Consumer Knowledge and Purchase Intention of Healthcare Product Consumers in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper was to determine the connection between consumer knowledge and purchase intention of healthcare product consumers. The study treated consumer expertise, consumer experience, and product familiarity as dimensions of consumer knowledge. The study was conducted with healthcare product consumers in Rivers State as the target population. Data collected from three hundred and eighty five (385) respondents was utilised in the final analyses of the study. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation served as the test statistics; while the SPSS version 20.0 was relied upon for data analyses. The study found that consumer knowledge correlates with purchase intention positively and significantly too. All the dimensions of consumer knowledge posted positive and statistically significant relationship with purchase intention, with consumer expertise posting the strongest relationship with purchase intention. The study concludes that purchase intention depends on consumer expertise, experience and product familiarity and recommends that healthcare product marketers that desire increased patronage for their products should strive to enhance consumer knowledge through consumer education that builds consumer expertise and improve their experience and familiarity with the product.

Keywords: Consumer knowledge, consumer experience, consumer expertise, product familiarity, purchase intention

INTRODUCTION
Individuals place high value on their health and attend their health concerns with unmatched devotion. They exhibit a high level of rationality when making healthcare product related purchase decisions (Nwulu & Ateke, 2014). Healthcare product-related purchase decisions are usually made with caution and based on extensive information search that builds the consumers’ knowledge on the product category. Calls for the exploration of consumer knowledge in order to ascertain its impact on brand preference across different situations have been made by scholars (McEachern & Warnaby, 2008; Aaker, 1997). System knowledge, action-related knowledge and effectiveness knowledge are different kinds of knowledge discussed in psychology literature (McEachern & Warnaby, 2008; Frick, Kaiser, & Wilson, 2004; Alba & Hutchinson, 2000). System knowledge represents knowledge of how systems or processes operate; action-related knowledge is knowledge of behavioural options and possible courses of action; while effectiveness knowledge refers to knowledge of possible gains of given behaviours. Each of these kinds of knowledge exerts varying levels of influence on the purchase decision-making process. The attainment of effectiveness knowledge requires system and action-related knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 2000).

The desired upshot of firms’ marketing programmes and efforts is to make profits, survive and grow (Akinyele, 2010). The achievement of these outcomes is better guaranteed if firms are able to attract and retain profitable customers. Customer acquisition, retention and maintenance are the pathway to sustainable competitiveness; being drivers of customers’ continued patronage. They are also the philosophical underpinning of theories in marketing including customer relationship management, customer experience management and customer involvement management. Customer patronage is influenced by myriad of endogenous and exogenous factors. The much a firm understand about these...
factors determine its marketing performance and marketplace standing. This is because understanding the customers and serving them better than competitors do, confers advantages on firms. Scholarly efforts aimed at determining drivers of customer patronage are replete in literature. Customer satisfaction, product quality, convenience, security/safety concerns, price, company’s expertise, as well as situational, behavioural and attitudinal factors are among the most frequently investigated variables to provide explanations for customer patronage (Olise, Okoli, & Ekeke, 2015; Adewale, Samuel, Moradeke, & Adegboye, 2014; Basera, Mutsikiwa, & Dhlawayo, 2013). However, consumer knowledge which is the first point of reference in information search prior to decision making has not received as much attention as is required. Consumer knowledge, often termed “product related knowledge” represents the extent of experiences, expertise and familiarity consumers have with a product. It refers to internalized information that consumers’ resort to, when making decisions (Kolyesnikova, Laverie, Duhan, Wilcox, & Dodd, 2010). Put differently, consumer knowledge describes the product related knowledge that consumers accumulate over time from exposure through advertising, salespeople or from using the product (Alba & Hutchinson, 2000), and on which they rely to aid their purchase decision-making. It is common knowledge in consumer behaviour studies that the information-search-stage of the decision making process starts with internal search. It is only where internal search fails to throw up a solution to an identified need that consumers resort to external information search.

Consumer knowledge is therefore a cogent driver of purchase intention; and requires increased research attention. Consumer knowledge is a multidimensional construct consisting of experience, expertise and familiarity (Kolyesnikova et al 2010; Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Consumer experience represents accumulated skills that enable individuals to acquire and process information (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004). The basic level of consumer knowledge is knowledge retained from consumption experiences (Clarkson, Janiszewski, & Cinelli, 2013). Consumption knowledge is extensive; and consists of coarsely defined pleasant or unpleasant consumption experiences (Clarkson et al, 2013); and also forms the basis for brand preference for food, entertainment and other service-dominant products.

Previous studies show that more experience with a product category results in more refined consumption knowledge that is less susceptible to misinformation (Cowley & Janus, 2004). Also, it has been shown that consumers develop experiential consumption vocabulary as their experience grows with a product category (Latour & Latour 2010). However, there would be no incentive for a consumer to develop a consumption vocabulary if there is no experiential knowledge that corresponds to the vocabulary (Clarkson et al, 2013). Furthermore, consumers develop consumption knowledge that is composed of embodied experiences (Joy & Sherry, 2003) and art knowledge that include experiential components consisting of embodied perceptions of balance, orientation, motion and force (Clarkson et al, 2013).

