

## E-TAILING STRATEGIES AND MARKETING PERFORMANCE OF SUPERMARKETS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

ATUO Eucharia Chinasa  
Department of Marketing  
Faculty of Management Sciences  
University of Port Harcourt Choba, Port Harcourt

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to empirically examine the relationship between e-tailing strategies and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study is four hundred and twenty (420) registered supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The spearman's rank order correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) was used to test the proposed hypotheses formulated for the study. The study revealed a significant positive relationship between e-tailing strategies and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The findings of the study showed that e-tailing strategies can improve marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. Thus, the study concludes that e-tailing strategies (e-trust and service reliability) significantly relates to marketing performance. The study therefore recommends that supermarkets in Port Harcourt should ensure that their e-trade channels command trust in such a way that customers can effectively transact businesses with them without being defrauded.

**Keywords:** E-tailing strategies, e-trust, marketing performance, service reliability

### INTRODUCTION

The Internet and Internet-enabled platforms have significantly altered the way business transactions are conducted; and have also enabled improved performance of firms. The Internet has become a powerful channel for businesses to compete favourably in the marketspace. And has constituted an easy medium of selling products. The Internet has also remarkably changed the way consumers obtain and evaluate products information. In essence, consumers can search for products, price and other information about service providers online. Stallaert and Zhang (2007) notes that e-tailers face a daunting challenge because e-shoppers have enough information available to them prior to making purchase decisions and can make comparison about firms with low prices of products.

In Nigeria, the number of supermarkets that engage in e-tailing (using the Internet as a platform to sell products) are increasing. E-tailing enable online customers to visit e-stores, locate and purchase products using credit or debit cards (Wanh & Head, 2002). Online shopping allows consumers to compare prices, by visiting other online outlets and websites, before making purchases. Many businesses are following the trend by diverting from traditional brick-and-mortar shops to digital marketing to enable them meet consumers' demands and compete favourably.

Turban et al. (2006) defined e-tailing as retailing that is carried out on the internet. E-tailing activities involves three major areas: A facility for product search which is usually regarded as a product evaluation or information gathering facility, an online purchase facility and a product delivery capability (Kolesar & Galbraith, 2000). Lim and Dubinsky (2004) states that e-shops are where e-customers make purchases.

E-tailers operate the 4ps (product, price, promotion and place) of marketing. Regarding products, e-tailers offer a wide variety of product ranging from electronics to groceries. Regarding price, e-tailers operated with low profit margin due to its low cost and higher sales volume. In terms of promotion, e-tailers have unlimited direct advertising opportunities. Lastly, in terms of place, e-customers can connect and purchase goods and services from the internet at any place and time.

Previous studies on e-tailing exists. Gurupandi and Abipriya (2019) and Gupta and Hooda (2011) studied the evolution to revolution of e-tailing in India. Das (2016) investigated antecedents and consequences of trust in online shopping from an e-tail branding perspective. Also, Chen and Mathews (2013) examined website quality and brand attitude towards e-branding in Taiwan. Further,

Khan and Rahman (2016) investigated influence of e-tailing brand experience on e-brand trust and e-brand loyalty.

However, most of these studies were not carried out in Nigeria, and to the best of the researcher knowledge, studies on e-tailing in extant literature seem to be skeletal in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study opts to examine the relationship between e-tailing strategies and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

Wheel of retailing theory (McNair, 1958) is adopted as a baseline theory in this study. Wheel of retailing theory is the oldest theory on the evolution of retail activities. The theory was developed to establish a theoretical basis for understanding the rapid growth and development of western industrialized countries (Massad et al., 2010). Wheel of retailing theory states that start-up retailers enter the market and as low-price low-margin operators as a cost-effective way to attract customers and compete favourably (Hollande, 1960).

The basic ideas in wheel of retailing theory are: (a) new retailers focus on acquiring customers than in making profits; (b) older retailers are often more interested in making profits than acquiring new customers; (c) the most efficient system of getting new customers is to charge low price; (d) older retailers will be more focused on higher prices and profits and focus more on gathering new customers.

### Concept of E-tailing Strategies

E-tailing is the process of selling products to e-consumers through online platforms (Doolin et al., 2005; Rao, 1999), and is characterized by virtual interaction between the sellers and buyers, content as the main attribute of competitive differentiation, and a complex set of network connectivity between various parts of the value chain. E-tailing has been made easy by online model for customers to easily access and to make comparison from different online stores during purchases. For example, for a window shopping or an actual purchase, it takes less time to window shop in five – more e-tailers, than physically going to stores to purchase or window shop.

