

## CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGIES AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF E-TAILERS IN PORT HARCOURT

Anwuri, Patience Nwokaego (Ph. D)

Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management  
Faculty of Management Sciences University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.  
patience.anwuri@uniport.edu.ng

Haniel O. Eke

Department of Marketing University of Port Harcourt  
E-Mail for Correspondence: haniel.eke@uniport.edu.ng

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between content marketing strategies and customer patronage of e-tailers in Port-Harcourt. In course of fulfilling this purpose, the topic extensively dealt with the concepts of how these content marketing strategies influence customer patronage. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design in developing the research plan. While a total of 1,148,665 constituted the study population, 400 customers of online shops were administered copies of the research instrument. Data gotten were analysed using Spearman's Correlation Co-efficient. The study found a moderate to strong, positive and significant relationships between content marketing strategies and customer patronage. It was concluded that purchase intentions and customer retention to a large extent can be influenced by infographics, mobile applications, social network and e-newsletter of online shops. The study therefore recommended that online shops seeking to improve retention and repurchase should endeavour to engage the identified content marketing strategies as this will increase the possibility of achieving higher customer patronage.

**Keywords:** Content Marketing, Customer Patronage, e-tailers.

### INTRODUCTION

The invention and innovation of technology and how the internet have been influencing Business-2-Consumer (B2C) and Business-2-Business(B2B) companies to invest in digital marketing is evident in recent times ("Internet World Stats", 2014). This paradigm shift is geared towards enhancing profitability with the least possible cost (Ngo, 2015). Also, the invention of the internet never changed the concepts of marketing but, made it easy for firms to use this technological space to serve customers better (Orapin, 2009). The author further stated that half of the world's population today are internet users through mobile phones, computers, tablets, laptops etc; hence, with the advent of digital marketing, customers can now purchase goods and services of their choice at their convenience, time saving, broader selection, more information, efficiency etc. ("Internet World Stats", 2014). E-tailing firms such as Konga, Jumia, EBay, Amazon, etc; are currently providing online shopping experience for customers in Nigeria (Baetzgen & Tropp, 2013). With the use of these online platforms, e-tailing firms have adapted different ways to serve, meet, and satisfy online customers (Ngo, 2015). Thus, learning about new marketing tools and channels gives companies competitive advantages over others in the industry. The phrase "content marketing" was used as early as 1996, when John F. Oppedahl

led a roundtable for journalists at The American Society for Newspaper Editors and in 1998, Jerrell Junerion held the title of “director of online and content marketing” at Netscape. Content marketing can be defined as a form of marketing focused on creating, publishing and distributing content for a targeted audience online. Unlike others, online marketing, relies on anticipating and meeting an existing customer needs for information as opposed to creating demand for a new need (Orapin, 2009). The phrase “content marketing” was used as early as 1996, when John F. Oppedahl led a roundtable for journalists at The American Society for Newspaper Editors and in 1998, Jerrell Junerion held the title of “director of online and content marketing” at Netscape. The way customers perceive and buy product and services online varies, which calls for proper customer purchase behaviour evaluation, availability of firm related information, and appropriate medium in communicating with them (customers). Information provided by content marketing seeks to focus on the firm’s offering (Baetzgen & Tropp, 2013). It is important that the content format will have different effects on the attitudes and purchase intention on online shoppers. The Authors further asserted that content improves the way an offering is presented, introduced and demonstrated on the commercial website. These content are used to increase brand recognition, trust, authority, credibility, loyalty and authenticity. The most important factors are high quality and credibility of the content, as well as its fit with target customers, brand and the media environment used. (Baetzgen & Tropp, 2013). With increased competition among online shops, customer patronage is becoming an issue among these firms (Kline, 2000). Profitability through customer satisfaction is slow and this is worrisome especially as these firms invest tremendously in ICT to better

serve their customers (Clark, 2012). Again, E-tailing firms have been looking for ways of improving customer satisfaction and online store traffic; hence a lot of studies have been carried out in this regard (Tobassum & Rahman, 2012; Shwu-Ing, 2003). It interesting to mention here that the increase in the usage of the internet does not necessarily connotes online customer patronage. Research indicates that 81% of those who browse web sites for goods and services do not actually make an online shopping (Kline, 2000). Majority of Nigerians (76 %), especially younger people were using the internet for non-shopping activities such as seeking information, playing games, entertainment, or communicating with friends, etc. (Narges, 2009). Thus, the fundamental issue here is to ascertain whether content marketing can change this trend; hence impacting positively on consumers’ attitude and purchase intention towards online shopping activities.

