DIGITAL INTERACTION AND STUDENTS' PURCHASE DECISION IN E-TAILING INDUSTRY IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically examined the relationship between digital interactions on students purchase decision. Survey research design was employed in the study. The population of interest was 9,743 students, with a sample size of 370 students. Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient were used for analysis with the aid of Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The study finds that digital interaction strategies significantly influences students purchase decision in varying degrees. It was therefore recommended that e-tailing industry should research into the digital interaction needs of the students and take advantage of its use in order to effect their purchase decision positively.

KEYWORDS: *Digital Interaction, E-tailing Industry, Purchase Decision*

INTRODUCTION

Digital interaction provides a marketplace where buyers and sellers develop transactions directly and interactively beyond the physical limitations experienced with the traditional brick and mortar retailers (Kiang & Shang, 2015). The speedy development of information communication technology and electronic commerce has allowed consumers to purchase products and services online (Lai, 2014). It is a resourceful tool which enables firms to create strong brands and gain competitive advantage (Tiago & Verrissimo, 2014).

Internet shopping is a phenomenon that has witnessed a rapid growth nowadays as such has significantly influenced the business environment. An examination into the exponential growth of the main players of this industry indicates that there is still a large reservoir of market potential for e-commerce. The emergence of social media is among the most pronounced development in the history of commerce. On regular basis 100,000 tweets are sent, 684,478 contents are shared on Facebook, 2 million search queries are made on google, 48 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube, 3600 photos are shared on Instagram and 571 websites are created (James, 2012).

Retailing is the set of business activities that adds value to the products and services sold to consumers for their personal or family use. On the other hand, electronic commerce is a form of electronic business, it is a means of sharing business information through the internet. Ozuru and Kalu (2006), views e-tailing as shopping online where goods and services are sold directly to the consumers electronically; which is also known as business to consumer (B2C).

Kiang & Shang (2015), indicated that the purchase behaviours of online shoppers play an important role in the success of e-retailers. Otim &

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Grover (2006), stated that service delivery through websites relates to the extent to which a website facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery of products and services. Digital interaction not only encourages user-generated contents but also extends the focus to the users by permitting them to share contents among different networks. The fierce competition presently existing in digital environment justifies the relevance of developing online services to capture the attention of surfers. Thus, e-business requires more than just offering a website; despite the fact that most firms ignorantly belief that just being online is enough to generate interest and improve their business (Suh, 2015).

However, the previous researchers did not explore the relationship between digital interaction and

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The huge growth of online shopping has driven intense competition among e-commerce retailers, who increasingly see the customer experience as vital (Lai, 2014). Online consumers identify and value the advantages of online services, at the same time e-retailers face a set of specific demands in the online environment based on the fact that on the Internet, a competitor is only a click away (Yun & Good, 2007). The proliferation of many e-tailing firms in the e-tailing industry has resulted to huge competition for a better

AIM OF THE STUDY

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
Instant Gratification Theory

This theory was propounded by Robertz in the year 1956. Instant gratification theory was first used by Sigmund Freud to describe the function of the 'id', his proposed component of the unconscious mind that is driven purely by instincts (Good Therapy, 2015). At the center of instant gratification theory is one of the most basic drives inherent in humans (that is, the tendency to avoid pain and see pleasure); this tendency is known as the pleasant principle.

Study Variables and Model Specification

The study adopted Digital Interaction (DI) as independent variables with its measures as Search engine (SE), Social Media (SM) while Students

FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

This study reiterate its aim to establish functional relationship between the measures of predictor and criterion variables. For the purpose of this study, we developed a model specification to aid the functional relationships as follow:

students purchase decision; few studies have been carried out to ascertain the extent to which social media affect consumer purchase decision of e-tailing firms. For instance, Hussain and Adamu (2014), in their research, concluded that the use of social media especially Facebook and twitter plays important role in facilitating purchase decisions. Additionally, Murphy (2009), in his study found that social media networks allows e-tailing firms to advertise their products through low cost and low risk channels. Therefore, given this knowledge gap, the current researcher's point of departure from previous studies is to empirically establish the relationship between digital interaction and students purchase decision of e-tailing industry in Port Harcourt.

patronage. In spite of the increase in the rate of internet penetration, e-tailing firms (Jumia, Konga, Jiji, Kara, Vconnect, etc) are faced with the need to constantly adapt to changes and trends in technology; more so, issues like servers or browsers being down, software malfunction, etc., can be a major setback to the success of e-tailing firms. Furthermore, the wide exposure of digital media has resulted in consumers being more selective about purchasing the products of online firms; making it difficult for the firms to attract the customer's attention (Noel, 2009).

