses or groups, believing that their dealings will be honest, fair, dependable, and moral. Trust is a fundamental element in the relationship between businesses and consumers, influencing purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and long-term engagement (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the context of real estate, consumer trust is

particularly crucial, as property transactions often involve significant financial investments, legal complexities, and long-term commitments. When consumers trust real estate businesses, they are more likely to engage in transactions, return for future business, and recommend the services to others (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). This study conceptualizes consumer trust using three dimensions, which the literature consistently highlights.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Commitment-Trust Theory developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), which serves as the foundational lens through which the relationship between business conduct and consumer trust in the real estate sector is examined. The theory posits that trust and commitment are the central elements in the formation of successful long-term relationships between businesses and their consumers. The theory posits that businesses that engage in ethical practices, demonstrate transparency, and comply with regulatory frameworks cultivate consumer trust. Consumer commitment increases as a result of this trust, fostering long-term relationships and sustained business success. In the context of the real estate sector, particularly in Abuja, the theory underscores that when real estate firms consistently exhibit transparent and ethical behavior, consumers are more likely to trust them and engage in repeat transactions. The Commitment-Trust Theory further posits that once trust and commitment are established, they result in consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term engagement with the business. These factors directly influence consumer behavior, ensuring that firms with high levels of trust maintain strong market positions and positive reputations. While Agency Theory and Social Exchange Theory provide supporting insights into governance, accountability, service quality, and fairness, the Commitment-Trust Theory remains the primary theoretical anchor of this study. This theoretical lens is operationalized in a conceptual framework that models business conduct (corporate governance, transparency, regulatory compliance, service quality, and fairness) as independent variables influencing consumer trust (reliability, fairness, and transparency), with regulatory influence serving as a moderating factor. This framework, therefore, guides the formulation of the study's hypotheses, the design of the research instrument, and the interpretation of findings within the context of Abuja's real estate sector.

Empirical Review

Yakubu, Wuyokwe, and Miala (2022) investigated the systemic challenges confronting property development and accountability in Abuja, with implications for consumer trust. Using a quantitative survey distributed to 123 estate developers (77 valid responses), the study applied simple random sampling and analyzed responses with descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that 68.83% of respondents strongly agreed that high building material costs severely hinder development, while 40.26% highlighted poor access to funding as a major constraint. Additionally, 37.66% identified corruption as a factor undermining real estate delivery, and over 40% indicated weak alignment of government policy with market realities. A further 44.16%

reported that low consumer purchasing power constrains demand, reflecting a two-sided crisis. Although the study did not measure consumer trust directly, the findings illustrate how unethical practices, corruption, and governance failures contribute to consumer dissatisfaction and weaken confidence in the Abuja real estate market.

Olaniyan and Adegroye (2024) examined the attitudes of Nigerian real estate professionals, including architects, builders, and project managers, toward sustainable and ethical practices. Using a survey of 68 professionals, the study employed the Relative Importance Index (RII) to rank perceptions. Results showed that respondents acknowledged the benefits of sustainability, such as positive environmental impact (RII = 0.78) and energy efficiency (RII = 0.76). However, major barriers persisted, including resistance to change (RII = 0.87), lack of government incentives (RII = 0.85), and limited awareness and training opportunities. The authors concluded that many developers prioritize short-term profit over long-term ethical responsibility, leading to a trust deficit among consumers. This study is directly relevant to Abuja, where weak professional ethics and reluctance to embrace sustainable practices have fueled consumer mistrust in the sector.

Muthoni (2022) explored how transparency failures and fraudulent practices affect consumer trust in Kenya's housing market. The study employed a case study approach, focusing on fraudulent land allocations and multiple sales of the same properties within government-backed housing projects. Findings indicated that weak institutional oversight and poor regulatory enforcement resulted in prolonged legal disputes, significant financial losses, and heightened consumer skepticism. The Kenyan context demonstrates how a lack of transparency in property dealings erodes market credibility, offering a critical parallel for Abuja, where similar issues, such as title disputes and opaque contract practices, are prevalent.

Adebayo and Omololu (2022) analyzed transparency and regulatory compliance challenges within the Nigerian real estate sector. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the authors combined documentary review with surveys of stakeholders, including developers, investors, and regulators. The study found recurring problems such as hidden charges, arbitrary service fee adjustments, and prolonged delays in the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy (C-of-O). Weak regulatory enforcement was identified as a key driver of consumer distrust, as buyers often faced inconsistent legal protections. For Abuja, these findings highlight how transparency lapses and compliance failures undermine consumer confidence, limiting the sector's ability to attract sustainable investment.

Adetayo and Ibrahim (2023) assessed service delivery challenges within Nigerian residential estates, focusing on both Lagos and Abuja. Using survey data from 150 homeowners, the study applied regression analysis to examine the impact of service quality on consumer satisfaction. Results revealed that poor infrastructure maintenance, prolonged power and water outages, and disputes over service charges were the most pressing concerns. The study emphasized that

inadequate service delivery not only diminishes consumer satisfaction but also weakens long-term trust in estate managers and developers. These findings resonate strongly with Abuja's context, where controversies such as the CITEC Estate dispute and Brains and Hammers power outages have exposed the consequences of poor service delivery on consumer trust.