In view of the above, and to understand the importance of content marketing in enhancing customer patronage toward online shopping firms in Port Harcourt is crucial to the study. Thus, the main objective of this study is to ascertain whether content marketing strategies of e-tailers influence customers’ patronage in Port Harcourt. The following are the specific objectives:

1. Examine the relationship between infographics and customer patronage
2. Examine the extent of relationship between mobile application and customer patronage
3. Examine the extent of relationship between social media and customer patronage
4. Examine the extent of relationship between e-newsletter and customer patronage

## Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses below were tested in the later part of the study and are illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

- H<sub>01</sub>. There is no significant relationship between infographics and purchase intentions.
- H<sub>02</sub>. There is no significant relationship between infographics and customer retention.
- H<sub>03</sub>. There is no significant relationship between mobile application and purchase intentions.
- H<sub>04</sub>. There is no significant relationship between mobile application and customer retention.
- H<sub>05</sub>. There is no significant relationship between social media and purchase intentions.
- H<sub>06</sub>. There is no significant relationship between social media and customer retention.
- H<sub>07</sub>. There is no significant relationship between e-newsletters and purchase intentions.
- H<sub>08</sub>. There is no significant relationship between e-newsletters and customer retention.

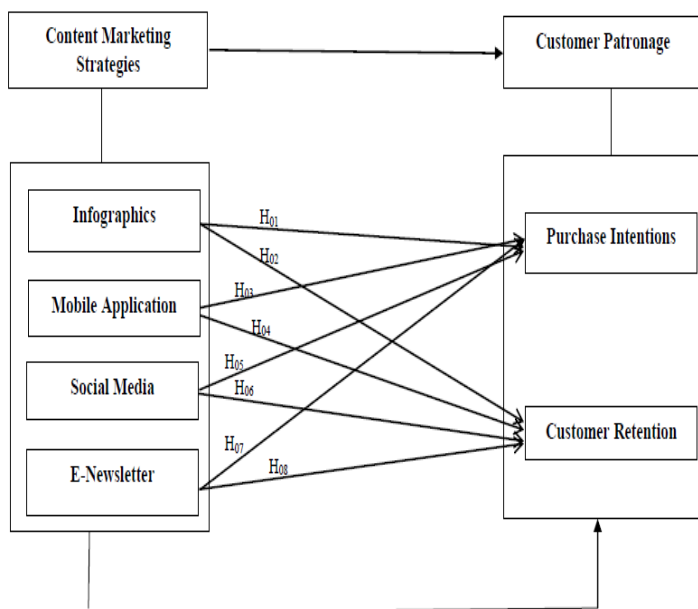


Figure 1 Operational Framework

## Figure 2.1: Operational Framework of the association between content marketing strategies and customer patronage

Source: Adapted from Literature Review, 2018

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Foundation

The theories upon which the present study was anchored are Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989). Theory of Reason Action (TRA) has its roots in social psychology setting. The theory proposes three general constructs namely; behavioural intention (function of both attitudes toward an intention, behaviour and subjective norms toward that behaviour which has been found to predict actual behavior), attitude (sum of beliefs about a particular behaviour weighted by evaluations of these beliefs), and subjective norm (Influence of people in one's social norms environment on his behavioural intentions; the beliefs of people, weighted by the importance one attributes to each of their opinions that will influence).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is the extension of the TRA due to the salient limitation in the previous theory in dealing with voluntary behaviour while the latter theory proposed that behaviour is not completely under control thus a voluntary action. TPB helps to understand how people's (adoption decision) behaviour can be influenced. It predicts deliberate behaviour, since behaviour can be deliberate and planned. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an adaption of the TRA and was used to assess user's computer acceptance, which is measured by the intention and the influence of attitude, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use toward the intention to use

These proposed theories mentioned above are to be considered in content marketing because, they are important to influence the purchase decisions, intentions and actual purchase actions by customers toward online shops.

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## Conceptual Review

### Content Marketing Strategies

Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience and ultimately, to drive profitable customer action (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Content marketing deliver value, provides information, high quality and also educate about what the company have in stock for them. Its objectives include; Increasing brand awareness, customer engagement, customer retention, customer loyalty, lead generation, brand recognition, website traffic, converting Leads into Customers, building the image as the industry leader, and sales (Rakic, Beba & Mira, 2014).