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between digital interaction and students purchase decision of e-tailing industry in Port Harcourt Today's generation are fondly referred to as 'microwave generation' because they are used to getting things done very fast. As a result of internet evolution and technology there is little or no patience in people any longer. Instant gratification theory saw the fast place environment in which we inhabit, that requires instant action and how things happen at once and too quickly. By this, (Allard et al, 2001) opines online shopping has impact on consumers because the use of internet to make purchases ensures the buying process is faster, efficient and effective.

Purchase Decision (SPD) was adopted as the dependent variable measured with Decision to buy (DB) and After Purchase Behaviour (APB).

The attributes of this study are follows:

$$SPD = f(DI) \quad .... \quad (1)$$
$$DI = f(SE, SM) \quad .... \quad (2)$$
$$SPD = f(DB, APB) \quad ....…......…… \quad (3)$$

(DB, APB) = f (SE, SM)

…………….………………..… (4)

Where:

SPD=   Students Purchase Decision

DI =   Digital Interaction

SE = Search Engine

SM = Social Media

DB = Decision to Buy

APB = After Purchase Behaviour
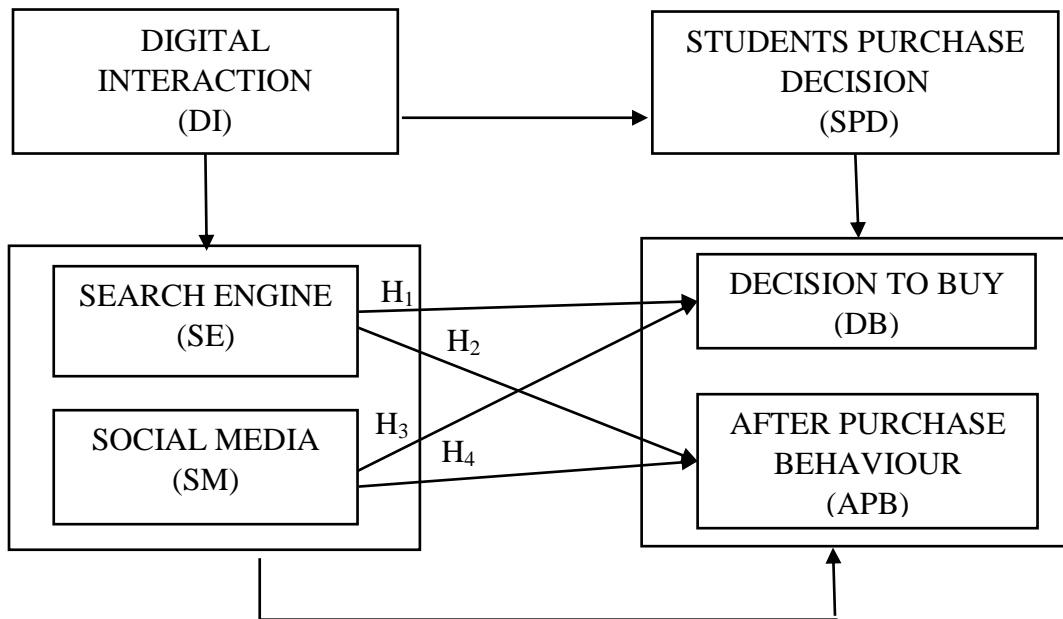
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/ OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Fig 1:   Conceptual/ Operational framework on Digital Interaction and Students Purchase Decision in E-tailing Industry in Port Harcourt.