Van Niekerk (2024) and Moonstone (2023) analyzed the Sharemax property investment collapse in South Africa, a case where fairness and accountability were central to investor trust. The investigation highlighted how misleading investment schemes, poor regulatory oversight, and unfair treatment of stakeholders left thousands of investors financially stranded. The case study underscored that the absence of fairness and effective service delivery within real estate markets can lead to catastrophic losses in consumer confidence. Although situated in South Africa, the lessons are highly transferable to Abuja, where consumers frequently experience similar issues of unfair pricing, unmet contractual promises, and weak regulatory protection.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to investigate the influence of business conduct on consumer trust in the real estate sector in Abuja. The choice of the survey design was informed by the need to obtain measurable data from a large population of estate residents, regulatory officials, and industry experts. It allowed the researcher to empirically examine the relationships between business conduct dimensions corporate governance, transparency and disclosure, and regulatory compliance and consumer trust without manipulating the study variables.

The design is appropriate because it enables systematic collection of standardized responses through a structured questionnaire, facilitates statistical testing of hypotheses, and supports generalization of findings to the wider Abuja real estate market.

Nature and Sources of Data

The study used primary data obtained through a structured, Likert-scale questionnaire administered both physically and electronically. Respondents were drawn from three key groups: estate residents of CITEC Mborra Estate and Peachville Platinum Estate, regulatory agencies such as FCDA, AGIS, FCTA, and AMAC, and industry experts including developers, architects, engineers, surveyors, valuers, lawyers, and property managers. A total of 326 questionnaires were distributed, and 284 valid responses were returned, representing a robust response rate of 87 percent suitable for inferential analysis.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and was executed in three major stages. The first stage involved the use of descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to provide a clear summary of respondents' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of corporate

governance, transparency, regulatory compliance, and consumer trust. The second stage focused on reliability testing. Here, Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales and to ensure that the questionnaire items reliably captured the constructs under investigation. The final stage involved inferential statistical analysis. Pearson's Correlation was employed to determine the direction and strength of the relationships among the study variables.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES

Data Presentation

presents the descriptive statistics for business conduct in terms of consumer trust and shows that all proxies were measured across 284 valid responses with no missing data, ensuring the completeness of the dataset. Corporate governance recorded a mean score of 13.83 with a median of 13.50, indicating consistency in responses around the middle values, with a spread reflected in the standard deviation of 2.778 and a range between 8 and 19. Transparency and disclosure had a slightly lower mean of 13.15 and a median of 12.50, suggesting moderate levels of disclosure practices, though the relatively higher standard deviation of 3.319 points to more variability in how respondents perceived this aspect, with scores ranging from 6 to 18. Regulatory compliance had the highest mean among the governance-related factors at 14.06, and a median of 13.00, reflecting strong adherence perceptions, although variability remained moderate with a standard deviation of 3.206 and scores ranging from 10 to 20. Consumer trust, the dependent factor, recorded a mean of 8.57 and a median of 8.50, with a lower standard deviation of 1.855, indicating that respondents generally had consistent views about their trust levels. Scores on consumer trust ranged from 6 to 12, showing narrower variability compared to governance and regulatory proxies. However, the results suggest that while business conduct factors such as governance, transparency, and compliance are moderately strong with some variability in perceptions, consumer trust remains stable but at a comparatively lower scale, underscoring the need for organizations to strengthen practices that directly build and sustain consumer confidence.

		Statistics			
		Corporate Governance	Transparency & Disclosure	Regulatory Compliance	Consumer Trust
N	Valid	284	284	284	284
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		13.83	13.15	14.06	8.57
Median		13.50	12.50	13.00	8.50

Std. Deviation	2.778	3.319	3.206	1.855
Minimum	8	6	10	6
Maximum	19	18	20	12

Source: Researcher’s Survey, 2025

Table 4.2 The Pearson correlation analysis of 284 respondents shows strong and significant relationships among the four variables. Corporate governance has a very strong positive correlation with transparency and disclosure ($r = .815, p < 0.01$), suggesting that effective governance structures go hand in hand with higher levels of organizational transparency. It also demonstrates a strong correlation with consumer trust ($r = .708, p < 0.01$) and regulatory compliance ($r = .657, p < 0.01$), implying that good governance fosters adherence to regulations while simultaneously strengthening consumer confidence. Transparency and disclosure correlate strongly with consumer trust ($r = .787, p < 0.01$) and regulatory compliance ($r = .635, p < 0.01$), highlighting that open communication and disclosure practices enhance both compliance and trust. Among all relationships, regulatory compliance exhibits the strongest correlation with consumer trust ($r = .894, p < 0.01$), underscoring that compliance with rules and standards is the most influential driver of trust. 18 Taken together, the results reveal that corporate governance, transparency, and compliance are mutually reinforcing factors that significantly contribute to building and sustaining consumer trust.