Consumer expertise represents the level of individuals’ ability to successfully deal with product-related tasks (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004). It comprises knowledge about product attributes and decision rules that facilitate action on the knowledge about product attributes. Consumer expertise builds through increased familiarity with the product. Research shows that “product category experts have a greater amount of domain knowledge which also differs from the knowledge of less savvy consumers in their content and structure” (Chi, Glaser, & Rees, 1982). More knowledgeable consumers have the ability to choose the right product for the right usage situation and to use and maintain it appropriately (Azila-Gbétor, Avorgah, & Adigbo, 2013; Bucks, 1985). Other studies suggest that product category experts have the ability to name more subcategories of the product than novices (Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976). This position is however controvertible as later studies indicate that consumers with less knowledge are more likely to refer to more subcategories of a product than experts (Lurigio & Carroll, 1985). There is therefore no universal agreement about differences in the amount of subcategories of products known by novices and experts (Sujan, Sujan, & Bettman, 1988).

Familiarity on the other hand represents accumulated awareness of a product that does not necessarily come from actual experience (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). It is the level of awareness acquired via “exposure to advertisements, information search, encounters with salespeople, choice and decision making” etc. (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Studies indicate that product familiarity influences purchase
intentions for different product categories and consumer segments (Kim & Chung, 2011). Product familiarity is believed to strongly influence behavioural intentions because future behaviours are products of past behaviours, based on learning (Mullen, Hersey, & Donald, 1987; Bentler & Speckart, 1979). Also, past experience has been found to influence consumers’ attitudes and perceptions towards products (D’Souza, Taghian, Lamb, & Peretiakos, 2006). Product familiarity thus influences consumers’ attitude and purchase intentions.

The criterion variable in this study is purchase intention. Purchase intention is the predisposition of customers to patronize a brand in the future. It describes the readiness and willingness of consumers, a favourable disposition to do business with a brand. Purchase intention is an important predictor of consumer behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Firms are concerned about purchase intention because it indicates consumers’ preference for a given product in a product category and because of its nexus with profitability (Pooladireishahri, Asgari, Hamid, & Asgarpour, 2015). Firms can induce purchase intention by responding proactively to customer feedback (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015) and by providing value adding services to customers’ experience. Favourable purchase experience reinforces customers’ repurchase intention. The more frequent customers get favourable experiences with a brand, the more likely they will do business with the brand (Chao-Min, Meng-Hsiang, Hsiangchu, & Chun-Ming, 2010). Purchase intention is also driven by perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988). Possible to buy, intended to buy and consider buying are the most notable measures of purchase intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The aim of this study is to determine the nexus between consumer knowledge and purchase intention of healthcare product consumers in Rivers State. The following hypotheses are formulated to provide direction for the study:

H₁: Consumer experience does not significantly correlate with purchase intention of healthcare product consumers.

H₂: Consumer expertise does not significantly correlate with purchase intention of healthcare product consumers.

H₃: Product familiarity does not significantly correlate with purchase intention of healthcare product consumers.

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the correlation between Consumer Knowledge and Purchase Intention
Source: Researchers’ Conceptualisation from Literature Review (2017)

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to determine direction and extent of relationship between consumer knowledge and purchase intention of healthcare product consumers. The study adopted an explanatory research design, and was conducted in a non-contrived setting. The population of the study consisted of consumers of healthcare product in Rivers State. However, the total number of persons that consume healthcare products in Rivers State cannot be ascertained due to the nonexistence of such a database. Therefore, the study adopted three hundred and eighty five (385) as its sample size. This is in keeping with Glen Israel’s assertion that the sample size for an unknown population at ninety-five per cent (96%) confidence interval and plus or minus five per cent (± 5%) precision is three hundred and eighty five (385) (Israel, 1992). The convenience sampling technique was employed to select the test units due to its merits in easing access to test units (Collis & Hussey, 2009).
The final analysis of the study was based on data collected from three hundred and eighty five (385) respondents through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of items describing consumer knowledge about a popular healthcare product whose wrap was attached to the questionnaire; and also their (consumers) willingness to buy the products if they have need for products in that product class. Respondents were required to tick an option from alternatives response on a scale where 1= very low extent; 2= low extent; 3= moderately; 4= high extent, and 5= very high extent. The validity of the instrument was confirmed through opinion of experts consisting of members of the academia and practitioners with adequate knowledge of the subject of the study; while the internal consistency of the measurement items was determined through a test of reliability using the Cronbach’s alpha test with a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). The reliability test produced a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .804, .744, .729, and .922 respectively for consumer experience, expertise, familiarity and purchase intention. Cronbach’s alpha is a commonly used test to evaluate the internal reliability of study instruments (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The study used the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) as the test statistic and relied on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for all analyses.

