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Using eCommerce to Improve Product Marketing and Profitability in Nigeria

Olayinka Thomas-Ogboja
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Walden University

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Olayinka Adunola Thomas-Ogboja

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2018

Abstract

Using eCommerce to Improve Product Marketing and Profitability in Nigeria

by

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MSc, Queen Mary University of London, 2008

MSc, University of Ibadan, 2006

BSc, University of Ibadan, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2018

Abstract

Small and medium enterprises in Nigeria rarely use eCommerce, which has led to lagging market shares and profitability compared to firms in other countries that use eCommerce. Approximately 90% of boutique fashion businesses shut down their businesses due to the inability to operate outside their business location. The social exchange theory was used in this multiple case study to explore how some small business owners in the boutique fashion industry use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. The target population for this study was 5 fashion boutique owners based in Lagos State, Nigeria with a significant record of profitability by using eCommerce in product marketing. The data collection was through semistructured face-to-face interviews with 5 business leaders; each from different fashion boutiques in Lagos. Data collected was first coded to maintain confidentiality of participants, the digital recordings was transcribed into a Microsoft word document, and Nvivo 10 software was used to analyze and generate emerging themes. The data analysis was supported by methodological triangulation and member checking to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the interpretations. Two of the themes that emerged from the study were generating sales to improve profitability and strategic store locations. Use of eCommerce may contribute to social change through an increase in successful startups, increased employment, and the positive impact such companies have in the societies and communities they operate. Leveraging eCommerce may enable small- and medium-sized enterprise leaders to operate sustainable businesses.

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Dedication

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Dr. & Prof. (Mrs.) Opeke. My parents have been my biggest supporters, and I am grateful for always respecting and supporting my aspirations. Thank you for all your sacrifices and labor of love. To my sisters and brother, Bukky, Toyin, and Ayo: thank you for your unconditional love. To my son, Oluwasemilore: I love you unconditionally and want you to know that anything you set your mind to do or achieve is attainable. Never limit yourself, baby.

To my friends who supported and encouraged me through this program, especially during periods I almost gave up: I thank and love you all, and may we always have reason to celebrate one another in Jesus' name, amen. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to God Almighty, my inspiration, provider, protector, savior, confidant, and father. To you be all the glory, now and forever, amen.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem	2
Problem Statement	2
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study	3
Research Question	5
Interview Questions	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study	10
Contribution to Business Practice.....	10
Implications for Social Change.....	10
Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	11
The Social Exchange Theory	13
Contrasting Theories.....	14
eCommerce	15
Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)	16

Online Product Marketing.....	18
eCommerce Strategies	20
Improved Business Practice.....	24
Overview of the Fashion Industry Past and Present	27
Products Branding.....	29
Sustained Competitive Advantage.....	31
Marketing Mix	33
Barriers to eCommerce	36
The Future of eCommerce	37
Profitability in Business.....	39
Product and Service Differentiation.....	40
Fashion Marketing	42
Transition	44
Section 2: The Project.....	45
Purpose Statement.....	45
Role of the Researcher	46
Participants.....	48
Research Method and Design	49
Research Method	49
Research Design.....	50
Population and Sampling	51
Ethical Research.....	53

Data Collection Instruments	54
Data Collection Technique	55
Data Organization Technique	55
Data Analysis	56
Reliability and Validity.....	57
Reliability.....	58
Validity	58
Transition and Summary.....	61
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change	63
Overarching Theme 1: Use of Facebook and Other Social Media	63
Subtheme 1: Generating Sales and Improving Profitability	65
Subtheme 2: Strategic Store Locations	66
Subtheme 3: Product and Service Quality	69
Applications to Professional Practice	71
Benefits of eCommerce to SMEs.....	72
Implications for Social Change.....	72
Recommendations for Action	72
Recommendations for Fashion Boutique Owners and SMEs.....	73
Recommendations for Federal Government of Nigeria.....	74
Recommendations for Further Study	74
Reflections	76
Conclusion	77

References.....	79
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	114

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the main drivers of economic growth, employment, investment, and innovation globally (Kumari, 2012; Narteh, 2013; Osei-Assibey, 2013). In Nigeria, 97% of business owners employ fewer than 100 employees, which indicate that the majority of businesses in Nigeria qualify as small businesses (Agwu, 2014). SME owners and managers use eCommerce for growth, visibility, and competitiveness (Shadkam & O'Hara, 2013). As a representative example, fashion boutiques have evolved over the years with an increasing number of potential consumers online, and fashion boutique owners in Nigeria are gradually marketing their products online for increased visibility, sales, and profitability.

Use of eCommerce promotes socioeconomic advancement in developing countries (Darwis, 2013). Lack of access to and use of eCommerce affects the performance and competitiveness of SMEs (Pousttchi, Tilson, Lyytinen, & Hufenbach, 2015). Consumers spend a significant amount of time in the social realm and on social media, and this could provide ample opportunity for fashion boutique owners to target consumers on eCommerce platforms (Barbosa, Marcelo, & de Souza, 2013). I conducted this study to explore what some fashion boutique owners in Nigeria do to use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability. Applying the results of this research, SMEs may identify improved strategies to market their products and increase profitability on eCommerce platforms (see Barbosa et al., 2013).

Background of the Problem

In developing economies, SMEs promote employment generation, food security, poverty alleviation, rapid industrialization, and economic restructuring (Abed, Dwivedi, & Williams, 2015). Small business owners are confronted with several challenges, including decreasing product lifecycle, rapid changes in customer needs, technological advancement, and increased competition (Abed et al., 2015). To overcome these challenges, business owners need to be more innovative in the way they market products (Abed et al., 2015). Mazzarol (2015) described eCommerce as the system where information and communication technology (ICT) is used to sell goods and services through the Internet.

Use of eCommerce allows enterprises to immediately access the global market, market products, reduce costs of sales, and increase profitability (Grochal-Brejda & Szymura-Tyc, 2013). In Nigeria, there is little evidence of study on the adoption of eCommerce among SMEs to promote product marketing and profitability (Faloye, 2014). SMEs in Nigeria contribute significantly to economic development, dynamic growth, and flexibility in the use of the factors of production (Agwu, 2014). Trading online is an essential part of today's business practice and a common practice across businesses in all sectors (Ghandour, 2015). This study may help business owners identify eMarketing strategies and means of improving business practice.

Problem Statement

SMEs in Nigeria rarely use eCommerce, which has led to lagging market shares and profitability compared with firms that use eCommerce in other countries (Omotayo

& Babalola, 2016). According to Ekman (2015), 90% of owners of boutique fashion businesses shut down their business due to inability to operate a business outside the business location. Retail eCommerce sales in the United States constitute approximately 4% of total retail sales, which translates to almost \$40 billion annually (Flanagin, Metzger, Pure, Markov, & Hartsell, 2014). The general business problem is that small business owners are not using eCommerce adequately as a possible option for product marketing and profitability. The specific business problem is that some small business owners in the boutique fashion industry in Nigeria lack the strategies to use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners in the boutique fashion industry use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. The target population for this study consisted of five fashion boutique owners based in Lagos State, Nigeria with a significant record of profitability by using eCommerce in product marketing. The findings from the study can contribute to positive social change by providing employment for the community where the business operates, and by providing opportunities for customers to shop with ease from their homes, can reduce possible accidents that may occur during commute.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative research method is a more flexible way of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). The researcher uses a qualitative

research method when the purpose of the study is interpreting and understanding people's perceptions and experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). A qualitative method is also suitable when little or no previous research exists in the case to be examined (Lund & Marinova, 2014; Trahan & Stewart, 2013). I chose a qualitative method to explore how some small business owners can attain knowledge on how to use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability. A quantitative method was not suitable for this study because it requires variables, relationships, and statistical inquiries (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). A mixed method was also inappropriate for this study as a mixed method contains both qualitative and quantitative elements (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

This study involved multiple case studies in data collection rather than a single case study design. I interviewed a few owners of fashion boutiques in Lagos who have successfully implemented eCommerce as a business strategy to improve product marketing and profitability. Researchers use a multiple case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the case under review (Yin, 2014). Qualitative designs include case study, phenomenological study, narrative, and ethnography (Yin, 2014). Using a phenomenological design enables the researcher to study the lived experience of the participants (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015), but a phenomenological design was not justified in this case because the lived experiences of the participants were not being studied. A narrative design was also not adequate for this study as a narrative design is used when the mode of data collection is through storytelling (Cash, Hicks, Culley, & Adlam, 2015). Ethnographic research was not adequate for this study because it entails extended observation of a given community or group with the aim to characterize the

culture that governs patterns of behavior and interaction of its members (Liberati et al., 2015). A case study design was appropriate for the purpose of this study because it can be used to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was “How can small business owners in the fashion boutique business use eCommerce strategies to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria?”

Interview Questions

Participants responded to the following interview questions:

1. How long have you been using eCommerce to market your product?
2. What aspect of eCommerce do you frequently use to market products?
3. What products do you market using eCommerce?
4. What strategies do you use to market products with eCommerce?
5. How effective are your marketing strategies using eCommerce?
6. How has your use of eCommerce to market products contributed to company profitability?
7. How can government agencies contribute to promoting eCommerce as a tool for product marketing in Nigeria?
8. What role can small business owners play in promoting knowledge about using eCommerce to market products in Nigeria?
9. What other information can you provide on how small businesses could utilize eCommerce to effectively market products?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the social exchange theory (SET). SET was an early work of Thibaut and Kelly (1959) and was expanded upon by Homans (1961), Blau (1964), Emerson (1990), and Jepsen and Rodwell (2010). The basic tenet of the SET is that social exchange is a long-term and unspecified mutual obligation (Blau, 1964). SET represents a group of theories about the social exchange of resources between two people (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001). Key propositions underlying SET include (a) interdependent relationships, (b) potential to generate high-quality relationships, and (c) relationships evolving over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments (Choi, Lotz, & Kim, 2014). Consumers often expect satisfaction with both products and services in online purchases (Tsai & Zhang, 2016).

Understanding the basic principles underlying SET could assist some fashion boutique owners in exploring effective strategies they can adopt to use eCommerce for product marketing and increase profitability. SET was most suitable for this study because fashion boutique owners can use the concept behind the theory to understand the online behavior of consumers, allowing them to improve their product marketing strategies. Furthermore, by viewing eCommerce topics through the framework of SET, fashion boutique owners can achieve competitive advantage and generate more sales. Parties in social exchange relationships, such as those that exist online, are more likely to connect better compared to those in economic exchange relationships (Gumus & Bal, 2016). In an eCommerce context, a customer who had a great online experience buying a product or service from a merchant online is more likely to share such experience with

other customers by electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), online reviews, direct marketing, and referrals (Gumus & Bal, 2016).