More so, internet portal services such as yahoo (visa shopping guide) has made comparison of different online stores very accessible for customers. Online shopping give customers the ability to visit e-stores to locate, purchase products and make payments via debit or credit cards, money transfers, cash on delivery etc. To enhance and increase sales, e-tailers need to develop website that are user-friendly, so that customers will easily purchase products, make payment, refer others and make repeat purchase.

E-tailers in Port Harcourt are currently focusing on developing sustainable and profitable business strategies for their internet-based marketing activities. A huge number of established supermarkets in Port Harcourt still engage in physical channels of distribution and their online sales platforms are still skeletal, although they are adopting strategies to ensure fully functional services. The range of e-tailing strategies supermarkets can adopt is almost unlimited. In this study however, we examine e-trust and service reliability.

### E-trust

E-trust is an agreement to depend on an exchange between a partner that one has believe and confidence in (Moorman et al., 1992). E-trust is a message source that is perceived to provide and deliver accurate and substantial information (Cheng & Thadani, 2012). E-trust determines what customers are looking up to from the organization and it reduces their uncertainty towards the organization in both social and business interactions (Fan & Miae, 2012). E-trust is also seen as the belief and knowledge customers has about the organization in meeting and exceeding their needs and wants, e-tailing has a very huge impact on customers and how they behave in the process of

transacting a business with the firm. When trust is broken by an organization, the customer feels disappointed, and it takes time for them to trust the organization again.

Previous studies on trust have identified trust as a characteristic that brings about customer loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013; Liu, Gao & Lee, 2011). Trustworthiness means is the ability of knowing whether a firm is willing enough to deliver what they promised their customers (Baek and King, 2011). Trustworthiness can also be captured within the context of e-tailing as sincerity, honesty, integrity and transparency of the organization by the consumers. Trustworthiness can also be seen as credibility of the firm in delivering quality products and services to their customers, which shows a reasonable level of acceptability of the messages delivered by the organization.

Trustworthiness refers to the perception of the customers about the e-tailing firm in terms of sincerity, integrity, believability and reliability. In other words, the customers want to know how reliable and sincere a firm is in their delivery of products and services in an online platform (Erdogan, 1999; Erdogan, et al., 2001). Organizations that sell online capitalizes on the value customers place on trustworthiness by using the appropriate and workable channels that are widely perceived as being honest, timely, dependable and reliable. Improving on being trustworthy, what the firm offers is the most effective way for firms to increase and enhance customer's confidence towards their brands (Suki, 2016).

### **Service Reliability**

Electronic Retailing (E-tailing) is a process which organization sell to customers individually in an online platform and in-turn customers purchase goods and services in the comfort of their homes. Nevertheless, this process requires shipping and delivery time. However, handling and delivering products have become a critical challenge for most electronic retailers today. Reliability is the ability of a firm's website to keep accurate records and deliver quality and prompt services and the ability to secure personal information of both potential and actual customers (Parasuraman et al., 1998; Janda et al., 2002; Kim & Lee 2002).

Dabholkar et al., (1996), posits that reliability is the degree to which customers believe and rely on the promises made by the online retail stores and whether they are readily available when customers need them. Reliability is also the ability to deliver a promised product or service to customers at the right place and time. Furthermore, Parasuraman et al., (1998) posits that reliability is the ability for firms to deliver a promised service accurately and dependably. Reliability also refers to the ability to provide and deliver expected standard of service at all times, how the firm handles customer service issues, service failure recovery, customer complaints issues, performing and offering the right services for the first time within the promised time frame and minimizing errors and complaints. Moon, (2013), stated that reliability of service from firms and service providers is related to service security and easy access to the firm's website or shopping sites.

### **Marketing Performance**

Performance can be defined as the accomplishment of assignment or task within a specified timeframe. It can also be the process of achieving a goal or obtaining an objective. Neely et al. (1995) states that performance measurement system is a set of indicators that is used to measure and quantify both the effectiveness and efficiency of a given action. Performance measurement has two major objectives: To connect company goals and objectives and to set targets for improvements activities. Marketing performance aims to measure how efficient and effective marketing activities can enhance business performance (Clark & Ambler, 2001).

Marketing performance can also be defined as the extent to which an organization achieves its stated and anticipated marketing objectives. Furthermore, it is the accomplishment of an organization's expected set goals. According to Lucky (2011), organization's marketing performance provides information about the state of the organization in terms of sales growth, profitability, efficiency, liquidity, market share, customer satisfaction, and leverage and success/failure rate. It provides information on how the firm succeeds or fails and predominantly the profitability level of the

business. Hence, marketing performance is a measure that the firm's marketing activities are effective, successful and profitable. However, measuring marketing performance can be in terms of market share, profitability and sales volume.

