



doi 10.5281/zenodo.6748280

Vol. 05 Issue 01 Jan - 2022

Manuscript ID: #0566

E-SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OF ONLINE SHOPS IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The global profanation of electronic commerce ensures that organizations comprehend the essentials of their presence in the digital platforms where marketing is practiced, to enable them to keep being relevant and to gain a competitive advantage in this era dominated by technology for markets and marketing. The primary focus of the study was to investigate the relationship between e-service quality and customer engagement of online shops in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. Two research questions and hypotheses were formulated for the study. As a social behavior-based study, the cross-sectional research design was adopted to enable data generation/ collection from different locations within the area of study. The population of the study was 24,335 while the sample size is 377 which were determined through Krejcie and Morgan (1970). This study found that site aesthetics and ease of use (e-service quality) had a positive and significant relationship with loyalty. The study concluded that e-service quality impacts customer engagement for online shopping. The study, therefore, recommended that online shops should pay attention to technical problems that always occur in an online systems such as trouble in applications on networks and sorting of product information. A good and friendly service system should be designed in order to reduce the time and effort costs in consumers' entire service experience.

KEYWORDS

Site aesthetics, Ease of use, Loyalty, E-service quality, Customer engagement, Online shops.



INTRODUCTION

Computer and information and communication technology's revolution have ultimately altered the way and manner business organizations operate, serve and retain their business organizations operate, service and retain their numerous customers: These activities created by ICT has brought about a paradigm in the service industry where service are better provided to recipients (Sadaq & Rahela, 2019). The global profanation of electronic commence influenced organization comprehend the essentials of their presence in the digital platforms where marketing is practiced, this is in order to keep being relevant and to gain competitive advantage in this era dominated by technology for markets and marketing. In essence, organizations use intent to increase their presence and deliver their products and services and to adequately communicate with their customers.

More so, electronic service is a type of service on the internet (Ghosh et al., 2004; Zelthaml et al, 2000). Electronic services are viewed as deed, efforts, or performances whose delivery is supported by information technology (Rowlay, 2006). E-service quality is used in the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of internet commerce, purchase and delivery of products and services (Wang & Wang 2006). This means that for e-service quality is believed to have been present there must efficiency and effectiveness of internet with regards to purchase and delivery of products and services. Prior to present day realization, what gave more concern to organizations in the adoption of electronic channels of service achiever were low cost and web presence as factors to enhance competition and survival in the market; but Parasuraman et al (2005) noted that after it was not long the importance of service quality was realized as key determinant of success of digital channels for service delivery.

However, the term customer engagement became known in 2006 as a rift of engagement and it cantered at the study of customer's behaviour and emotions towards interactions and participation with brands/services (Verleye, Gemmel&Rangarajan, 2014). It was argued that there are ways through which customers can generate values to organizations that is different from product purchase (Kumer et al, 2010). It is essential to determine different ways to establish relationship, engage customers and create communities by leveraging on advancement of social media to provide competitive advantage to online based organizations (Henning et al, 2010). But it was noted that consistent and correct engagement of customer online is a teething challenge for internet based firms (Bai, Yao, & Duo, 2015). There are two important perspectives in which customer engagement is approached; behavioural and psychological. The behavioural sees customer engagement as a behavioural aspect that focuses on all non-transactional behaviours that can have effect on organizations (Bijmolt et al- 2010: Verhoef, Reinart& Kraft, 2010); and its viewed as a customer's behavioural expressions that have a brand or organization focus, which is beyond buying (Van Doorn et al, 2010); it early involves both user participation and involvement (Wagr&Majchrzak, 2007).