Definition of Terms

eBusiness: The use of the Internet to perform a range of activities in order to deliver valuable products and services to customers (Gare & Melin, 2013).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM): An informal discussion among consumers regarding products and services online (Mishra, Satish, & Vikalpa, 2016).

eMarketing: The process of finding, attracting, winning, and retaining customers through electronic means (Tabrizi & Kabirnejat, 2015).

Internet marketing: Use of the Internet and related technologies for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers (Eida & El-Gohary, 2013).

Marketing mix: The elements of marketing that are controllable and can be manipulated by marketing managers to ensure the maximum appeal of their product or service (Goyal Wasan & Tripathi, 2014).

Marketing strategy: A stabilizing force involving a firm's integrated pattern of decisions regarding their products, markets, marketing activities, and marketing resources (Palmer, Simmons, & Mason, 2014).

Small and medium enterprise (SME): A company with a maximum asset base of NGN200 million, excluding land and working capital, and with no fewer than 10 and no more than 300 employees (Nwobu, Faboyede, & Onwuelingo, 2015).

Social exchanges: Derived from informal relationships that create personal feelings of trust and obligation, rooted in mutual commitment to the other party's needs (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015).

Sustained competitive advantage: Achieved when a firm is able to consistently create more economic value than rival firms, where economic value is simply the difference between perceived benefits gained by a customer and the full economic costs of the product or service (Chekwa, Martin, & Wells, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is something that a researcher presumes to be correct without evidence (Magruk, 2015). The first assumption of this study was that fashion boutique owners could benefit from the findings made in this study by using eCommerce for their businesses. The second assumption was that the research method chosen helped explore the case of eCommerce. Another assumption was that employing open-ended questions and active listening techniques could give participants freedom of response to alleviate concerns about the integrity of interviewee answers. A fourth assumption was that Lagos, Nigeria is a large enough geographical and business area to provide reliable data for the study. Finally, the study was designed under the assumption that participants answered questions openly and honestly to provide the information needed for the study.

Limitations

Limitations are issues that the researcher does not have control over (Berbary, 2014), and they represent the potential shortcomings that may affect the trustworthiness

of findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A major limitation of the qualitative research approach is the potential of researcher bias. Identification of personal experiences, assumptions, and attitudes before starting the study is essential to limiting researcher bias (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Researcher bias may inhibit the interpretation of participants' perceptions and experiences. It is important to keep detailed project documentation with an explanation of the research process undertaken to ensure repeatability of the case study (Wahyuni, 2012). Another limitation of this study is that five participants may not be a sufficient population when compared to the number of SMEs in Nigeria.

Delimitations

Delimitations help define the study's boundaries and the propositions that researchers want to examine (Yin, 2014). The primary delimitation for this study was using a multiple case study and limiting the interview responses to five participants representing five small businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. The scope of this study was limited to five small businesses with no more than 20 employees, located in the island and mainland areas of Lagos. Ninety-seven percent of all businesses in Nigeria employ fewer than 100 employees, which indicates that the majority of businesses in Nigeria are small businesses (Agwu, 2014). The level of knowledge and resources allocated to Internet marketing strategy vary, but study participants already used the Internet to market their products or services.

Significance of the Study

This study's findings may be of value to businesses because they could provide fashion boutique owners in Lagos insight on how to use eCommerce platforms. Findings from this study may fill gaps in the understanding and effective practice of integrating technological innovations in small businesses. Business leaders should identify what eCommerce strategies best suit their business needs and then plan an execution. Rostami, Sommerville, Wong, and Lee (2015) described planning as the process of proactively arranging people, resources, and technology together in taking advantage of present and future opportunity.

Contribution to Business Practice

Small business owners in Nigeria require adequate information on the operational strategies required to use eCommerce for improved marketing and profitability. Fashion boutique owners could benefit from the study because business leaders constantly take steps to grow and develop their organizations. Such steps are possible through the implementation of processes and removal of barriers (Randall & Gibson, 2013). Results from the study may provide business owners the knowledge to use the different online and mobile channels that may enable them to capture a wider audience in the domestic and foreign market for increased profitability.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this study may contribute to social change by providing comfort and ease to customers around the world, as they can buy products from the comfort of their homes and compare prices in the global market to get the best deals at competitive

prices. Knowledge of eCommerce may provide consumers with access to goods and services online. Consumers may order goods whenever needed and they will be delivered within the proposed delivery time. The result of this study may contribute to improvement of well-being of both the business owners and the consumers of the eCommerce product by creating awareness of the adequate use of eCommerce as means to product marketing and profitability. People from the local community may benefit from this study because awareness of eCommerce can expand the marketing of products in Lagos State, Nigeria. The use of eCommerce can contribute to social issues by improving business success and increasing employment opportunities (Maxwell, 2012).

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners in the fashion industry use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. The research question for the study was “How can small business owners in the fashion boutique business use eCommerce strategies to improve product marketing and profitability?” Various journals, reports, and scholarly materials were researched for an in-depth analysis of this study. Eighty-five percent of the literature was within 5 years of study completion (2013 to 2017); literature older than 5 years were seminal works and articles related to the background for the study. I organized the literature review by subtopic for a better focus on the multiple components necessary for understanding eCommerce for small business owners in the fashion industry. I discuss the evolution of eCommerce, its growth pattern, its acceptability across economies, and its implications for emerging markets. I also focus on eCommerce platforms, targeted

audiences, peculiarities of business needs, and how to leverage the opportunities inherent in an information age.

In the literature review, I review the various strategies of marketing products for profitability in fashion boutiques through eCommerce. Ninety-five percent of the 150 sources in the literature review are peer-reviewed, and 90% contain articles published within 5 years of expected final approval. The organization of this literature review starts with the fundamental concepts of eCommerce, SMEs, SET, online product marketing, eMarketing strategies, product pricing, improved business practice, the fashion industry (past & present), branding, sustained competitive advantage, marketing mix, barriers to eCommerce, and finally, a review on profitability. I used the following databases in my search for professional and academic literature: Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, SAGE Premier, Science Direct, Health Science, and Information and Technology databases. Books and journal articles are the main publications used in the review. I used the following keywords to conduct my search: *eCommerce, small businesses, product marketing, marketing strategies, profitability, the social exchange theory (SET), advertising, branding, competition-based pricing, competitive advantage, customer engagement, customer relationship marketing, customer relationship management, customer segmentation, marketing–mix adaptation, market analysis, marketing mix, market orientation, market segmentation, marketing theories, product development, pricing strategies, relationship marketing, resource advantage, social marketing, and viral marketing.*

The Social Exchange Theory

SET was developed in the early works of Thibaut and Kelly (1959), as well as by Homans (1961), Blau (1964), Emerson (1990), and Jepsen and Rodwell (2010).

Reciprocity is the fundamental factor underlying social exchange relationships, and people return favors by engaging in the cooperative and rewarding behavior (Peng, Schaubroeck, & Yuhui Li, 2012). The norm of reciprocity may be encouraged by intentional motives to reciprocate, as individuals return favors to increase the probability of receiving more favors in the future (Westphal, Park, McDonald, & Hayward, 2012). Such intentional motives, however, tend to be weaker determinants of reciprocation than the perceived social obligation to reciprocate. Social exchange refers to intangible social costs and benefits—for example, friendship and caring, which do not require a reciprocal reward or benefit (Choi et al., 2014). Parties in social exchange relationships are more likely to connect better compared to those in economic exchange relationships.

In an organizational context, employees in a favorable relationship of social exchange are more likely to impact the organization positively because they can identify with the company and may perceive a responsibility to be of help (Choi et al., 2014). In an eCommerce context, a customer who had a great online experience buying a product or service is more likely to share such an experience with others. Based on the SET perspective, the consumer-supplier relationships terminate or continue based on the prior history of the relationships and purchase experiences (Kim, 2012). Two critical aspects of SET are also time discrepancy and satisfaction (Kim, 2012). In online exchanges, the consumer needs to trust that the supplier will deliver the goods promptly after payment.

Consumer trust is a critical factor for a business-to-consumer online exchange to occur successfully. If the consumer is satisfied with the purchase experience, the possibility of a continued relationship is higher. Researchers characterized social exchange as an exchange driven by trust among parties, socioemotional benefits, mutual commitment, and a long-term relationship (Choi et al., 2014).

Contrasting Theories

Von Bertalanffy (1950) introduced the general systems theory, emphasizing the use of multiple perceptions to research the interactions of all the elements of an organization in order to understand the dynamics that occur. From a social perspective, systems theory can be used to describe the way humans react and evolve to changes in their external environment to survive. Systems theory was the foundation of the click-and-mortar model, which was devised to explain an empirical phenomenon within the retail industry. Click-and-mortar refers to existing retailers who integrate eCommerce into their business to reduce a growing competitive disadvantage (Mishra, 2009).

Rogers's (1995) diffusion of innovations theory classifies adopters of the theory into four different categories: (a) innovation, (b) communication channels, (c) time, and (d) a social system. Rogers, a consumer behavior theorist, defined diffusion of innovations theory as "the process by which innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system" (p. 11). Researchers have shown that a number of factors motivate fans to make online retail purchases through a social networking site (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010). Researchers have focused on a few influencing factors such as word-of-mouth, promotions, and trust, yet these factors

have not been combined into one comprehensive model (Nambisan & Watt, 2011; Stephen & Toubia, 2010; Zhang & Daugherty, 2009).

eCommerce

The introduction of eCommerce facilitated a rise in human capital. Business leaders use eCommerce to facilitate and promote the spread of ideas and information, thus changing people's attitudes and behavior (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2014). Modern business practices and institutions such as bookkeeping, banking, and commodities market evolved with modern commerce, but the current historical context favorable to eCommerce is globalization (Faloye, 2014). Zabukovsek, Sisovska, Mravljak, and Bobek (2015) explained that the effects of globalization and technology forced smaller firms around the world to implement eCommerce practices, even though the degree of adoption and usage varies from country to country. Findings from previous studies indicate that some possible behavioral differences between those who used eCommerce and those who did not (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2014). Online shoppers are behaviorally and demographically different from those who do not shop online, and studies indicate that online shoppers were highly educated, younger, and have more disposable income (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2014).

In the 1960s, a cooperative effort between industry groups produced a first attempt at common electronic data formats (Udupa, Nayak, & Seema, 2014). The formats were only for purchasing, transportation, and finance data, which were used primarily for industry transactions (Udupa et al., 2014). In the late 1970s, work began on national Electronic Data Interchange standards, which were developed well into the early 1990s.