### **E-tailing Strategies and Marketing Performance**

The success of e-tailing largely depends on the efficient website design, easy payment system, prompt delivery and effective shopping experience (Zeithaml, 2002). Other factors that inform successful e-tailing are timely delivery, return and replacement process, accurate refund policy, speedy response to e-customers complaints etc. Ratchford et al. (2001) states that customers can retrieve information about a firm and its merchandize and compare their products amongst other competitors at a minimal cost through the internet.

Customers are increasingly engaging in online purchases due to the convenience of comparing products and prices of different online merchants (Myerson et al., 1998). Guttman et al. (1998) notes the unique attributes that differentiate online shopping from traditional shopping. Apart from convenience and the wide variety it provides, e-tailing makes it easy to access and compare information from multiple e-stores. In other words, supermarkets may experience decrease in physical shopping (Meeker, 1997).

Levy and Weitz (1995) posits that the sustainability of any retail store is hinged on satisfying the needs of customers more efficiently than their competitors. The increase of e-tailing in Port Harcourt has shown that the Internet can completely redefine how customer's needs can be met; and that the Internet is a virtual retail environment with wide global visibility.

### **E-trust and Marketing Performance**

Customers are the major assets of any organization and without them, no business will survive. Achieving success is a bit straight, but maintaining that success is a big deal and a serious task for organizations. E-trust plays a critical role in today's business environment. Trust is usually seen as a complex statement because one cannot know the motive and intentions of others (Kramer, 1999). Trust is however seen customers' ability to accept the weaknesses of an organization in an online transaction based on their positive expectations regarding future online store behaviour (Kimery and McCard, 2002).

E-business has grown rapidly in Nigeria. And e-tailers must focus on building trust with customers rather than focus only on developing websites (Pavlou, 2003). Customers value trust more than price, they consider trust twice as important as any service rendered to them. Trust is difficult to build in offline business. It is however, more herculean to build trust online (Hodges, 1997; Ratnasingham, 1998; Hoffman et al., 1999; Roy et al., 2001).

In other-words, marketing success largely depends on perceived credibility of a service provider. It is important that organizations ensure that their websites and other e-platforms work effectively to avoid a service failure. When trust is broken, it is very difficult to rebuild. It is then worthy to note that e-trust is key to healthy customer experience, which in turn, increases loyalty. Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between e-trust and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.

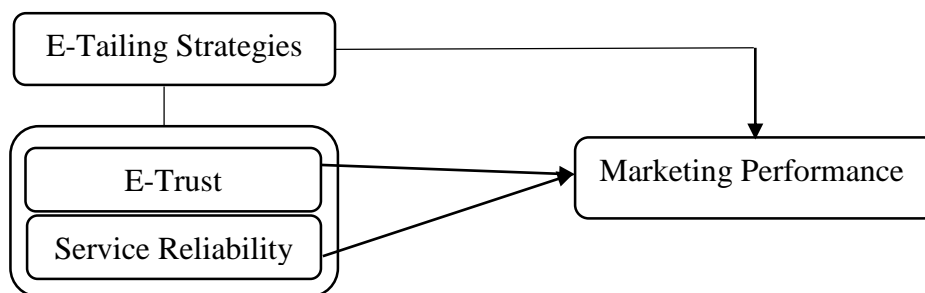
### **Service Reliability and Marketing Performance**

In e-commerce, customers interact with sellers through a high technical interface instead of through direct physical contact. Goods are delivered by sellers without a direct contact with customers which often bring about service quality issues such as late delivery, damaged goods, inaccurate product information, lack of proper customer care approach etc. (Zeithaml et al., 2002; Bitner et al., 2000). Reliability is the ability to perform a promised service accurately and consistently (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Holloway & Beatty, 2003). Customers are more concern about service outcome, shopping experience and customer service of a given firm, which will decline if the

firm fails to deliver as expected (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Failure to perform the services reliably results to dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, lack of trust and switching behaviour (Bitner et al., 2000; McCollough et al., 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1994; Lehr et al., 2012). Lehr et al. (2012) note that reliability of performance is the process of delivering quality service that meets and exceeds some target level of the firm's performance.

In other for firms to avoid major online service failures, it is necessary that they deliver quality service and increase the reliability of their operations. More so, it is vital that firms perform services as promised. This will increase their market share, sales growth and profitability. Based on the above, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between service reliability and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.