The psychological perspective sees customer engagement as a state that occurs as a result of using an interactive channel; it takes place as a result of customer co-creation experience with a central object or agent customer engagement is influenced by lots of factors, which most time are organization based. Customers decide to engage in an online shopping activity when there is a perceived service quality and overall satisfaction. Differently, Ramon, Antonio, and Manuel (2014) studied 'evaluation of the e-service quality in the service encounters with incidents: difference according to the socio-demographic profile of the online consumer' in Spain Sadat and Rahela (2019) evaluated 'services quality to e-service quality: a paradigm shift', in India. Natalia, Elena, Nadezluda and Olga (2020) examined 'e-service quality from attributes to outcomes: the similarity and difference between digital

and hybrid services', in Russia. Jukka (2010) examined e-service quality: a conceptual model', in Finland. Amongst the numerous study only little and princely one was able to study 'the impact of e-service quality on the customer satisfaction and customer engagement behaviours towards luxury hotels', in Vietnam (Nga, Milo Slara&Ho, 2019).

Therefore, the departure point in this study would be to investigate the nexus between- e service quality and customer engagement of retroviral distributing hospitals in Port Harcourt. This is imperative due to the fact that none among those studies was found to have been conducted to the best of our knowledge. The measures of the predictor variable (site aesthetics and ease of use) and that of the criterion variable (loyalty) formed the point of departure.

Study Objectives

The primary focus of the study is to investigate the connection between e-service quality and customer engagement of online shops in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. However, specific objectives are included; they are to:

- i. Ascertain the tie between site aesthetics and loyalty of online shops in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.
- ii. Examine the influence of ease of use and loyalty of online shops in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

In the course of performing the task ahead, the following statements have been put up as:

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of site aesthetics on loyalty of online retail shops in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Ease of use of an intent platform does not significantly correlate with loyalty of online retail shops in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

Study Variables and Conceptual Framework

The independent variable for this study is E-service quality with its dimensions as site aesthetics and ease of use while the criterion variable is customer engagement with its measures as loyalty which is mathematically represented as:

$$ESQ = f(CE) \dots\dots\dots (i)$$

$$ESQ = f(SA, EU) \dots\dots\dots (ii)$$

$$CE = f(L) \dots\dots\dots (iii)$$

Where:

f= Function

ESQ= E-service quality

CE= customer engagement

SA= site aesthetics

EU= ease of use

L= Loyalty

Operational framework

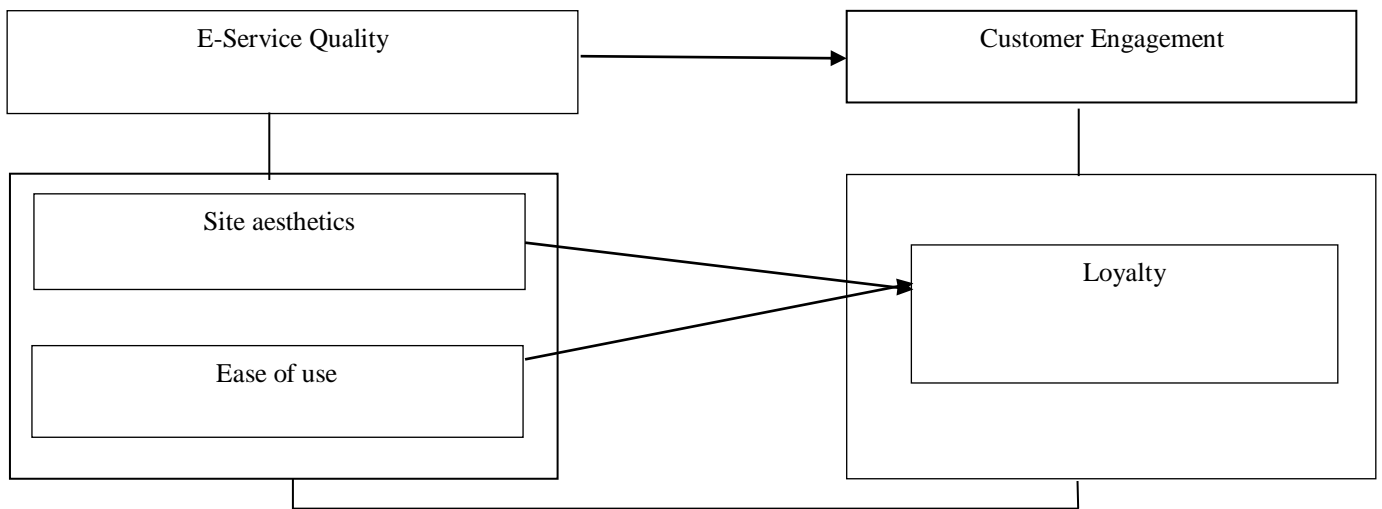


Figure. 1 Operational Framework of E-service quality and customer engagement of online shops.