Source: Researcher's Concept 2019, as adapted from Silverman (2001); Ayodeji (2018).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

George (2004) has studied how a consumer's beliefs about the privacy and trustworthiness of the Internet might ultimately shape their attitudes towards the Internet and their purchasing intentions. In a similar vein, researchers have studied how the Internet's perceived 'usefulness' and 'ease of use' (Bhattacherjee, 2000; O'Cass & Fenech, 2003) might ultimately shape consumers' intention to shop.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Digital Interaction

Digital interaction enables customer post reviews and update about services, firms, brands, products at firm's websites and even third party websites and social networks and these reviews have the tendency of reaching a larger number of potential customers (Kannan & Alice, 2017); it provides a

Rasool and Madni (2014) from their research, found that 53% of customers get their information from social media, firm's websites before purchasing a product. Also, Haubl and Trifts (2000) in their research, investigated the nature of the effects that interactive decision aids may have on purchase decision making in an online shopping environment.

suitable environment for experiential communication between e-tailing firms and its customers

According to Chukwu and Uzoma (2014), the digital platforms of e-tailing firms (e.g. Jumia, Konga, Jiji, Payporte, Vconnect etc.) offers a wide selection of styles and brands, complete convenience, easy access from any location, efficient customer service, secure payment through bank deposit or online banking as well as cash on delivery, fast delivery services,

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effective return policy in case of any defects, etc. Digital interaction is an integrated communications environment where electronic or digital devices are the tools which communicate and manage the content and activities within it.

In the words of Ayodeji (2018), digital interaction provides a place for online shopping within the internet, which includes websites, cloud servers, search engines, social media, mobile apps, email, audio and video and other web-based resources, online market place, etc. In this study, we limited our dimensions of digital interaction to **search engine and social media.**

Search Engine

Search engine is a mechanism for effective selection, Chan et al., (2011) explained, customers acquired through search engines purchase more and constitute higher customers' value compared to those gotten through other online or offline channels. These search engines includes Google, Bing, Yahoo, Ask.com, Aol.com, Baidu, Internet archive, etc; its purpose is to extract requested information from the internet, as such, search engine becomes a day to day tool for interaction. Search engines provides access to free information in products and services, enabling consumers to identify brands and firms that fit their needs and wants thereby resulting in their purchase decision (Kannan & Alice, 2017). Thus, the following hypotheses were conceptualized:

Ho_1:   There is no significant relationship between search engine and decision to buy in e-tailing industry in Port Harcourt.

Ho_2:   There is no significant   relationship between search   engine and after purchase behaviour in e-tailing industry   in Port Harcourt.

Social Media

Dann & Dann (2011), indicated that social media formation is based on interconnected elements such as social interaction, content and communication media; thus it enables a two-way conversation. Marketing through social media is an umbrella term which entails the use of social platforms as marketing tools; it is the use of the social through media to market businesses (Weinberg, 2009). Social media is an

Students Purchase Decision

Consumer behaviour has been a major subject of market research since the beginning of the 21st century (Mokrysz, 2016). Purchase decision is the selection of an action from one, two or more alternative choices (AAker et al., 2014). Kotler and Armstrong (2005) posits, decision making process is made up of five stages to acquire products or services. It proceeds from

essential touch point in today's purchase decision process from the stage of need recognition to post purchase behaviour (Smith & Zook, 2011).

Weber (2009) opines, social media offers opportunities to achieve potential customers who have interest in sharing to others. The global average time spent per person on social networking sites is 6.9 hours per month (Delaney & Salminen, 2012). In the words of Trattner and Kappe (2012), social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Google+, etc allows customers to interact with one another; thus acting as a vehicle which aids firms gain traffic to their websites through links and adverts placed on their social media sites.

Drury (2008) argued, the use of social media platform by e-tailing firms is no longer a one dimension but a two-way process which engages a brand and an audience thereby fostering purchase decision. In the words of Safko and Brake (2009), social media involves activities, practices and behaviours among people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions using a conversational media. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. are dynamic tools that facilitate online relationship (Golden, 2011); it is a relatively low cost of marketing that allows e-tailing firms to engage in direct and end-user contact (Laplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Furthermore, Weber and Weinberg (2009) posits, advertisement via social media reaches potential customer thereby inducing their purchase decision. The growth of social media has allowed for increased awareness in terms of a changing environment (Mayfield, 2011) thus social media is playing an increasing essential role in marketing and customer purchase decisions (Cuming, 2015). Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Ho_3:   There is no significant relationship between social media and decision to buy in e-tailing industry in Port Harcourt.

Ho_4:   There is no significant relationship between social media and after purchase behaviour in e-tailing industry in Port Harcourt.

the stage the consumer recognizes a need, gathers information, evaluates alternatives and make a decision. However, few stages are skipped in regular buying and routine purchases (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

The traditional model of decision making process (Five-stage model of the buying process) involves five steps that consumers move through when buying a product or service. Solomon et al, (2006)

opined, the decision making process is the amount of effort that goes into the decision each time it must be made. A marketer has to understand these steps to properly move the consumer to the point of buying the product, communicating effectively to consumers and closing the sale.