**Fig. 1:** Operational framework on e-tailing strategies and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.

**Source:** Researcher Desk 2023.

## METHODOLOGY

This study examined the relationship between e-tailing strategies and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a descriptive research design while data was collected in a cross-sectional survey, and in a non-contrived environment where the researcher has incomplete control over the elements of the study. The population of the study is four hundred and twenty (420) registered supermarkets in Port Harcourt (According to Rivers State Yellow Pages Directory, 2013/2014 edition). The study adopted Taro Yamen formula for sampling size determination. The spearman's rank order correlation ( $\rho$ ) was used to test the proposed hypotheses with the aid of SPSS version 21.

## RESULTS

As a result of observed blank or omitted entries as well as incomplete entries, some copies of questionnaire were deemed not useable and so were not included in the analyses. Out of a total of four hundred and twenty (420) copies of questionnaire distributed, three hundred and sixty-five (365) copies representing a response rate of 89% were retrieved and 45 which represent 11% were not retrieved. Out of the 365 retrieved, 341 which represent 93.4% were usable, and 24 which represent 6.6% were not usable.

Analyses of the usable copies of questionnaire showed that male respondents account for 51.3% corresponding while female respondents account for 48.7%. This shows that a greater number of men participated in the study. Also, 32.6% of respondents were found to be in the age group of 18-25 years; those in the 26-45 years category made 49.6% of the respondents while 17.8% of the respondents fall within the age of 46 and above. In terms of academic qualification, 30.8% of respondents hold BSc/MSc/PhD, 38.1 hold OND/HND/NCE, while 23.2% of the respondents hold SSCE. For job position, 69 of the respondents representing 20.3% were senior managers, 123 representing 36.1% were managers, while 149 representing 43.7% were assistant managers.



**Table 1: Correlation between E-trust on Marketing Performance Correlations**

			E-trust	Marketing Performance
Spearman's rho	E-trust	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.854**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	341	341
	Marketing Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.854**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	341	341

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 reveals a rho coefficient of 0.854 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between e-trust and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis.

**Table 2: Correlation between Service Reliability and Marketing Performance Correlations**

			Service Reliability	Marketing Performance
Spearman's rho	Service Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.956**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	341	341
	Marketing Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.956**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	341	341

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 reveals a rho coefficient of 0.956 and probability value of 0.000. This result indicates that there is a strong, positive and statically significant relationship between service reliability and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis.

**Table 3: Summary of hypotheses result for e-tailing strategies and marketing performance**

Hypotheses	Hypotheses Statement	Results	Decision
Ho <sub>1</sub>	There is no significant relationship between e-trust and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.	0.854	Rejected
Ho <sub>2</sub>	There is no significant relationship between service reliability and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.	0.956	Rejected

**DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS**

Our findings show significant relationship between e-tailing strategies and marketing performance. When e-commerce channels are effectively established they speed up e-business transactions and as such, encourage marketing performance. This outcome concurs with the findings of Doolinetal (2005) which showed that effective e-tailing strategies result in superlative gains for firms.

Our analyses revealed a strong, positive and significant relationship between e-trust and marketing performance of supermarket in Port Harcourt. This findings suggests that e-trust gives confidence to potential buyers to do business on-line. The findings aligns with the initial stand of Dennis et al. (2004) that if customers lack trust in e-trade channels, they will be discouraged to trade online. Our findings also validate the stand of Ayas (2008), and Corritor (2003).

Our analyses also showed that there is a significant relationship between service reliability and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. This result support the findings of Kim and Lee (2002) and Rabinovich and Bailey (2004) that service reliability is critical to success of e-tailers.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research examined the nexus between e-tailing strategies (e-trust and service reliability) and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The findings show that e-tailing strategies largely relate marketing performance. In specifics, the study showed that e-trust and service reliability positively relates to marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The study thus concludes that e-tailing strategies inform marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt; and recommends that supermarkets in Port Harcourt that seek improved marketing performance should:

1. Ensure that their e-trade channels command trust in such a way that customers can effectively transact businesses through such channels without being defrauded.
2. Prove at all instances that their e-service channels are reliable; this must be guaranteed by providing customers with 24 hours e-service reliability.
3. Strive to sustain a high reputation for their e-channels so as to give loyal customers confidence in dealing with the supermarkets.

## CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

It is believed that the findings of this study has in no little way contributed positively to literature on e-tailing strategies and marketing performance. Firstly, this work has contributed in resolving existing issues relating to e-tailing strategies and marketing performance. Also, the study has offered recommendations based that if acted upon, could help supermarkets improve their marketing performance. It is equally vital to observe that the findings of this study could serve as a source of information that will spur further research in this research area.

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