Source: Research Desk; as adapted from Zeithaml et al. (2000); Busalim, AbRazak, and Noorminshah, (2019).

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Foundations

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT): the theory underpinning this study is the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) which is used to explain the reasons behind peoples' active request and use of specific media to meet particular needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). The UGT became popular as researchers became interested in understanding why audiences engaged with different types of media, such as giving listening ears to the radio and reading the newspaper (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) stated that the UGT expresses how individuals select media that are satisfying, and enabling them to achieve gratifications.

E-Service Quality: E- service quality is playing a very prominent role in every society, it is servicing as the major factors on how customer can access and interpret online banking, and later, it defined how to interact and operate with online services (Sasono et al, 2021). According to Echelons, e-service quality signifies how a given internet banking service could serve and foster online transactions effectively and efficiently (Zeithaml, 2000). Electronic service is defined as all interactive services through the internet, and use of advanced communication and information and multimedia technology; it is also defined as information service or set of business done via information and communication technology (Boyers et al, 2002; Rowley, 2006). According to Akinyele and Olorunleke (2010), e-service is made available through phone, internet, and self- service centres; it involves all components, which include electronic retail, customer support, service itself as well as service delivery. The important nature of e-service as means of differentiation among competitors is dependent on the factor that customers get involved during the product development process via swift feedback and increase customer relationships; and e-service aid provides service at possible lower cost, thereby, it assists in acquiring excellence in quality (DeRuyter et al., 2001).

E-service is self-service-based; it boycotts the process of speaking to an employee on the phone or physically on the service counter; this types of service is achieved via mechanical interaction and the

mutuality between the user and machine (Surjadaja et al., 2003; Gera 2011). Some challenges were noticed on electronic service includes absence of direct contact between employee and customers; interaction between customers and organization; making it imperative for electronic service to meet the desires of customers and be more responsive to demands of customer (Fadeleh, 2010: Al- Alaq, 2004). E-service encourages organizations to provide beyond expectations of customers than in the traditional service. Therefore, the presence of technology in customer service is essential for access to the most primary organizations survival goals (Lake & Hickey, 2002; Wilson, 2004; Mahmood, 2013).

Site Aesthetics and Customer Engagement: Well-designed website is said to generate high revenue, promote products and services, and provide superior services to customs and the attraction of more customers to the organization. Bilgihan and Bujisic, (2015) opined that to promote organization to achieve success and influence more engagement, it is advised that websites should be designed in a manner that they will appear trustworthy and require little cognitive efforts to use. The authors added that a well- designed website plays important role in actualizing the deserved business objectives by stimulating more customers towards website acceptability and repeat visit. Site aesthetics is said to have positive influence on user's perception of the websites' usability (Tractinsky, 2000). Lee and Lee (2003) found that website aesthetics influence satisfaction which includes significantly buying intention in on online shopping.

Ease of use and Customer Engagement: Ramayah and lo (2007) established that any system or technology that appears to be easy to use or comprehend, would be found useful from user's point of view. Bruggen and Wierenga (2005) believed that the success of a technology relies on its ability or the level at which it is easy for user to use. The study of Khalid and Nor (2009) concluded that ease of use is a strong antecedent that play vital role in electronic customer relationship management performance. Oficlia, Yasri, & Susi (2018) studied effects of perceived ease of use, service quality, price fairness, and trust on Gocar user satisfaction is Padang City. A total of 110 respondents were surveyed and analyzed through multiple regression analysis. The results showed that perceived ease of use service price fairness, and trust had significant effect on the satisfaction of Go Car users in Padang.