The term *eCommerce* was used to describe a variety of market transactions, enabled by information technology and conducted over the electronic network (Udupa et al., 2014). Previously, a dominant firm in the value chain usually built a network that deployed proprietary applications over the private network.

The growth of eCommerce boosted quality of service, customer care, reduced costs to the customer, and increased faster execution of transactions (Udupa et al., 2014). Dawes and Nenycz-Thiel (2014) stated that online purchasing is the most rapidly growing form of trade, and currently, consumers can buy virtually anything online. Drew (2014) argued that consumption of goods via the Internet is still a relatively young activity when compared to commerce in general. According to Udupa et al. (2014), the growth of eCommerce in the past 5 years has increased by about 400%, and it is one of the most important facets of the Internet to have emerged in recent times. Faloye (2014) stated that eCommerce impacted business operations positively with a wide range of benefits, but companies that fail to adopt this new system cannot compete favorably in the global marketplace.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Advancement in communication and information technology has led to the creation of an online audience whose members will exceed the largest nation in a very short time (Faloye, 2014). Business owners are increasingly investing in online trading, and SMEs are motivated to invest in eCommerce even if they struggle with measuring the success of their websites (Ghandour, 2015). The inability of some SMEs to measure the success of their websites has resulted in ineffective eCommerce activities and

disappointment over recognizable benefits. According to Faloye (2014), small business owners are increasingly adopting eCommerce due to the advent of the personal computer, increased cost-effectiveness, and cheaper ICT. Faloye argued that even though small business owners are embracing global trade, studies showed that SMEs in developing countries are slow in adopting eCommerce compared to their counterparts in developed countries. Zabukovsek et al. (2015) suggested that small- and micro-businesses are an integral part of national economies, and an in-depth understanding of eCommerce among them is crucial for growth and success.

Businesses across different industries have implemented eCommerce systems, and research shows that a significant number of companies have failed also. Consequently, it is important for SMEs to explore new ways to describe and measure eCommerce success from a business perspective (Wu, Gide, & Jewell, 2014). Faloye (2014) argued that many SMEs are not achieving the minimal levels of eCommerce adoption, and despite many government-led initiatives, barriers to eCommerce have continued to impede adoption levels more than anticipated. One such barrier is that eCommerce environments sometimes lack information that can somewhat promote trust among exchange partners.

On the other hand, digital technologies have created new forms of eWOM, which offers new avenues for gathering credible information that guides consumer behaviors and purchase decisions (Flanagin et al., 2014). Faloye (2014) carried out a survey in southern Nigeria and found that SME managers disagreed that eCommerce was best for the type of products or services they offered. Ghandour (2015) suggested that managers

should embrace eCommerce because it is an essential part of today's business practice that has been increasingly adopted by businesses across all sectors. Ghandour further explained that managers' perception of recognizable benefits was a function of their eCommerce website meeting its objectives, defined as the ability to market their products/services while maximizing profit/shareholder value.

Online Product Marketing

Online product marketing is important in sales promotion because of the rapidly growing rate of Internet users. With more people engaged in the use of the Internet and considering its ease of access, many manufacturers prefer to sell their products via an online channel (Sayadi & Makui, 2014). A new trusted source of information is eWOM, which helps consumers planning to make online purchases and product review sites outrank other media in influencing customer choices (Mishra et al., 2016). By default, some Internet users visit search engines like Google and Yahoo for information on desired products or services (Panda, 2013). Research shows that there is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and product sales, and eWOM is now more robust than printed information because it is considered more credible and valuable (Mishra et al., 2016). Fashion boutique owners can leverage on the possibilities of eCommerce platforms to strategically position their products, create hitch-free customer experiences on their platforms and increase their chances of attracting new and repeat customers.

Organizations intending to increase online visibility may engage the services of professional online marketing companies to promote their products and drive traffic to

their sites. By using some web mining tools and algorithms, online marketing companies can route traffic to desired websites and predict the likely behavioral pattern of consumers. Web mining tools and algorithms help online marketing companies guide customers' inquiry into a purchase process thereby generating increased sales for their clients (Panda, 2013). The use of eWOM is because of its speed, convenience, broad reach, and the absence of face-to-face human pressure (Rollins, Anitsal, Anitsal, & Meral, 2014). As a result, eCommerce operators such as online fashion boutique owners can archive eWOM interactions derived from forums in databases, which can enable them to position their brands better (Mishra et al., 2016).

The introduction of online communication paved the way for new and almost unlimited business opportunities to the world. Consequently, businesses across the globe are now developing their website as an efficient way of reaching their customers (Chih-Hui, Shih-Shuo, & Chin-Fa, 2013). The increasing use of eCommerce channels may lead to some channel conflicts because of disparity with the traditional existing brick-and-mortar channels (Sayadi & Makui, 2014). Despite the influence and evidence of eWOM on consumer choices and purchase decisions, there remain several important empirical and theoretical questions regarding the effect of online reviews on new product sales (Mishra et al., 2016). The volume and valence of online reviews have received much attention in recent past, and how the volume of views of online reviews influences the sales of new products requires further investigation (Mishra et al., 2016).

Product marketing using online channels may work for or against some companies depending on how product owners position their brand. An effective way to

raise interest in a company's products and services is to stimulate eWOM communication among the company's prospective target market (Rollins et al., 2014). Regardless of this, eWOM can also stifle the progress of a company if the goods or services provided consistently disappoint consumers (Rollins et al., 2014). The entertainment industry, for example, has witnessed a rapid spread of eWOM, which is shrinking the life cycle of its products and is prompting firms to rethink their pre- and post-launch marketing strategies. Companies that have online audience need to develop appropriate, flexible, and timely strategies for better product marketing and increased sales (Chih-Hui et al., 2013).

eCommerce Strategies

Business owners may develop appropriate marketing strategies that cater to their needs. Through analyzing websites, current marketing efforts, industry, consumers, target markets and competition, business owners can identify the eMarketing strategies that will help sell their products or services (Tabrizi & Kabirnejat, 2015). The best way to ensure eMarketing success is to develop a strategy that is easy to deploy and measure. The plan should ideally include multiple methods to reach target markets (Tabrizi & Kabirnejat, 2015). No single method that would reach all target potential customers due to variations in individual behaviors and preferences; hence, the need for owners to have a proper understanding of their business for an effective eMarketing strategy to be developed and implemented.

Customer segmentation. With the rapid development of eCommerce in the world, online customer segmentation has attracted much attention from both business and

academia. Customer segmentation as an eMarketing strategy can contribute to a better understanding of customer behaviors in the marketplace (Benfu & Zhang, 2015).

Regarding transaction results, there are three different groups: shoppers, purchasers, and nonpurchasers (Liu, Li, Peng, Lv, & Zhang, 2015). Segmentation of shoppers may be helpful in targeting purchasers and potential purchasers (Liu et al., 2015). The segmentation process involves dividing the total market into homogeneous segments, selecting the target segments, and creating separate marketing programs to meet the needs and wants of these selected segments (Noori, 2015). Ability to segment the market into groups of potential customers will allow companies to target the most popular segments, with each segment consisting of a cluster of people who are in one or more important groups. These segment classifications include new, engaged, lapsed, and inactive; *new* refers to people who have ordered online in the past 3 months, engaged customers have ordered within the last 6 months but are not new, lapsed customers placed their last order 6 to 12 months ago, and inactive customers ordered last over 12 months ago (Tarter & Zahay-Blatz, 2014).

Online sales and price promotion. As social media continues to gain popularity, companies with an online presence are searching for workable platforms on which to base their strategic decisions on how to engage and influence their customers (Shadkam & O'Hara, 2013). A major strategy adopted by many firms is the use of online sales promotion to increase their visibility (Crespo-Almendros & Del Barrio-Garcia, 2014). Marketers rely on consumer insights as the basis for their sales and marketing strategies (Fulgoni, 2014). For example, one of every 10 American consumers monitors and

purchases online discounts daily, and 20% check the available offers occasionally (Crespo-Almendros & Del Barrio-Garcia, 2014). The United States is the leading global user of online sales promotion regarding consumer take-up.

Platforms that support eCommerce activities provide a mutually beneficial relationship between consumers and companies. Consumers make informed decisions based on available information, product reviews, and eWOM, while firms make more profits by attracting and alluring potential buyers via social channels (Shadkam & O'Hara, 2013). As online shopping grows rapidly, sales promotion has become an important issue of electronic commerce success; despite this, there is a lack of sufficient research that focuses on online sales promotion (Shen & Fu-Ciang, 2014). Although various types of price promotion are used to increase sales, this strategy may negatively affect consumers' perceptions of a premium product brand, though some customers perceive an economic advantage when purchasing the promoted product (Zoellner & Schaefers, 2015). New product development and price promotions have been observed to help business owners increase the number of buyers and frequency of purchases (Trinh & Anesbury, 2015).

Twitter marketing. Social media has influenced advertisements and marketing strategies adopted by companies who intend to maintain a strong online presence. Twitter was launched in 2006, and it enables users to send and read short messages limited to 140 characters, known as "tweets" (Alturki & Fayyoubi, 2014). Twitter is a communication platform that serves an important role in integrated marketing communications (IMC), and an increasing number of marketers are embracing this new form of social media

(Swani, Milne, Cromer, & Brown, 2013). Marketers are reaping the benefits of Twitter by sending out informal tweets to their followers, generating lead revenues, increasing brand awareness, fostering relationships, and creating brand loyalty (Swani et al., 2013).

The ability to post and read status updates on Twitter has made it very useful for measuring eWOM and public opinion concerning products and services (Jin & Phua, 2014). Twitter is beneficial for both unregistered and registered users, as the former can read tweets and the latter can post tweets through SMS, website interface, and innumerable mobile phone applications (Jin & Phua, 2014). Despite the popularity of social media in general and Twitter specifically, little empirical research exists to assist marketers on how to successfully connect with consumers in these environments (Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). The disparity between traditional branding and the seemingly unlimited possibilities presented by the advent of digital branding leads some companies to abandon tried-and-tested aspects of marketing for the flash of the new (Doctoroff & Macmillan, 2015). A successful integration of traditional and digital marketing strategies may be a true and lasting strategy for brands to move into the future.

Product pricing. Consumers are constantly seeking for optimal value at the lowest prices; hence, price is one of the most effective variables that can be manipulated by companies to encourage or discourage product demand (Cai, Feng, Li, & Shi, 2013). Companies face the challenge of finding a way to sell a service with a profit margin above cost to a large enough set of consumers to cover their production costs (Weber, 2016). One of the most common pricing strategies in product marketing is quality discrimination or versioning, where producers offer different qualities or versions of the

same service for different prices (Weber, 2016). Offering different qualities and prices enables consumer to make their choices based on their willingness to pay. Though consumers with low purchase intentions (PI) receive little attention from market researchers, other information gathered from these consumers relating to the product development process may help researchers understand why this population would not buy the product (Bishop & Barber, 2014). This may help marketers understand if they can change something about the product in order to appeal to this group, especially if this group is large and attractive.