Decision to Buy

This is the stage in the decision making process when the purchase actually takes place. During this stage, the customer forms an intention to buy the most preferred brand as a result of his alternative evaluation. According to Kotler (2011), this stage can be disrupted by two factors: negative feedback of others and level of motivation to accept feedback and a situation one did not anticipate such as losing a job. In the words of Backhaus et al, (2007) decision to buy is the occurrence of transaction. More so, decision to buy could be described as minor like buying toothpaste or as major like buying a car; thus, the more major the purchase

METHODOLOGY

The population of this study comprised of the students from faculty of management sciences and business studies of three Universities located in Port Harcourt (Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt) that patronize e-tailing firms in Port Harcourt. In this study, our population of interest was

Data Analysis and Presentation

Decision Rule: Reject null hypothesis (Ho) if PV< 0.05 but accept H_o if otherwise. Also, 0.1 and above= positive relationship while -0.1 and above= Negative relationship.

decision, the more efforts is typically put into the purchase process.

After Purchase Behaviour

This stage consists of examining and comparing products/service features such as quality, price; the customers tend to correlate their expectation to perceived value (Macinnis et al, 2014). After the product has been consumed, the customers experience certain levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction thereby evaluating the choice they have made in selecting the alternative. More so, Silverman, (2001) indicated that this is a phase when the customer decides whether or not to move from implementing the product only or to a full adoption; that is whether to repurchase the product repeatedly or not. Neal et al (2004), argued that it is the most important stage as it directly affects the consumers' purchase of the same product or services from the same supplier in the future.

nine thousand seven hundred and forty three (9743); to determine the sample size we made use of the Krechie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table, by this we had a sample size of 370. Thus, 370 copies of questionnaires were distributed; however after data cleaning, 356 copies was found usable. Data was analyzed using Spearman Rank Correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.

TABLE SHOWING RESULT OF HYPOTHESES

HYPOTHESIS	RELATIONSHIP	CORRELATION	PROBABILITY VALUE (PV)	DECISION
Ho_1	Search Engine and Decision to Buy	0.843	0.000	Rejected
Ho_2	Search Engine and After Purchase Behaviour	0.676	0.010	Rejected
Ho_3	Social Media and Decision to Buy	0.917	0.030	Rejected
Ho_4	Social Media and After Purchase Behaviour	0.742	0.000	Rejected

Source: Field Survey Data, 2019.

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DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result from our test of hypothesis using SPSS version 20 reveals the following:

Hypothesis One: There was a positive relationship between search engine and decision to buy. The positive relationship that exists was also significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected, thereby accepting the alternate hypothesis; this means that the decision to buy of students in Port Harcourt is directly related to the use of search engine. More so, this result concurs with the outcome of the study carried at by Hayta (2013), where it was found that students are significantly influenced by search engine when making their buying decision.

Hypothesis Two: There was a positive relationship between search engine and after purchase behaviour. The positive relationship that exists was also significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate accepted. This means that the behaviour of students after purchases is influenced by the information gotten through search engine.

Hypothesis Three: There was a positive relationship between social media and decision to buy of e-tailing industry. The positive relationship that exists was also significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected, thereby accepting the alternate hypothesis. This means that social media can significantly explain the decision to buy of students in Port Harcourt. This results supports the findings of Ramnarain and Govender (2013), which shows that customers are seeking out social platforms and deliberately turning away from traditional advertising and therefore makes their purchase decision based on the information gotten from social media.

Hypothesis Four: There was a positive relationship between social media and after purchase behaviour. The positive relationship that exists was significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null (Ho$_4$) hypothesis was rejected, and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This means that social media adopted by e-tailing industry influence the after purchase behaviours of university students in Port Harcourt.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that digital interaction have a very strong association with students purchase decision of e-tailing industry in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATION

Broadly, e-tailing industry should concentrate on digital interaction and information technology, attempts should also be made to understand how students perceive them. This would help them influence students purchase decision positively.

Practical Implication

This study provides the e-tailing firms operational in Port Harcourt and beyond with ample ideas on how to use digital interactions (social media, search engine, etc) adequately in order to ensure favorable purchase decisions which will in turn increase its profitability.

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