Customer Engagement: Customer engagement has experienced varying definitions by different scholars. It is defined as the level of a customer's physical, cognitive and emotional presence of their relationship with a service organization (Patterson et al; 2006). It is also defined as level of customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind, characterized by a specific level of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011). The good example of customer engagement is found in the concept of service- dominant logic, which means co-creation of value. According to Verhoet et al (2010), co-creation starts when organization appeals to customers to get involved in their function that is non-transactional.

“Customer engagement (CE) is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships that co-create value. Customer engagement plays a central role in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences interactive CE processes. It is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or

stakeholder specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural dimensions” (Brodie et al., 2011).

Empirical Review

Nga, Miloslava and Ho (2019) examined ‘the impact of e-service aviation on the customer satisfaction and consumer engagement behaviours toward Luxury hotels’ Vic-tram. The aim of the study was to increase the number of online bookers enhancing the level of customer satisfaction and engagement behaviours on e-service of up-scale hotel websites in Vietnam. The survey was carried out among 332 online bookers through both online and offline methods. The PLS- SEM was used to conduct the analysis on the association among the constructs. The results revealed that website service avidity plays key role in boosting customer satisfaction, customer engagement behaviours and brand loyalty. It was also found that customer satisfaction has partial mediating role on ties between hotel website service quality and customer engagement behaviours in the hotel sector.

Paluo, Tiago and Almira (2019) examined ‘the impact of e-service quality and customer satisfaction on consumer behaviour in online shopping’. The study aimed at developing new knowledge to better comprehend the most essential dimensions of trust, and customer behaviour. Data generated from online survey of 355 Indonesian online consumers, the analysis revealed that three dimensions of e-service equality (website design, security/privacy and fulfillment have effect on overall e-service quality. However, customer services do not significantly relate with overall service quality.

Suliman and Warda (2017) examined ‘impact of electronic service quality on customer satisfaction of Islamic banks in Jordan. The predictor variables were reliability, ease of Use, effectiveness, website design, privacy, and responsiveness. The population of the study comprised of customer of Islamic banks in the North territory of Jordan (Jordanian Islamic bank, International Arab Iskimia Bank); using a random sampling, 300 respondents were determined, and SPSS was used to examine the study’s hypotheses and attainment of its objectives. The result revealed a statistically significant impact of electronic service quality (Via ease of use, website design, privacy, and responsiveness) on customer’s satisfaction of Islamic banks in Fordam. Whereas there was insignificant impact of reliability and effectiveness on customer satisfaction it had great role in stimulating and supporting customer’s alteration.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research method, and quasi experimental approach of research. Similarly, as a social behaviour-based study, cross- sectional research design was adopted to enable the writer to generate or collect data from different locations with the area of study. As an objective focused research, all the elements in the study were not under the control of the researcher. The population of the study comprised of online shoppers in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. However, the targeted sample were those who based in Yenagoa Local Government area because of the terrain of the study area. According to population of cities in Nigeria (2021) Yenagoa has the population of 24, 335 this is available@:<https://www.worldpopulationreview.com>. Specifically, the study targeted respondents who are young in age (18-50yrs) because of their activeness in using internet platforms to make purchase of one item or the other. The study adopted judgmental sampling method while conducting the survey. According the population statement, there are about (24, 335) people in Yenagoa Local Government area according to World population Review (2021).But, in order to determine the sample

size, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was used, which amounted to 377 samples. See Table 1 below: For the customers, the application of

Table 1 below: Population Schedule

Description	Population	Sample Size
Yenagoa LGA	24,335	377

Source: population of Cities in Nigeria, 2021, (Available <https://www.worldpopulationreview.com>)

Data Analysis and Results

Survey copies of questionnaires were apportioned directly to online shoppers. Out of Three Hundred and Seven-Seven (377) copies of questionnaire distributed, three hundred and sixty-one (361) copies of questionnaire were retrieved from the field given the questionnaire response rate of ninety six percent (96%) while sixteen (16) copies were not retrieved occupying four percent (4%).