Another pricing strategy adopted mostly by online stores is a dynamic pricing strategy known as Pay What You Want (PWYW), where a buyer's control over the price setting is at a maximum level (Marett, Pearson, & Moore, 2012). In PWYW, the customer can decide to pay absolutely nothing for the product if he or she so desires, and this strategy has been used in recent high-profile business efforts. Major reasons for using PWYW include attracting the attention of new customers, increasing word-of-mouth marketing, and enhancing consumers' perceptions of the vendor's innovativeness (Marett et al., 2012). From the operational and financial viewpoints, pricing decisions are important to enterprises for effective supply chain management (Khamseh, Soleimani & Naderi, 2014).

Improved Business Practice

The beginning of eCommerce dates back to about 40 years ago, in the late 1970s, but became a reality in the early 1990s when the Internet was brought to the general public, and it took another four years for the creation of the required security protocols

and sufficiently fast Internet connections (Sawmy & Damar-Ladkoo, 2015). Businesses are increasingly investing in online trading, and small business owners are motivated to invest in this way of doing business and developing websites for eCommerce (Ghandour, 2015). Utilization of eCommerce is a technology implementation that increases business competition and sales of a wider range of products or services, either physically or digitally (Darwis, 2013). Advanced cyberinfrastructure has improved network capacity, connectivity, interoperability, processing, and effective handling of large quantities of data, which has enabled the transformation of commerce into eCommerce (Winter, 2012).

The United States government played a significant role in the birth of the Internet, but the web itself exploded mainly around commercial enterprises (Winter, 2012). The growth of eCommerce is occurring at five times the rate of traditional retail channels, and new channels of eCommerce, such as daily deals offered by companies, have boosted the sector's momentum since 2010 (Elizabeth, 2014). Consumers are seeking an integrated shopping experience across online channels, and they expect retailers to deliver this experience; inability to do so puts the retailers at risk of becoming irrelevant (M. Balasescu, 2013). Web 2.0 is an online platform that has transferred the Internet to a social environment, creating platforms where people can interact and create content online. Web 2.0 has also elevated online communities to a level where new business plans are developed and implemented on those communities (Elizabeth, 2014). The explosion of the Internet has triggered a significant rise in eCommerce, as many businesses found that Internet provided unparalleled opportunities for them to extend their operations overseas (Sawmy & Damar-Ladkoo, 2015).

Online opportunities have created an upward trend in eCommerce worldwide, and there are many success stories of organizations that adopted eCommerce; however, many organizations are still lagging behind in establishing an online presence (Sawmy & Damar-Ladkoo, 2015). In developing countries, understanding eCommerce adoption has been challenging and often reliant on studying individual adopters of this technology (Faloye, 2014). Studies have shown that even though small businesses in developing countries are turning more to global markets, they are still slow in their adoption of eCommerce compared to their larger counterparts (Faloye, 2014).

Companies operate their online stores at different cumulative functional levels, namely informational, communicative, and transactional levels (Sawmy & Damar-Ladkoo, 2015). At the informational level, companies enlighten the public about the different products and services they offer; at the communication level, their interactions are limited to e-mail, enquiries, and information updates; and at the transactional level, selection of the product, making an order and payment transactions are conducted (Darwis, 2013). Regarding competitive advantage, the use of new technologies appears to be guided by the idea of lowering costs, mainly through staff costs reduction (Bacanu, 2015). Organizations can transfer some of their operational costs to online marketing costs.

Recently, small businesses are increasingly using and adopting eCommerce due to the increasing availability of the personal computer, cost-effectiveness, and cheaper information communication technology (ICT). ICT makes it possible for SMEs to compete equally with large corporations because of the opportunities provided by this

platform (Faloye, 2014). Social media and mobile technology have significant impacts on retail businesses as consumers increasingly utilize these channels for shopping, coupons, reviews, online promotions, price checks, product comparisons, and information (M. Balasescu, 2013). Business that fails to adopt eCommerce runs the risk of reduced social and economic development; however, despite its opportunities, eCommerce adoption in developing countries has been sporadic (Faloye, 2014). A wide range of benefits is conveyed by eCommerce, and companies that fail to leverage this platform cannot compete favorably in the global marketplace (Faloye, 2014).

Overview of the Fashion Industry Past and Present Fashion is a cultural phenomenon that encompasses the way people dress, act, and think, and therefore, fashion is a symbolic word that comprises all aspects of life (Polese & Blaszczyk, 2012). Fashion does not just refer to clothing, but also affects all spheres of life; however, historically and theoretically, it has referred mainly to clothing and personal adornment (Atik & Fuat Firat, 2013). The apparel industry has evolved with regard to manufacturing and retailing. Evolution of the apparel industry was inspired by the search for cost advantages, and the relocation of manufacturing from the United States and the European Union to other countries with cheaper labor since the 1970s (Barbosa et al., 2013). In today's competitive environment, retailing systems compete for supremacy and organizations that maintain efficient supply chain networks out-compete less efficient systems (S. Balasescu, 2014). Apparel retailers in the past offered price discount and limited choices at a favorable price to increase market penetration and profit margins. Apparel retailers gradually evolved as they built margins by offering higher customer service and

exclusive product/brand lines.

Fashion has evolved consistently based on the theoretical product life cycle (Sproles, 1981). The theoretical lifestyle stages are: introduction and adoption by fashion leaders, increasing public acceptance (growth), mass conformity (maturation), and inevitable decline and obsolescence (Sproles, 1981). In the 1970s, young people in Western societies emerged as a new kind of consumer, demanding a more informal and less classic clothing style that birthed the differentiation of clothes and opposition to the conformist adult way of dressing (Merlo, 2011). Since this time, fashion trends among young people have become an autonomous and rapidly increasing market, one that demands greater segmentation in supply and availability of different styles (Merlo, 2011). Fashion designers must be aware of the fact that trendsetters spend a significant amount of time in the social realm (Barbosa et al., 2013), and trendsetters give meaning to the world that outsiders think of as frivolous, superficial, or filled with cute people who have nothing to say or do. In the past, the fashion industry focused on the avant-garde, the unique, and the unusual, especially within the realms of creation and design (Buckley & Clark, 2012).

Large retailers, marketers and manufacturers control apparel chains, and they get their income from providers who work in this value chain, such as traders, overseas buyers, and licensed manufacturers (Barbosa et al., 2013). However, the introduction of new technologies such as improved sewing machines, paper patterns, machine-made textiles, and ready-to-wear systems have improved methods of distribution, dissemination, and retailing (Buckley & Clark, 2012). With more than 1.9 billion Internet

users worldwide, the number of online purchasers has increased considerably (Loubeau, Jantzen, & Alexander, 2014). Fashion designers are supported in eCommerce through online platforms, which alters the traditional requirements of physical appearances to anytime and anywhere, making transactions easier to conduct (Darwis, 2013). On the other hand, some customers without a detailed knowledge of fashion find it challenging and overwhelming to choose clothes suitable for their preferences from a large selection of apparel shopping sites, or may even give up buying clothes online (Sekozawa, Mitsuhashi, & Ozawa, 2011). Competitiveness has increased through eCommerce as a form of technology implementation, and business owners can now market their products and services to a wider range of consumers across geographical boundaries (Sawmy & Damar-Ladkoo, 2015).

Products Branding

Business managers are facing challenges on how to package their products and how branding affects the overall perception of their brands (Baumeister, Scherer, & Wangenheim, 2015). Research has shown that branding has a stronger impact on product evaluation than product qualities and attributes because products purchased by consumers represent a way of expressing desired identities (Kinley & Brandon, 2015). Brand managers of two brands can enter into a cooperative arrangement to increase market competitiveness according to Ingredient Branding Offering (IBO) theory (Radighieri, John Mariadoss, Grégoire, & Johnson, 2014). A fashion boutique owner may decide to have an IBO with an already established modeling company with established brand equity to promote their clothing line. An effective strategy for an upcoming fashion

boutique owner is to align with a strong brand, which will help the boutique owner overcome weaknesses in its product category and also broadens its appeal by association (Radighieri et al., 2014). Emotional branding, defined as the successful attachment of a specific emotion to a brand, is also another increasingly popular advertising strategy. However, no study has documented the behavioral effectiveness of emotional branding (Taute, Peterson, & Sierra, 2014).

Despite numerous arguments on branding and different perspectives from which it can be analyzed, research in a strategic marketing context is scanty, even though brands are considered the face of a business strategy (Rahman & Areni, 2014). Companies must develop marketing strategies to develop their market environment, brand loyalty, product quality, and positioning (Taute et al., 2014). Branding develops the cognitive system of the consumer and persuades them to act in a desired manner. Branding also creates favorable and unfavorable attitude as well as responses to the products (Taute et al., 2014). Due to today's dynamic business environment with limitless online content, it is difficult to grab consumer attention because the nature of the consumer, the socio-cultural dimension, and the adjustment to different situations are changing very quickly (Taute et al., 2014). Contrary to this, cultural globalization has accelerated the exchange of cultural symbols among people around the world to an extent that leads to changes in local popular cultures and identities (Taylor & Okazaki, 2015).

Advertising can generate strong, specific, emotional attachment, but favorable brand encounters and experiences must follow if this approach is to be successful (Baumeister et al., 2015). Emotional branding is the more traditional unique selling

proposition (USP) advertising strategy, and it is observed to be an effective strategy for high involvement, positively motivated products (Taute et al., 2014). Brands are key cultural symbols that arise out of consumption culture, which contributes to globalization (Taylor & Okazaki, 2015). Given the significant increase in the number of ethnic consumers, Puzakova, Kwak, and Bell (2015) suggested that firms must utilize various marketing communication strategies to promote their brands to these ethnically diverse groups. Managing the identity of brands and products in a global environment is one of the most challenging activities for executives of companies regardless of size (Talay, Townsend, & Yenyurt, 2015).

Sustained Competitive Advantage

The adoption of competitive strategies is necessary for organizations because the globalized economy demands more competence and professionalization (de Melo & Guerra Leone, 2015). Sustained competitive advantage is achieved when a firm can consistently create more economic value than rival firms (Chekwa et al., 2015). Managers are faced with the need to make increasingly complex decisions and precise risk assessments because competitive firms require adequate allocation of physical, financial, and human resources to maximize opportunities (de Melo & Guerra Leone, 2015). As SMEs are struggling to survive due to immense pressure created by the globalization of world economy and competition from giant multinational firms, it is important for them to discern their competitive edge in alternative ways (Krajnakova, Navikaite, & Navickas, 2015). Business leaders may leverage their intangible assets such as excellent customer service to create sustainable competitive advantage; it is more

difficult to copy compared to tangible assets like machinery (Chekwa et al., 2015).