According to Rach and Halvorson, (2016), content marketing strategy is “a plan for building an audience by publishing, maintaining and spreading frequent and consistent content that educates, entertains or inspires to turn strangers into customers and with the ultimate goal of driving profitable customer action”. Content marketing strategies must contain 5 components of the business which are business case for innovating with content marketing, business plan for content marketing, your audience personas and content map (i.e. their content engagement cycle), the brand story and channel plan (i.e. the platform you will use to tell your story) (Rakic, et al., 2014)

The benefits of a content marketing strategy include inbound traffic to your organization website, building brand awareness through engagements, generating natural link popularity for SEO, more accurate goal setting and tracking, become an authority to your customers, increases team efficiency etc.

### Customer Patronage

Customer is as old as business itself, the sole and primary aim of any business is to satisfy

customers, therefore bring more profit, through repeat purchase and referral to the organization. According to the Concise (Zhou, 2011), the word “Customer Patronage” means a person buying goods and services for personal consumption or use. Customer patronage is a means of determining a firm’s sales volume or volume of transactions, profit margin and customer retention level.

Many studies have been able to determine what influences customer patronage and impacts of customer patronage (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004; Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). According to Nwulu and Asiegbu (2015), online organization must have those capabilities to attain and improve products and services attributes if they want to induce customers to buy more of the organization’s products. Online shopping is being influenced by these attitudes, personality nature, and it increases the online shopping rate.

More so, Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), assert that customers undergo some perceived risks. This perceived risk can be defined as those uncertainties that consumer face when they cannot foresee the consequences of their purchase decisions. They identified these perceived risk to be; functional (performance), physical (health and safety), financial (monetary investments), psychological (self-image) and time (effort and convenience). Thus, it depends on the person, product, the situation, and culture. These factors mentioned are not just for traditional methods of marketing but, has also advanced in the electronic marketing which paved way for online shopping.

Furthermore, Sulek and Hensley (2004) noted that the essences of customer patronage are – repeat purchase, sales volume, company profitability, improves customer satisfaction, build better purchase intentions and customer retention etc.

## **Content Marketing Strategies and Customer Patronage**

Retailers are increasingly using online strategies to enhance their competitiveness, increase sales and make profits. One of these many strategies are social media, infographics etc. and are regarded as content marketing strategies. Many e-retailing businesses across the world use these strategies to set rivalry between domestic and foreign e-retailing businesses every day. Since, the success in e-retailing industry depends on the customers, most domestic e-retailers are also moving into social media, mobile apps, infographics, newsletters and other platforms etc. which their counterparts exploit abroad (Chaney & Gamble, 2008).

### **Infographics and Customer Patronage**

Infographics are graphic visual representation of information, data or knowledge intended to present complex information quickly and clearly (Newsom & Haynes, 2004). It can improve cognition by utilizing graphics to enhance the human visual systems ability to see patterns and trends (Kim & Jones, 2014). Similar pursuits are information visualization, data visualization, statistical graphics, information design or information architecture (Smiciklas, 2012).

Infographics can be traced back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but it was modified in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the early 2000's infographics was used in different forms such as musical videos, books, games, businesses, journalism, religious denominations used infographics for publicity for its various activities and have recently increase the number of easy-to-use, free tools have made the creation of infographics available to a large segment of the population (Stollery, 2015). Infograhics consists of three parts which are; visuals, contents and some insights into data they present. It also comes in

different forms; statistical, histogram, graph, data map, sequence maps etc.

Many businesses use infographics as a medium for communicating with and attracting potential customers. Information graphics are a form of content marketing and has become a tool for internet marketers and companies to create content that others will link to, thus possibly boosting a company's reputation and online presence. This infographics functions to keep customer informed, educate them about upcoming and already existing activities of the organization. This brings about loyal customers who increase the level of customers patronizing the organizations product or services.

### **Mobile Applications and Customer Patronage**

Customers in today's world are on the move and they're using mobile application platforms to get there. Whether they use mobile phones, tablets, or other mobile devices they have all the information they need (Seigler, 2008). Mobile app is a software program (internet application) designed for smart phones or other mobile application. The main aim of creating this application is to acquire many users as possible and deliver quality engagement within the target groups (Maczuga et al., 2014). They began appearing in 2008 and typically operated by owner of the mobile operating system (Cark, 2012). Thus, it is easy to find and install and also available on various distribution platforms such as App store, Google Play, Windows phone, Phone store and Blackberry App world.