Among these copies of questionnaire three hundred and fifty-seven (357) questionnaires were deemed usable. The overall percentage of questionnaire used for the study is ninety-nine (99%) while four (4) copies were deemed not useful for analysis representing one percent (1%). This response rate of ninety-nine (99%) was considered adequate for further analysis. A non-response rate of four (1%) was recorded for the study, which occurred as a result of busy schedule, inadequate time and loss of copies on the part of the customer care personnel.

Table 2: Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Distributed	377	100
Retrieved	361	96
Not retrieved	16	4
Retrieved usable	357	99
Retrieved not usable	4	1

As evidenced in Table 2, three hundred and seventy-seven (377) copies of questionnaire, copies of questionnaires returned was three hundred and sixty-one (361), copies of questionnaires not returned sixteen (16) and number of questionnaires deemed usable was three hundred and fifty-seven (357). However, 99% were used and 1% were not used which shows that, the returned rate was high and encouraging.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Site Aesthetics and loyalty

		Correlations	
		Site Aesthetics	Loyalty
Site Aesthetics	Pearson Correlation	1	.911**

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	357	357
	Pearson Correlation	.911**	1
Loyalty	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	357	357

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

Table3 above reveals a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.911 and probability value of 0.000. The level of significant relationship between site aesthetic and loyalty is positive and strong. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive significant relationship between site aesthetic and loyalty of online shops in Bayelsa State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05).

Table 4: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Ease of Use and Loyalty

		Correlations	
		Ease of Use	Loyalty
Ease of Use	Pearson Correlation	1	.925**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	357	357
Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.925**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	357	357

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

Table 4 above reveals a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.925 and probability value of 0.000. The level of significant relationship between ease of use and loyalty is positive and strong. This result indicates that there is a strong and positive significant relationship between ease of use and loyalty of online shops in Bayelsa State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05).

Discussion and Conclusion

Site aesthetics was revealed to impact significantly on customer engagement; enhancing outcomes such as word of mouth and loyalty. The evidence establishes site aesthetics as a significant predictor of customer engagement measures; therefore, all the null hypotheses statements were rejected. The findings corroborate the position of previous scholars such as Lee and Lee (2003) found that website aesthetics influence satisfaction which includes significantly buying intention in on online shopping. The outcomes from the test of analysis identified ease of use as having a significant impact on customer engagement and as such enhancing outcomes such as word of mouth and loyalty. On this basis, all null hypotheses statements were rejected as the results revealed a significant relationship between ease of use related activities and the measures of customer engagement. The results showed that e-service quality which involves ease of use contributed towards the degree to which online

shops is able to attract and retain its customers, drives the uniformity and uniqueness of their service delivery capacity and also their reputation and positioning in the heart of their customer in Bayelsa State. The findings illustrated the role of ease of use on the steps forward of online shops in reaching out and effectively engaging their customers. The evidence points to the effectiveness of such ease of use in attracting and capturing the interest of the customers width and breadth of the State. It also highlights the effectiveness of such concept as a basis for management and for the elevation of one's business and brand. The findings reiterated the views of scholars such as Oficlia et al. (2018) that perceived ease of use had significant effect on the satisfaction of Go Car users in Padang. Similarly, Irfan and Nurafni (2015) discovered that perceived ease of use has significant and positive influence on customer satisfaction.

Conclusively, the study is in line with the growing body of literature on e-service quality and customer engagement and shows that the dimensions of the independent variable impacts on word of mouth and loyalty helping them to deliver on set goals and objectives.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the study therefore recommends that;

- i. Online shops should pay attention to technical problems that always occur in online system such as trouble in application on network and sorting of product information.
- ii. Good and friendly service system should be design to reduce the time and effort costs in consumers' entire service experience.
- iii. Firms need to improve the quality of online service provided by increasing the quality of physical product/services, supporting physical product/services, company, technical and technical.

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