Besides assessing whether relationships exist between variables, it is also important to evaluate the nature of the relationship between the variables. A commonly used technique to quantitatively measure this phenomenon is the Pearson correlation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The coefficient of correlation can range from -1.00 to 1.00. -1.00 represent a perfect negative relationship, 1.00 represent a perfect positive relationship; while 0 denotes no relationship. A higher correlation coefficient indicates stronger relationship between variables. In assessing the nature of the relationship between the variables under investigation, this study adopts the threshold of correlation coefficients suggested by Shi, Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2009) where: (1) No relationship exists between two variables if the coefficient of determination is $\pm .00$. (2) The relationship between two variables is very weak if the coefficient of determination is $\pm .01-.19$. (3) The relationship between two variables is weak if the coefficient of determination is $\pm .20-.39$. (4) The relationship between two variables is moderate if the coefficient of determination is $\pm .40-.59$. The relationship between two variables is strong if the coefficient of determination is $\pm .60-.79$. (5) The relationship between two variables is very strong if the coefficient of determination is $\pm .80-1.0$. The interpretation process was subject to 0.01 (two tail) level of significance.

**RESULTS**

Table 1: Summary of Correlation Analysis on Dimensions Consumer Knowledge and Purchase Intention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Consumer Experience</th>
<th>Consumer Expertise</th>
<th>Product Familiarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlation Coefficient</strong></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.518**</td>
<td>.615**</td>
<td>.408**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumer Experience</strong></td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.518**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumer Expertise</strong></td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.615**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product Familiarity</strong></td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.408**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>358</td>
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Simulation from SPSS Output on Data Analysis on Consumer Knowledge and Purchase Intention (2017).

Table 1 presents the summary of the result of test of relationship between dimensions of consumer knowledge and purchase intention. The Table indicates that the relationship between consumer
experience and purchase intention carries a P(r) coefficient of .518**. This result means that a moderate relationship exists between the variables. The p-value (0.000) is less than .05 level of confidence, meaning the correlation between the variables is statistically significant; while the positive sign of the correlation coefficient suggests that the relationship between consumer experience and purchase intention is positive; and implies that increase in consumer experience will inform increased purchase intention. Hence, the study accepted the alternate hypothesis and affirm that a significant relationship exist between consumer experience and purchase intention.

The test of relationship between consumer expertise and purchase intention generated a P(r) coefficient of .615**; as Table 1 indicates. This high value suggests that the strength of relationship between the focal variables is strong. The p-value (0.000) is less than .05 level of confidence, meaning that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient suggests that the relationship between consumer expertise and purchase intention is a positive one; which implies that increased customer expertise will result to increased purchase intention. The study thus affirms that there is a significant relationship between consumer expertise and purchase intention.

Finally, Table 1 displays a P(r) coefficient of 0.408** on the relationship between familiarity and purchase intention. This value suggests that the strength of relationship between the variables is moderate. The p-value (0.000) is less than .05 level of confidence, meaning that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient suggests that the relationship between familiarity and purchase intention is a positive one. This implies that increased product familiarity will lead to increased purchase intention. The study thus affirms that there is a significant relationship between familiarity and purchase intention.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
The focus of this study is to determine the nature and extent of relationship between consumer knowledge and purchase intention of healthcare products in Rivers State. The test of hypotheses reveals that consumer knowledge significantly associates with purchase intention; as all the dimensions of consumer knowledge posted positive relationship with purchase intention. Consumer expertise reports the strongest relationship with purchase intention, followed by experience while product familiarity posts the weakest relationship with purchase intention. This result suggests that consumer knowledge have strong influence on purchase intention; with consumer expertise exerting the most influence.

The findings of this study supports Kim and Chung’s finding that product knowledge influences purchase intention for different product categories and consumer segments (Kim & Chung, 2011). The findings also support that of Lehto, O'Leary, and Morrison (2004) that prior knowledge and experience strongly influence consumption, future behaviour and decision making. Furthermore, the findings of this study support the finding of Azila-Gbettor et al (2013) that label-reading influences purchase behaviour. Label-reading builds consumer knowledge by offering consumers an opportunity to know what they are buying, how to use it, as well as when to stop using it.

Additionally, the findings of this study corroborate the position of Mullen et al (1987) that product-related knowledge strongly influences behavioural intentions; and that of Sujan et al (1988) that product knowledge play important roles in purchase decision making. The findings of also lends credence to the statement of D'Souza et al (2006) that past experience influence attitudes and perceptions of consumers towards products.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Often, consumers make purchase decision on impulse, sometimes they are cajoled into making a purchase by salespeople. However, economic theory suggests that consumers are rational, and are persuaded to make purchases based on calculated benefits and trade-offs. From the economic perspective therefore, it is deducible that consumers are knowledgeable and that their purchase decisions are based on rationality. They know the products they want, including the benefits associated with using those products; and the purchase decisions they make follows from the confidence they have in their knowledge about products.
Based on the result of test of hypotheses and the discussions in the preceding sections, this study concludes that consumer knowledge influences purchase intention; and that consumers’ intention to purchase healthcare products depends on their knowledge of the products. Consumer knowledge in the form of expertise, experience and familiarity drives consumers’ willingness and readiness to purchase products. The study thus, recommends that healthcare product marketers that seek improved customer patronage should evolve effective consumer education schemes to enhance consumers’ expertise, experience and familiarity with their products.

REFERENCES