Competitors may find it easier to copy tangible assets like computers or machines, but intangible assets like a company's unique culture, transformational leadership, and superior customer service may be more difficult to emulate (Liu, 2013).

The future sustainability of companies in complex business situations relies on forward-thinking strategies. When new technologies are applied, implementing creative ideas leads to innovation that stems from everyday practice and interaction (Teodorescu, Stancioiu, Ravar, & Botoş, 2015). The economic recession that impacted firms regardless of location increased competition and changes in customer expectations requires all companies to be resilient in their strategies to remain competitive (Liu, 2013). Low prices alone may not be sufficient to develop and sustain competitive advantage. Companies that manage to remain competitive have achieved this goal not only by sustainable business-sense advantages but also on perceived value from the customer's perspective (Chekwa et al., 2015). An effective organizational structure will facilitate communication between departments, thereby increasing work efficiency (Daniela, 2014).

Strategy is one of the most crucial and key issues for the future of organizations. For example, Adidas has focused on broad differentiation, innovation, and trying to produce new products, services, and processes to remain competitive (Ali Mahdi, Abbas, Mazar, & George, 2015). Adidas and Nike Inc. have both embraced a multi-brand strategy that emphasizes expansion into emerging markets, continuously improving infrastructure, processes and systems, a culture of challenging convention, and embracing change, passion, integrity, and diversity (Ali Mahdi et al., 2015).

As introduced by Porter (1979), the goal of all businesses is to get a competitive advantage in relation with competitors in the market the market place either through sales at a lower price or product differentiation (Daniela, 2014). It is global practice for companies to formulate their strategies based on their visions and to satisfy customers' needs, requirements and expectations (Teodorescu et al., 2015). The 21st century has introduced dramatic changes in economies and societies worldwide owing to the introduction of advanced technologies and emergence of smart cities as hubs of creativity and innovations. As global knowledge and innovation increase, the importance of creativity and efficiency in offering new products and services becomes crucial for achieving growth and sustainable competitive advantage (Sofronijevic, Milicevic, & Ilic, 2014).

Marketing Mix

Noah Borden created the marketing mix in 1957, and it included 12 elements, namely: product, packaging, price, brand, distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, display, post-sale service, logistics, information gathering, and analysis (S. Balasescu, 2014). The performance of brands is a function of marketing activities, which may or may not be effective in generating growth (Porto & Lima, 2015). The four Ps of marketing were identified: product policy, pricing policy, placement policy, and promotion policy (Talpau, 2014). Talpau (2014) argued that any organization must aim to produce goods and services that are desired by their target audience regarding tangible features (color, size, functionality, etc.), as well as intangible ones (customer experience, after-sales services, etc.). More competitive prices are possible

through eCommerce platforms because costs such as storage, staff, and physical locations have disappeared or diminished significantly for online stores. Furthermore, the Internet offers companies the opportunity to reach consumers directly and eliminate intermediaries. Promotional policy complements traditional methods of promotion with a series of instant communication backed by low cost and specific market segmentation. Examples of promotion policies are websites, paid advertising, search engine optimization, newsletters, etc. (Talpau, 2014).

Marketing mix represents those elements of marketing that are controllable and can be manipulated by marketing managers to ensure the maximum appeal of their product or service (Goyal Wasan & Tripathi, 2014). The dynamics of marketing was fairly similar in the past, but with the technological progression experienced in recent years, there has been a visible impact on the market and marketing. Marketing is a way of exploring, creating and delivering value to meet the needs and desires of the target market (Talpau, 2014). For product retailers who have direct contact with their consumers, six fundamental elements of the marketing mix were identified: location, the store (point of sale), product, price, distribution, and promotion (S. Balasescu, 2014). The efficiency of marketing communication actions is a major concern for managers. Research shows that efficiency is calculated at the marketing communications mix components level and not at an integrated level of marketing communication (Romero & Yague, 2015). Brand equity and marketing mix strategy are necessary tools for building corporate competency in the business world (Romero & Yague, 2015). The marketing mix strategy utilizes the four Ps model (product, price, promotion, and place). Studies

have shown that service quality, brand equity, and marketing mix strategy have significant and positive relationship to customer loyalty (Romero & Yague, 2015).

As part of their integrated marketing communication efforts, innovative companies recognize the need to convey the right messages to the right customers to create value, and to encourage purchase decisions (Vomberg, Homburg, & Bornemann, 2015). Many brick-and-mortar retailers have opened online stores and found that their sales increased dramatically (Dinner, Van Heerde, & Neslin, 2014). For example, while Macy's 2012 year-on-year revenue growth in physical stores was 3.7%, their online sales increased by 41.0% (Macy's, 2013). Marketing mix has both communicative and operative functions. Communicative function is the need to highlight to consumers the value in a product or service while operative function aims to remove hitches from the customer journey, making it as effortless as possible (Gajic, 2012). Product, price, promotion, physical location, packaging, place, and people are the seven Ps of marketing (Gajic, 2012). New technologies have created new markets, and new possibilities have improved marketing mix enabling the development and introduction of new products/services into the market (S. Balasescu, 2014).

Product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process are the seven Ps of the marketing mix (Vomberg et al., 2015). In retailing, quality is an important component of the product element, discounts and allowances are important components of prices, location is an important component of place, and policies are important in the process category (Vomberg et al., 2015). Advertising and endorsements are major components of promotion; personnel plays an important role in the people category,

while a sales receipt showing information (including the company's web address, store location, and telephone number) is a major component of physical evidence.

Barriers to eCommerce Business leaders in developing countries are confronted with eCommerce challenges, which include (a) lack of adequate infrastructure, (b) cybercrimes, (c) logistical bottlenecks, (d) system breakdowns, (e) network coverage, and (f) hacking incidents (Grochal-Brejdak & Szymura-Tyc, 2013). The eCommerce revolution is well underway but still faces significant challenges. As an additional purchase option, eCommerce is growing rapidly (Zatonatska & Kornieieva, 2016). Some retailers still believe that consumers want to feel and touch a product before purchasing it. Some customers are still unable to trust online platforms enough to make purchases on them (Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012). Additionally, eCommerce faces problems like cybercrimes, logistical bottlenecks, system breakdowns, and hacking incidents (Zatonatska & Kornieieva, 2016).

Over the past decade, policymakers, scholars, and practitioners agree that eCommerce is an essential ingredient for socio-economic advancement in developing countries; however, there is minimal information about the conditions and contingencies surrounding eCommerce adoption in developing countries (Faloye, 2014). Barriers to eCommerce in developing countries are external (supply barriers, demand barriers, and environmental barriers) and internal (resource barriers and system barriers) (Fleet, 2012). Other barriers to eCommerce include differences in cultural beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, and limited exposure to Internet shopping opportunities (Loubeau et al., 2014).

The population of online shoppers has increased from 40% to over 85%, with half of today's users making regular purchases at least once a month (Loubeau et al., 2014). Research shows that Western Europe leads the world in retail eCommerce, with France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom constituting the largest online markets (Loubeau et al., 2014). However, some online users in these countries are deterred by the chances of receiving an unsatisfactory product or incurring an unexpected financial loss (Rose et al., 2012). Some SMEs viewed ICT as unsuitable for their product/service and their ways of doing business, and of no benefit to their organizations (Fleet, 2012).

Without a proper assessment of eCommerce inefficiencies, consumer participation in this platform will remain laden with lingering suspicion that will prevent open transactions in eCommerce (Zatonatska & Kornieieva, 2016). Technology, language, legal and cultural barriers, lack of access to infrastructure and equipment, inability to operate a computer and an insufficient sense of security and trust are also barriers to eCommerce (Grochal-Brejidak & Szymura-Tyc, 2013). These challenges are technological barriers, non-technological barriers, and macroeconomic and macroeconomic barriers (Grochal-Brejidak & Szymura-Tyc, 2013). Other identified barriers to eCommerce include knowing the true identity of transacting entities, the true nature of the product, and judging the integrity of the seller (Rahman, 2015).

The Future of eCommerce

As eCommerce continues to gain popularity, marketers are searching for strategies on how best to employ social media to engage and influence their customers

(Hoffman & Novak, 2012). Retailers have started gravitating to densely populated, highly trafficked areas in the real world, rather than hoping for customers to come to them.

These retailers seek to gain access to millions of consumers who are not only spending their time but also sharing their opinions, recommendations and purchase experiences (Shadkam & O'Hara, 2013). The development and sustenance of trust remain vital while discussing the future of eCommerce. Trust is a dynamic process, which includes the initial trust-building, trust maintaining, and trust recession. Marketers must seek to gain and preserve the trust of their customers (Zhongwei, June, & Fuyuan, 2015).

On a large scale, eCommerce has attracted the interest of global players, making the business terrain not just competitive, but a battleground for all online business owners (Pousttchi et al., 2015). Some business owners, as part of their production and marketing strategies, adopt a process of integrating the consumer into their value chain as content providers (Pousttchi et al., 2015). Information is another fundamental aspect to consider while discussing the future of eCommerce. The intrinsic nature of information includes information organization, form, structure, classification, cataloguing, and indexing (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Applications of information in practice depend on how it interacts with other fundamental components, and within what domains and context. Information is a vital aspect in eCommerce, with an emphasis on consumer-generated content (Wang & Zhang, 2012).

Advancements in the usability and functionalities of mobile devices will influence the future of eCommerce. With the implementation of 3G technologies in telecommunication, marketers, network operators, customers, application developers, and

service providers have had to change their strategies. The future of eCommerce requires dynamic solutions that provide a foundation to profitability in the current scenario and also accommodate future technological advancements (Mehmood, 2015). With the introduction of 4G technology in different countries, the question of whether or not companies can use traditional business models to fulfill their goals for maximum benefits remains largely unanswered (Mehmood, 2015).

Omnichannel retailing is another dimension to the future of eCommerce. In the omnichannel, customers move freely between online, mobile, and physical stores, all within a single transaction process (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). The customer journey is expected to be smooth, seamless, and unified, regardless of the channels used, because the channels are managed together, and perceived interaction is with the brand (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). The driving force behind the development of eCommerce is new technology such as smartphones, tablets and related software like apps, mobile payments, e-valets, e-coupons, digital flyers, and location-based services (Hemphill, 2014). Changes in information technology provision promote productivity, reduced cost, and increased access to information that allow for personalization and price optimization (Shadkam & O'Hara, 2013).