According to Lai and Wang (2012), there are some of the biggest benefits of mobile apps for businesses. They stated that firms can build loyalty, reinforce the brand, increase visibility, increase accessibility, increase sell-through, increase exposure across mobile devices, and connect with on-the-go consumers. These

benefits of mobile app improve businesses and therefore stimulate the rate at which customers patronize products from these online retail stores.

### **Social Media and Customer Patronage**

Social media is perceived as a software programme, a webpage or website designed for smart phones or other mobile application. It is seen as a series of activities aimed at promoting content through social media channels like Facebook, twitter, Instagram etc. It acquires many users as possible and delivers quality engagement within the target groups (Babin & Dardin, 2014). E-commerce businesses may refer to social media as consumer-generated-Media (CGM). A common thread running through all definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value for the business or organization that is using it (Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkatraman & Wang 2016).

Although social media accessed via desktop computers offer a variety of opportunities for companies in a wide range of business sectors, mobile social media, which users are accessing when they are "on the go" via tablet computer or smartphone can take advantage of the location- and time-sensitive awareness of users (Kaplan, 2012). Mobile social media tools can be used for marketing research, communication, sales promotions or discounts, and relationship development and loyalty programmes (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006). The authors stated that social media platforms for many organization helps in not only given out product information, to targeted audience, get its customers updated about the organizational activities, and follow up with quick response, this increases the rate of customer patronage of the organizations services.

### **E-Newsletter and Customer Patronage**

An E-newsletter is a printed report containing news (information) of the activities of a business (legal name; subscription business model) or organization (institutions, societies, associations) that is sent by mail regularly to all its members, customers, employees or people, who are interested in. It is a form of advertising sent periodically to a specific group of people (Dictionary Cambridge, 2017). It is mostly about a particular topic to a targeted group, usually done after collecting information through the use of questionnaire and other forms of research instruments (Maczuga et al., 2014). According to Klikitmedia (2012), e-newsletter comes in different forms like articles or sponsored articles posted on a webpage, simply containing the whole text; it goes as far as using infographics to enlighten its customers about a particular topic.

E-newsletter can improve businesses through the following ways; to increase awareness, position your brand, to get more business from current clients, to get repeat business from former clients, to educate prospects, to generate word-of-mouth referrals, to build your contact list, to establish expertise and credibility, to provide content for, and traffic to your web site, to shorten the sales process, to add value to your services etc., only matters to the business (Candill & Murphy 2008). This feeling may bring about repeated patronage. E-newsletter improves customer patronage keeping contacts with customers, making them feel like they (i.e. individually on age of organizations services to the business

### **Methods and Materials**

The research adopted cross-sectional survey in accessing the study population. Information from respondents were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed personally to the study subjects by the

researchers. Furthermore, the population of the study comprise online shoppers in Port Harcourt. According to World Population and Internet Review (2018) a total of one million, one hundred and forty eight thousand, six hundred and sixty five persons (1,148,665) purchase goods and services online in Nigeria. In determining sample size, Taro Yamen formula, was adopted to arrive at a sample size of 400. The formula is given below

$$\eta = N/(1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where n = sample size

N = Number of people in the population

e = allowable error

More so, both primary source of data was employed and obtained with the help research instrument. Finally, Spearman's Rank Correlation Co-efficient was used in testing various proposed hypotheses.

### Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Data collected from the field in this section was presented in tables and figures. A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed to selected customers of online shops in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State.

Table 1: Questionnaire Administration and Responses.

	Number involved	Usable copies (%)
Distribution	400	100
Useful copies returned	370	93%
Discarded Response	26	7%
Lost in Transit	4	1%

Table 1 above shows that a total of 400 copies of questionnaires were distributed amongst selected customers of online shops. Out of which 370 copies (93%) copies returned were considered useful. Due to obvious mistakes and incomplete response, 26 copies (7%) were discarded, while 4 copies (1%) could not be retrieved due to misplacement and other reasons given by the respondents.

**Reliability Analysis:** Reliability test was conducted to ascertain that the measures actually conform to the concept investigated in the research study. Table 2 provides the reliability test result of the variables.

Table 2: Result of reliability analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Infographics	.715
Mobile application	.747
Social media	.759
E-Newsletter	.767
Purchase intention	.755
Customer Retention	.762

The reliability analysis above shows that the variables had Cronbach's Alpha  $\geq .700$  which is an acceptable measure. Therefore, it implies that the research instrument measured the variables of the study as required.