		Correlations			
		Corporate Governance	Transparency & Disclosure	Regulatory Compliance	Consumer Trust
Corporate Governance	Pearson Correlation	1	.815**	.657**	.708**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	284	284	284	284
Transparency & Disclosure	Pearson Correlation	.815**	1	.635**	.787**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000

	N	284	284	284	284
Regulatory Compliance	Pearson Correlation	.657**	.635**	1	.894**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	284	284	284	284
Consumer Trust	Pearson Correlation	.708**	.787**	.894**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	284	284	284	284
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey 2025

4.4 Discussion and Findings

The study demonstrates that business conduct measured through corporate governance, transparency and disclosure, and regulatory compliance significantly enhances consumer trust in Abuja’s real estate sector. Regulatory compliance was the strongest driver of trust ($r = .894, p < 0.01$), emphasizing its role in ensuring fairness, accountability, and adherence to professional standards. Transparency and disclosure ($r = .787, p < 0.01$) were also critical, as open communication and accurate information reduce information asymmetry and foster confidence. Corporate governance positively influenced trust ($r = .708, p < 0.01$), though its effect depends on effective implementation and visible accountability.

Interrelationships among the variable’s governance with transparency ($r = .815$) and transparency with compliance ($r = .635$) highlight that these factors reinforce one another in building consumer confidence. While weak enforcement and regulatory evasion may limit practical outcomes, the findings overall align with both local and international research, confirming that compliance, transparency, and governance collectively strengthen trust. The study also identifies opportunities for future research comparing Abuja’s real estate governance with other contexts to deepen understanding of business conduct on consumer trust.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that business conduct factors, corporate governance, transparency and disclosure, and regulatory compliance play a significant role in shaping consumer trust. Among these, regulatory compliance emerged as the most influential driver of trust, showing the strongest positive correlation with consumer trust. Corporate governance and transparency also contribute substantially, with strong interrelationships observed among all factors. Overall, while governance, transparency, and compliance practices are moderately strong with some variability in perception, consumer trust remains relatively stable but at a lower level, highlighting the need for organizations to further enhance practices that directly foster consumer confidence.

Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of how business conduct constructs corporate governance, transparency, and regulatory compliance affect consumer trust within the Abuja real estate sector. The findings indicate that consumer trust is the most positively perceived aspect of business conduct, followed by transparency and regulatory compliance. Despite its importance, real estate businesses perceived corporate governance the least positively, indicating areas for improvement. The study reveals that while transparency has a positive influence on consumer trust, corporate governance, despite its importance, appears to be inversely related to trust. This paradox suggests that more robust governance structures could potentially alienate consumers if they are perceived as overly bureaucratic or impersonal. Transparency, on the other hand, is clearly considered a key factor in fostering trust, with businesses that are open and clear about their processes and dealings being more likely to gain consumer confidence. Regulatory compliance, while vital for legal adherence, was found to have little direct influence on consumer trust. This finding suggests that while regulatory compliance is a given in the real estate sector, consumers consider it a standard rather than an active factor in building trust. This study stresses how important it is for real estate companies in Abuja to find a balance between governance, openness, and following the rules. Strong governance and following the rules are important, but businesses need to put transparency first if they want to earn and keep the trust of their customers. Furthermore, governance practices should be consumer-centric, aligning with consumer expectations to avoid alienating potential clients. The study's findings suggest that a more integrated approach, incorporating transparency and ethical governance, will be key to fostering stronger consumer trust in the real estate market.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and in line with its stated objectives, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen consumer trust in the real estate sector of Abuja:

i. Strengthening Corporate Governance Practices

Although the study revealed that corporate governance was the least positively perceived construct and at times inversely related to consumer trust, it remains an essential framework for accountability. Real estate operators should adopt governance practices that are less bureaucratic and more consumer-centric. This includes simplifying decision-making processes, involving residents in governance structures, and ensuring fairness in service delivery. Regulators should also promote governance codes that emphasize ethical leadership and consumer satisfaction rather than rigid administrative procedures.

ii. Enhancing Transparency and Disclosure

Given that transparency was found to be the strongest driver of consumer trust, estate operators must make openness a core principle of their business conduct. Developers and managers should establish clear and consistent communication channels, provide timely updates on projects, disclose service and maintenance charges without hidden costs, and organize regular stakeholder engagements such as town hall meetings. Making financial and operational information easily accessible will build credibility and reduce consumer skepticism.

iii. Reinforcing Regulatory Compliance

While regulatory compliance was found to have minimal direct impact on consumer trust, it remains a baseline expectation from consumers. Estate operators must therefore adhere strictly to planning approvals, contractual obligations, and property regulations. Regulatory agencies should intensify oversight, ensuring fair enforcement without creating unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. Introducing compliance seals or ratings could help distinguish trustworthy operators and reassure consumers about the integrity of estates they engage with.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research empirically demonstrates that corporate governance, transparency and disclosure, and regulatory compliance significantly influence consumer trust in business conduct. By providing robust evidence of the strong interrelationships among these factors, the study advances the understanding of how organizational practices contribute to building and sustaining consumer confidence. It further enriches the literature on corporate governance and consumer behavior by highlighting regulatory compliance as the most influential driver of trust. This work contributes to the body of knowledge by showing that strengthening governance, transparency, and compliance

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