Profitability in Business

Profitability is the most important principle of commerce (Mousavi-Khaneghah et al., 2013). Managers, investors, and financial analysts apply profit as an index for evaluating management effectiveness and for decision making. Financial and manufacturing programs, activities, and decisions are reflected in a firm's profitability

(Dehghan, Ghafoorifard, Shamsi, & Seyed Heydari, 2015). Sales through eCommerce are conducted over communication networks using computers, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones, and are comprised of online retail and online marketplace (Mousavi-Khaneghah et al., 2013). In general, eCommerce transactions can be categorized into: (a) business-to-business (B2B), (b) business-to-customer (B2C), (c) business-to-government (B2G), and (d) customer-to-customer (C2C) (Niraj & Nageswara Rao, 2015). Business owners analyze return on invested capital (ROIC), which is operating income less net invested capital or net operating assets to assess profitability (Jing-Liu, Ohlson, & Weining, 2015).

Innovation capability is an asset of profitability for small businesses, and managers should pay more attention to the ability to develop new ideas (Saunila, Ukko, & Rantanen, 2014). Some fashion boutique owners integrate sustainability into decision-making and initiatives because of its long-term consequences. Leveraging different online and mobile channels enables sellers to capture a wider set of potential customers in the domestic and foreign market, which affects profitability (Niraj & Nageswara Rao, 2015). Business owners aim to create new products, processes, knowledge, and services by utilizing new or existing knowledge. Innovation is an organizational resource that could help create value (Saunila et al., 2014).

Product and Service Differentiation

A company can leverage eCommerce to devise an offensive strategy against competitors when dealing with the forces that drive industry competition. Business owners utilize eCommerce to build additional value for customers through differentiation (Fauska, Kryvinska, & Strauss, 2014). For example, Amazon is popularly known for

efficient logistics and delivery services, and the introduction of Amazon Prime and Amazon Prime Now further reinforces this perception. Amazon Prime and Amazon Prime Now are delivery options that guarantee receipt of goods purchased within hours. In an online marketplace, business owners use product or service differentiation to assign a buyer to a seller where each seller commits to sell a different version of the product than other competitors (Makadok & Ross, 2013). Buyers will voluntarily self-assign themselves to the product that most closely matches their preferences, if their preferences differ (Makadok & Ross, 2013). For example, Coca-Cola and Pepsi created their success stories, and part of their enduring success is a function of their abilities to structure not only their businesses but the industry as a whole (Fauska et al., 2014).

Bundled discounts as a way of product or service differentiation can be promoted on eCommerce platforms. Customers pay less using bundle discounts for a package of products than when purchased separately (Brito & Vasconcelos, 2015). Mixed bundling is a useful business tool even in symmetric competition as well as within a monopoly (Jae, 2015). A customer gets more discounts for another dress or shoe if a particular number of shoes or dresses were purchased, or a bundle discount for buying different items (Brito & Vasconcelos, 2015). Consumers have the choice between meeting their entire needs by buying a package at a discounted price, or purchasing items individually (Jae, 2015). The most commonly used reduction schemes in 2007 were buy-one, get-one half price (44%), buy-two, get-one free (25%), and buy-one, get-one free (BOGOF) (Pechpeyrou, 2013).

Fashion Marketing

Fashion exploded with globalization in the last two decades and profoundly affected marketing strategies (Alpat & Aksu, 2014). Consumers with an interest in fashion experience a feeling of differentiation and transformation to boost their ego. Luxury fashion business owners enjoy high profiles worldwide and are perceived to be leaders in the fashion marketing industry through their excellence in quality and design (Carrigan, Moraes, & McEachern, 2013). Mainstream fashion brands, in contrast to luxury brands, are defined as brands that consist of a lower but reasonable level of quality and are also more affordably priced (Fuchs, Prandelli, Schreier, & Dahl, 2013). In today's competitive business environment, one way that companies endeavor to cut their costs is by reducing inventory (Huang, Hsu, & Ho, 2014). Retailers of fashion goods usually employ dynamic pricing such as clearance sales or markdowns to influence market demand, to increase sales volume, and to deplete stocks of goods (Huang et al., 2014). Likewise, eWOM marketing involves any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, which creates the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

The worldwide fashion industry is divided into a variety of market segments and consumer-based demographical segmentations such as gender, age group, income level, nature of fabrics, and category of garments and price (Ahmed, Chowdhury, Humayun, Uddin, & Ferdous, 2014). The fashion industry consists of people and organizations involved in creating symbolic meanings and transferring these meanings to cultural goods (Carrigan et al., 2013). Some companies adopt a dynamic pricing strategy to attract

enough customers to lessen the inventory burden and improve sales (Huang et al., 2014).

The economy of a country determines the market scenario, purchasing power and behavior of the consumers because consumer income levels define living standards, which in turn determine purchasing decisions (Ahmed et al., 2014)

Owners of luxury fashion brands such as Gucci engage in viral marketing, particularly brand-sponsored videos, with the hope of attracting the attention of visual influencers (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Pinterest and other visual platforms have become important marketing channels for brands, and a dominant mode of conveying the brands' desired image (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Some fashion marketers such as Victoria's Secret identified the fashion leaders within their target audience and communicate how their brand allows the owner's personality to be expressed in a way that is still socially acceptable to their peers (Simmers, Parker, Stephen, & Allen, 2014). Face-to-face conversations are also credible, with a higher emotional content, and linked to a natural instinct for socialization.

Gap in Literature Previous studies on eCommerce was carried out for companies such as Blockbuster, Borders, Sears, Netflix, Barnes & Nobles, and JC Penney on how the leaders have utilized eCommerce to promote product marketing and increase profitability for the organization (Jones & Livingstone, 2015). Some managers have also used eCommerce to expand their market across cultures and countries (Jones & Livingstone, 2015). Electronic retailing as been researched adequately using empirical investigation on services and product marketing (Zhang, Dai, & He, 2015). Despite the previous studies on eCommerce in past studies, there seem to be none that have considered how some

fashion boutique business owners utilize eCommerce to improve market products and enhance the chances of profitability (Jones & Livingstone, 2015; Zhang et al., 2015).

Transition

Section 1 of this capstone study contains the foundation of the study, background of the study, nature of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, and research question/interview questions. It also includes assumptions/limitations/delimitations, conceptual framework, and literature review. The organization of this literature review consists of the fundamental concepts of eCommerce, SMEs, SET, online product marketing, eMarketing strategies, product pricing, improved business practice, the fashion industry past & present, branding, sustained competitive advantage, marketing mix, barriers to eCommerce, and finally, a review on profitability.

In section 2, I discuss the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical procedures, and data collection instrument. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, the implication for social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflections, and a conclusion to this study.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners can attain knowledge on how to use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. The participants for the multiple case study included five fashion boutique owners in Lagos, Nigeria who have used eCommerce to market their products and have a significant profitability as a result of eCommerce. In this section, I address various topics, including the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population sampling, data collection and technique, data organization techniques, and data analysis. The conclusion of the section contains a discussion of the reliability and validity of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners in the boutique fashion industry use eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. The target population for this study consisted of five fashion boutique owners based in Lagos State, Nigeria with a significant record of profitability by using eCommerce in product marketing. The findings from the study can contribute to positive social change by providing employment for the community where the business operates, and by providing opportunities for customers to shop with ease from their homes, can reduce possible accidents that may occur during commute.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is the most vital in the data research process (Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2014). The researcher participates in the data collection process, selection of appropriate design, methodology, recruitment of participants, interviews, analysis, verification, and reporting (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Themes and meanings emerged from the semistructured interviews. The researcher should understand the research topic, scope, central themes and concepts relevant to the research (Baskarada, 2014). To that end, participants' eCommerce use in their various businesses was assessed, and I analyzed results from the performance of their current eCommerce strategies by evaluating their web analytics, social media presence, online advertising, and website functionalities.

The Belmont Report, originally written by The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979), summarizes ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of humans. Researchers use *The Belmont Report* to distinguish between research and practice, the three basic ethical principles, and the application of the principles. I reviewed *The Belmont Report*, and with my completed National Institutes of Health web-based training course, I complied with ethical standards and protection of human research participants. Compliance with the ethical research principles of justice, respect, and beneficence is vital for a credible research process (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012).

The researcher should know the scope of the study to understand the central concepts and issues relevant to the research (Baskarada, 2014). I am familiar with using

eCommerce for improved product marketing and profitability because of my role as the managing director of a fashion brand that relies heavily on eCommerce. Bernard (2013) stated that researchers' cultural and experiential background might contain biases, values, and ideologies that can affect the interpretations of their study findings. The semistructured interview involved fashion boutique owners in Lagos, Nigeria, which is where I live, but they were not within my circle of influence to avoid researcher bias.

Researcher bias may influence the research process; hence, identification of personal experiences, assumptions, and attitudes before starting a study is essential to limiting researcher bias (Yin, 2014). To minimize my personal bias, I remained mindful of my personal and professional background when designing this study, crafting research questions, and analyzing results. To refrain from introducing researcher bias in the process of data collection, I adhered to (a) note-taking during data collection and analysis, (b) asking open-ended questions to encourage interviewees to tell stories about their experiences, (c) member checking, and (d) transcription (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Open-ended interview questions are useful for exploring the voices and experiences of research participants and gaining an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the research problem (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Researchers use interview protocol to get the best information from the participants (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014). Interview protocol serves as a procedural guideline for directing new qualitative researchers through the interview process (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014). For the interview protocol of this study, see Appendix A.

Participants

The participants for this multiple case study were five SME fashion boutique owners in Lagos, Nigeria. In a qualitative study, a sample size between three and 25 is adequate (Draper & Swift, 2012). Robinson (2014) explained that the purpose of the scholarly investigation is to show that an issue potentially exists. Paradkar, Knight, and Hansen (2015) found participants with substantial knowledge and experience in exploring how to fill gaps in ideas and organizational resources. In their research, Gerasymenko and Arthurs (2014) were physically present at an organization to meet with the appropriate individuals with knowledge and experience. Likewise, Christner and Stromsten (2015) conducted face-to-face interviews for exploring the interconnection of accounting and technology. Following the example of these scholars, I gained access to participants with high exposure to the subject of this research via telephone calls and e-mails to set up appointments.

To establish a working relationship with participants, I engaged the responsive prospects in continued e-mail and telephone communication. Such exchanges possess the potential to strengthen ties, leading to confidence and trust. In an atmosphere of mutual communication, prospective subjects are likely to agree to participate and agree to answer questions in a face-to-face interview (Riiskjær, Ammentorp, & Kofoed, 2012). Other methods that I used for data collection were observation and archival document review. I developed trust and fostered a good working relationship with participants by ensuring they remain anonymous and preserving the confidentiality of the interview process (Gottfert, 2015; Siu, Hung, Lam, & Cheng, 2013).