Table 3: Summary of Test of Hypotheses

S/N	HYPOTHESES	(p)	p-value	Sig. Level	Decision	Conclusion
H0 <sub>1</sub>	There is no significant between Infographics and purchase intentions.	0.008**	0.05	0.625	Reject	Significant
H0 <sub>2</sub>	There is no significant between Infographics and customer retention.	0.004**	0.05	0.580	Reject	Significant
H0 <sub>3</sub>	There is no significant between mobile applications and purchase intentions.	0.0091* *	0.05	0.800	Reject	Significant
H0 <sub>4</sub>	There is no significant between mobile applications and customer retention.	0.007**	0.05	0.810	Reject	Significant
H0 <sub>5</sub>	There is no significant between Social media and purchase intentions.	0.0045* *	0.05	0.926	Reject	Significant
H0 <sub>6</sub>	There is no significant between Social media and customer retention.	0.0059* *	0.05	0.791	Reject	Significant

H0 <sub>7</sub>	There is no significant between E-Newsletters and purchase intentions.	0.000**	0.05	0.960	Reject	Significant
H0 <sub>8</sub>	There is no significant between E-Newsletters and customer retention.	0.000**	0.05	0.877	Reject	Significant

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents our discussion of our findings.

- i. Our findings shows that there is a positive and a significant relationship between infographics and purchase intentions of online shops in Port Harcourt, as shown by the spearman's rank order correlation coefficient of +0.625, indicating that there is a strong relationship between infographics and purchase intentions. The t-calculated value of 0.008, which is less than the t-tabulated value of 0.05, necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis.
- ii. Similarly, our findings further indicated a positive and a significant relationship between infographics and customer retention of online shops in Port Harcourt, as shown by the Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient of +0.580. This indicated that there is a moderate relationship between infographics and customer retention. The t-calculated value of 0.004, which is less than the t-tabulated 0.05, necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis.
- iii. We also observed a positive and a significant relationship between mobile applications and purchase intentions, as indicated in the spearman's rank order correlation coefficient of +0.800, indicating that there is a very strong relationship between mobile applications and purchase intentions. The correlation coefficient of +0.0091 gave rise to the rejection of the null hypothesis.
- iv. Also the study shows that there is a strong correlation between mobile applications and customer retention as indicated by the coefficient of +0.810. This revealed that there is a very strong relationship between mobile applications and customer retention; on the other hand the rank coefficient of 0.007 which is less than the tabulated value of 0.05 necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis.
- v. The study also indicated a positive significant correlation between social media and purchase intentions as shown by the correlation coefficient of +0.926, indicating that there is a very strong relationship between social media and purchase intentions. On the other hand the t-calculated value of 0.0045 which is less than the t-tabulated value of 0.05 necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis thus the acceptance of the alternative.
- vi. Furthermore the study showed a significant positive relationship between social media and customer retention as indicated by the moment correlation coefficient of +0.791, indicating that there is a strong relationship between social media and customer retention also the t-calculated value of 0.0059 which is less than the t-tabulated value of 0.05 necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.
- vii. Similarly, our findings further indicated a positive and a significant relationship between e-newsletter and purchase intentions as shown by the Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient of +0.760 shown in Table 3, indicating that there is a strong relationship between e-newsletter and purchase intentions. The t-



calculated value of 0.000 which is less than the t-tabulated value of 0.05 necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis.

- viii. We also observed a positive and a significant relationship between e-newsletter and customer retention, as indicated in the spearman's rank order correlation coefficient of +0.877 in, indicating that there is a strong relationship between e-newsletter and customer retention. The t-calculated value of 0.000 which is less than the t-tabulated value of 0.05 necessitated rejection of the null hypothesis.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

Based on the analysis carried out and discussion of findings the study is a demonstration of the fact that content marketing strategies are important in enhancing customer patronage in an online marketing environment. This implies that online marketers should craft strategies that will aid them to achieve competitive advantage in the competitive marketplace.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were advanced:

1. E-tailers should use multiple content formats to lead prospects to products and services they seek for as this strategy has proven to influence customer patronage.
2. E-tailing firms are also advised to showcase their offerings via various social media platforms in order to improve customer retention and revisit intention.
3. E-tailing organisation should endeavour to improve on their mobile applications to be user-friendly and exciting which will affect positively on activities such as product display, product assortment, prices and

visual display etc; in order to attract new customer and retain existing customers.

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