Research Method and Design

The research method for this study is qualitative, and the design is multiple case study. The qualitative methodology is most appropriate for this study because researchers use open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants view the research problem (Singh, 2015). This section also includes a detailed description of the research method and design, and the reasons for using the selected method and design and why other methods and designs are inappropriate.

Research Method

The qualitative method was most appropriate for this study because the qualitative approach involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data to explore a specific research question (Park & Park, 2016). Using a qualitative study method requires an evaluation of the researcher's role in this study. The result of a study depends on the level of transparency with which the participants participate in the data collection and analysis process (Halpern & Leite, 2015). In a qualitative study, the researcher relies on the participants' judgment on the topic for findings (Yin, 2014). A qualitative research method is used to understand a case in depth, where precise measurement or a predetermined hypothesis is not likely available (Kipkulei, 2013).

Researchers use a qualitative research method to obtain a general viewpoint of participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Dalton, 2013; Johnson, 2015). A qualitative research method provides a more flexible way of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, as it relates to human perception (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). In a quantitative study, by contrast, numeric data are analyzed using statistical or econometric

methods (Starr, 2014). The mixed method approach is a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods (Starr, 2014). The objective of this research was to explore how some fashion boutique owners in Lagos, Nigeria successfully use eCommerce for product marketing. The mixed method approach was unsuitable for this study because it contains the quantitative method (Thurimella, 2014).

Research Design

I used multiple case study in data collection rather than a single case study design by interviewing multiple owners of fashion design businesses in Lagos who have successfully implemented eCommerce as a business strategy to improve product marketing and profitability. Researchers use a multiple case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the case under review (Yin, 2014). Qualitative designs are case study, phenomenological study, narrative, and ethnography (Yin, 2014). Using a phenomenological design enables the researcher to study the lived experience of the participants (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015), but a phenomenological design was not justified for the purposes of this study because I did not study the lived experience of the participants. A narrative design was not adequate for this study as a narrative is used when the mode of data collection is by storytelling (Cash et al., 2015). Ethnographic research was not adequate for this study because it entails extended observation of a given community or group with the aim to characterize the culture that governs patterns of behavior and interaction of its members (Liberati et al., 2015). I achieved data saturation and obtained the richest data possible by conducting semistructured interviews with my participants to ensure (a) no new theme emerged from the data collection

process, (b) no new coding was indicated, and (c) no new information was attained from the participants, as suggested by Fusch and Ness (2015).

Population and Sampling

The sample population embodied attributes necessary for acquiring extensive knowledge on the research topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, the population consisted of five fashion boutique owners located in Lagos, Nigeria who have used eCommerce to improve product marketing and achieve profitability in their businesses. Qualitative researchers use the purposeful criterion sampling technique to determine participants who have the appropriate experience and qualification about the research topic (Grossoehme, 2014). Purposeful criterion sampling is appropriate for identifying participants with extensive expertise in a specific area (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). In this study, I used purposeful criterion sampling to identify eCommerce experts in the fashion industry. Robinson (2014) insisted between three and 16 interviewees should be sufficient to achieve saturation in an exploratory case study. Furthermore, Grossoehme (2014) suggested that interview participants should include between three and 15 participants to explore a case extensively.

Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study because it enabled me to select specific business owners from a population of interest so that by studying the sample, I may fairly generalize my results back to the population from which they were chosen. In using the purposeful sampling method, I initiated contact with the fashion boutique owners who agreed to participate in this study. Those who met the inclusion criteria and responded with an expression of interest went through the ethical consent process to

become eligible to participate (Yin, 2014). Using the purposeful sampling method increased the chances of finding quality participants for the research study since the participation of each participant could be confirmed (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014).

I selected five fashion boutique owners who met the following criteria: (a) based in Lagos, Nigeria, (b) have operated in the fashion industry for over three years, and (c) successfully utilize eCommerce for product marketing. Researchers use findings from sample size to address the research questions and determine data saturation (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The sample size should be large enough for participants to answer research questions (Marshall et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers reach data saturation with a sample size of between five and 50 participants (Dworkin, 2012). Robinson (2014) insisted between three and 16 interviewees should be sufficient to achieve saturation in an exploratory case study. Schenkel, Corhran, Carter-Thomas, Churchman, and Linton (2013) used 11 participants to qualitatively explore phenomena pertaining to investor exit strategies. With these guidelines, I decided to use five participants, knowing saturation is confirmable with three or more participants.

Member checking is proof of a researcher's impartiality to participant input (Harper & Cole, 2012; Robinson, 2014). One of the reasons for using member checking in a study is to show readers how neutral a researcher can be. To secure trustworthiness in a study, Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) used member checking to confirm data from participants.

Ethical Research

Ethical standards help researchers to avoid the fabrication or falsifying of data to promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth, which is the primary goal of research (Nebeker, Linares-Orozco, & Crist, 2015). Researchers include ethical issues in the design of their studies and follow the principles of justice, respect, and beneficence (Helin, 2013). Eligible participants were given informed consent forms. The consent agreement (Appendix B) covers issues such as research subject consent to participate, purpose, procedures, risk and benefits, voluntary nature of participation in the research, and confidentiality protection procedures (Dekas & McCune, 2015). Participants read the consent agreement carefully and gave their consent to participate in the interviews by e-mailing a signed form back to me. I saved consent forms electronically, with the file name bearing each participant's unique identification code. Incentives were not provided in exchange for participation in this study other than a promise to provide participants with an electronic copy of the summary of the findings of this study. I ensured and confirmed data integrity by using the member checking approach. Participants also received a copy of the typed interview transcript.

I informed participants of the voluntary nature of their participation in the study and of the option to opt out at any point of the interview or research process. Participants were informed that there were no expected risks associated with their participation in this study and that information provided would not be used outside the proposed doctoral study. To protect participants' confidentiality, I did not mention their names or organizations; instead, I assigned unique codes to each participant. Using a research log, I

protected the names of participants and the organizations used for the study. Participants received the official contact details of the Walden University representative in case the eligible participants want to raise any queries. I saved data collected for five years and destroy the data after this period. I conformed to Walden University IRB requirements, including approval of all ethical considerations of the proposed study before collection of data, and the final doctoral manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in a research study (Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins, & Peng, 2014). As such, I served as the primary instrument for data collection in this study. Researchers use semi-structured interviews as an effective tool for data collection (Mojtahed et al., 2014). Business leaders use eCommerce platforms to improve product marketing and profitability (Cao, So, & Yin, 2016). I explored the experiences of five business owners who utilize eCommerce platforms to improve product marketing and profitability. Participants answered open-ended interview questions freely and elaborate on questions asked (O’Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic, & Sinha, 2015). I asked probing questions where necessary to obtain data saturation, which occurs when no new additional information emerges, and the themes amongst participants are similar (Kalla, 2016). Member checking is the most effective way to establish credibility in qualitative studies (Wang, Duan, & Yu, 2016). I conducted member checking by allowing participants to review and validate their interview transcript.

Data Collection Technique

Before commencing this study and after IRB approval, I sent an invitation e-mail to each participant. The e-mail content included a brief background on the purpose of this study. I e-mailed an informed consent form to each participant to confirm his or her willingness to participate in this study. Upon approval of the consent form, the participants acknowledged the confidentiality and protection of their rights in the study (Newington & Metcalfe, 2014; Zhou & Nunes, 2013). Following a strong selection of the five qualified and consenting participants, I agreed with the participants on the most suitable time to conduct a 30-minute interview session. I used three different methods to collect data: (a) face-to-face semistructured interviews (b) recorded the interview sessions with a Samsung Edge, and (c) reviewed participants' business plans.

I transcribed the voice-recorded interview to a Microsoft Word document. Before receipt of a participant's response, I sent out a copy of the interview questions to the participant. I interviewed five fashion boutique owners and conducted member checking to obtain data saturation. I maintained a professional relationship with the participants throughout the duration of this study to ensure a successful outcome.

Data Organization Technique

Qualitative researchers use a research log to capture the key ideas presented by the participants about each of the interview questions (Mayer, 2015). I recorded each interview and transcribe the digital recording into a Microsoft Word document. I wrote my notes for further analysis of the data. NVivo 10 software can be used to store and organize data (Guo et al., 2013; Oliveira, Bitencourt, Zanardo dos Santos, & Teixeira,

2016). Qualitative researchers use a filing system to facilitate data organization (Thomas, 2015). I assigned codes to the companies and participants to maintain confidentiality and privacy (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). I stored all data on a password-protected computer and in a fireproof safe, and will delete or destroy them respectively after five years.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners can attain knowledge on how to utilize eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. Qualitative researchers conduct methodological triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources (Walsh, 2013; Yin, 2013). I obtained methodological triangulation by collecting data from interviewing and observation (Joslin & Müller, 2016). In the data analysis process, I first used a coding system to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and to identify key themes emerging from the interview process (O’Keeffe et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers use a coding process to identify themes to strengthen the validity and reliability of data analysis (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). I used the designations PT1 to PT8 for the eight participants. Second, I transcribed the digital recording into a Microsoft Word document and analyzed the emerging themes using the NVivo 10 software tool (Oliveira et al., 2016). NVivo software tool can be used to analyze emerging themes, classifying, sorting, and arranging the information (Thomas, 2015; Oliveira et al., 2016). The NVivo 10 software was used to explore the relationships in the data by identifying key themes from my text-based research log. Third, I focused on the key themes that emerged from my

interview transcript for consistency. Finally, I analyzed the key themes emerging from the interviews with the literature and the conceptual framework. Data analysis further helped to strengthen the underlying propositions of the SET conceptual framework, which include: (a) interdependent relationships; (b) potential to generate high-quality relationships; and (c) relationships evolving over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments motivation (Oparaocha, 2016).

Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of research serve as a measure of trustworthiness and credibility of the findings (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Scientific research must be reliable and valid to earn the trust of readers and research users (Platt & Skowron, 2013). Reliability in a qualitative study refers to the researcher's ability to replicate the study and obtain consistent findings (Ma, Lund, Nielsen, Aamand, & Su, 2015). Researchers contend that documentation of research procedures in a research journal is vital to validate the reliability of a study (Grossoehme, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Qualitative researchers demonstrate reliability in research by (a) documenting the process of data collection analysis and interpretation, (b) explaining the strategy used for the study, (c) explaining the selection of participants, and (d) articulating the roles of the researcher (Thomas, 2015). I ensured reliability in this study by documenting the sequences of data process and analysis, member checking, and triangulation (Grossoehme, 2014; Thomas, 2015). There are four proposed similar criteria for qualitative studies, each of which are explored below: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Reliability

Dependability is the ability to repeat the study and understand the variations (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Two methods increase the dependability of this study: triangulation and a researcher's journal. Triangulation assists with understanding the larger picture and diversities of perceptions that exist within participants (Stake, 2006). I used two different sources of data to support the evidence. Using several sources of data leads to a more valid, reliable, and varied representation of the reality of participation (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Yin, 2014). The two data sources used are semi-structured interview, and archive document review. Triangulation in a multiple case study serves to ensure that the picture created is as clear and meaningful as possible, free from bias, and not misleading to the reader (Stake, 2006).

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the credibility or the persuasiveness of the study (Grossoehme, 2014). I demonstrate credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through methodological triangulation and member checking. To ensure credibility, I used member checking, observation, and triangulation. Credibility refers to the trustworthiness, or the believability by the participants in the study (Boesch, Schwaninger, Weber, & Scholz, 2013). Researchers establish credibility by using strategies such as persistent observation, referential adequacy materials, peer debriefing, member checking, triangulation, negative case analysis and reflexive research journal (Boesch et al., 2013).

To ensure transferability, I used purposeful criterion sampling. Transferability of the findings of the study is the responsibility of the readers and future users of research. Those who are transferring the findings of a study should trust the work as practical and satisfactory in data collection, verification, and analysis (Adams, Bailey, Anderson, & Thygeson, 2013). Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research. Dependability is the ability to repeat the study and understand the variations (Petty et al., 2012). To that end, I used member checking by allowing the participants to review and validate the data. I ensured confirmability by documenting the procedures. Ensuring confirmability eliminates researcher's bias and certifies that the results of the study are a product of the research (Boesch et al., 2013). Researchers use reflexivity to disclose their personal experiences and biases that could influence the study (Boesch et al., 2013).

Qualitative researchers use the coding technique, description of data instrument, and coordination with proper presentation technique to demonstrate rigor (Boddy, 2016). In this study, I used member checking to achieve validity. Member checking is an effective way to establish validity and credibility in qualitative studies (Wang et al., 2016). I demonstrate member checking by interviewing five fashion boutique owners in Lagos to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem and share the findings and interpretations with participants for validation. Also, I asked open-ended questions and probed participants to gain a comprehensive perspective on the problem. Qualitative researchers use triangulation to demonstrate the validity in research (Walsh, 2013). Methodological triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources to establish

validity in case studies (Yin, 2013). Triangulation method is used to collect data from multiple sources such as interviewing and observation (Walsh, 2013).

Creditability is to ensure that the results derived from the data are accurate and based on actual data. A researcher should not recruit individuals who have no connection whatsoever with the field of the study (Adams et al., 2013). Member checking involves the interviewee by engaging them to check their own transcripts and case summaries for content, accuracy, and themes, thereby improving the credibility of the study (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). As soon as I completed transcribing the interview, I e-mailed the interview to the participants to check for accuracy. Dionne-Odom, Willis, Bakitas, Crandall, and Grace (2015) argued that a researcher should complete all accuracy checking before moving raw data over to the computer for analysis. All the participants had the opportunity to read their own case summaries before the final stage of reporting the information.

Transferability is the applicability of the results to other environments (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The findings must be clearly stated, and applicable within multiple fields of research (Stake, 2006). Transferability of the findings of a study helps in confirming the validity of such a study. Readers and future researchers could judge the transferability of a study (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Transferability is often left for the readers of a study to judge. Transferability of the findings of a study helps in confirming the validity of such a study. Readers and future researchers could judge the transferability of a study (Houghton et al., 2013). Therefore, I leave the transferability to future readers and researchers.

Conformability in qualitative research is the degree to which other researchers could confirm or corroborate the results. When a researcher uses diverse methods to ensure accuracy, the foundation becomes existent, and other elements of that study could rest on such a foundation (Kahlke, 2014). The process of checking and rechecking the data was documented during the entire data collection and analysis process. Using a journal to outline the steps taken was a valuable tool for another researcher to replicate the design. Also, I provided evidence that the ethical procedures described in the next sections was respected.

Data saturation occurs when researchers collect data until no new information is available and the themes are similar (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Research sample size is often justified by repeatedly interviewing participants until reaching data saturation (Emmel, 2015; Merwe, 2014).

Researchers use findings from sample size to address the research questions and determine data saturation (Marshall et al., 2013).

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners in the boutique fashion industry utilize eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. A qualitative method with case study design serves better than other methodologies and designs in pursuing the knowledge. I served as the primary data collection instrument, and organized, analyzed, and reported findings. Protection of participants' confidentiality was of utmost importance. Individuals who have provided solutions related to the research topic area are eligible to participate.

Section 3 includes the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action. Other areas of coverage in Section 3 are recommendations for further study and reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore how small business owners in the fashion boutique business could use eCommerce strategies to improve product marketing and profitability. One overarching theme and four subthemes emerged from data analysis. The use of Facebook and other social media was the overarching theme and the three subthemes were generating sales and improving profitability, strategic store locations, and product and service quality. Study findings confirmed that the use of Facebook and other social media was the most common factor from interview responses. Section 3 includes presentation of the research findings, discussion of applications for professional practice and implications for social change, recommendations for action and future research, my personal reflections, and a conclusion to the study.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question of this study was “How can small business owners in the fashion boutique business use eCommerce strategies to improve product marketing and profitability?” The overarching theme (use of Facebook and other social media) and the three subthemes developed from analysis of interview responses and business documents.

Overarching Theme 1: Use of Facebook and Other Social Media

The use of Facebook and other social media platforms was a consistent response among all interview participants. In their responses to Interview Questions 2 and 4, all participants indicated that they use Facebook or some other social media platform to

market or promote their products and optimize traffic to their eCommerce website. The participants stated that social platforms such as a website, Instagram, WhatsApp, Pinterest, and e-mail have provided immense exposure to their stores, products, and services they provide. All the interview participants noted that by using social media there has been a surge in sales, as these promotional avenues drive a social media following that enables business owners to reach diverse customers, build brand awareness, and increase visitor flow. For instance, PT1 indicated:

the use of several sales channels enabled me increase sales by at least 30% in 2017, because I was able to make sales via Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest. Most of our sales have been via Facebook and Instagram, followed by Whatsapp, then Pinterest.

Per Chang et al., (2015), value creation on eCommerce platforms is viewed as noncontractual social exchanges that promote reciprocity, reliability and trust social exchange is a relationship between actors who engage in exchange, which can either be individuals or corporate groups involved in eCommerce relationships. Weiger, Wetzel and Hammerschmidt (2017) explained eCommerce platforms as participating in online brand marketing. Providing customers user friendly platforms to make a purchase can improve sales and increase revenue. An in-depth assessment of interview responses revealed that fashion boutique owners utilize multiple online sales platforms to improve product marketing and profitability.

Evidence from the literature review in Section 1 on eCommerce, online sales, product branding, and online product marketing, were aligned with the overarching

theme, which developed from analyzing interview responses. The findings also coincide with the SET conceptual framework, which is used to describe social exchange as a long-term and unspecified mutual obligation (Blau, 1964). Researchers have found that by analyzing websites, current marketing efforts, industry, consumers, target markets and competition, business owners can identify the eMarketing strategies that will help sell their products or services (Tabrizi & Kabirnejat, 2015).

Subtheme 1: Generating Sales and Improving Profitability

The first subtheme from the results of this research was sales generation and profitability. The demographic cluster and lifestyle of customers determine how much money an individual is willing to spend (Gergely & Dieter, 2014). Responses to Interview Questions 4, 5, and 6 from PT1 and PT3 through PT5 indicated that the use of social media plays an integral role in generating sales to increase revenue for the business. PT3 said:

As earlier mentioned there is a direct link between our online presence and profitability because majority of our sales are online, we operate a website that allows customers shop in Naira and in Dollars which allows us to process USD transactions as well as Naira. Our profitability is linked to our ability to utilize eCommerce.

PT4 and PT5 noted that partnering with similar brands to increase market share and creating online visibility has contributed to enhancing sales figures and increasing overall profitability of the business. The most common ways to improve sales are (1) increase customer base, (b) increase and encourage repeat purchases, and (c) entice

customers to make bigger or bulk purchases (Agwu & Murray, 2015). PT5 declared that the use of eCommerce websites has enhanced sales tremendously and attributed this hike in sales to having ownership of the two largest eCommerce stores in Nigeria with a wide customer base and international presence.

Studies from the literature review relating to sustained competitive advantage, profitability in business, and the future of eCommerce, were supportive of the theme generating sales and improving profitability. The introduction of technology in the 21st century has driven changes in economies and societies worldwide and has presented the emergence of smart cities as hubs of creativity and innovations. As global knowledge and innovation increase, the importance of creativity and efficiency in offering new products and services becomes crucial for achieving growth, sustainable competitive advantage, and profitability (Sofronijevic, Milicevic, & Ilic, 2014).

Findings of this study match the SET conceptual framework. Based on the SET perspective, the consumer-supplier relationships terminate or continue based on the prior history of the relationships and purchase experiences (Kim, 2012). If the customers' purchasing experience is positive, this could provide a window of opportunity for repeat business, which may generate more sales and increase profitability.

Subtheme 2: Strategic Store Locations

In response to Interview Questions 2, 4, and 7, PT1, and PT3 through PT5 echoed that having partnerships with businesses that sell similar products have afforded the business to establish a larger footprint. PT5 stated that partnerships are created with businesses outside Lagos, which creates avenues to own stores in Abuja and Port

Harcourt. PT2 and PT3 agreed that sharing offices with brick-and-mortar stores to showcase products and foregoing the option to renting, have proven to be more cost efficient for the business and have afforded the opportunity to plant new store locations. Business leaders are faced with the need to make increasingly complex decisions and precise risk assessments because competitive firms require adequate allocation of physical, financial, and human resources to maximize opportunities (de Melo & Guerra Leone, 2015). PT1 said:

I use co-location strategy, which allows me to put my products in the premises of a shoe seller and aggressively market this partnership online; having a mutual understanding and complimentary products made this strategy efficient. Part of my 2018 strategy is to identify and sign up as many companies with complementary products to co-locate with. I have reduced my expenses through this strategy when compared with cost of renting a space, and the result is significant.

Small business owners can leverage collocation to increase their market share, physical presence and expand their frontiers into new markets (Arto, Ahola, Kyrö, & Peltokorpi, 2017). Oner and Larsson (2014) described a business network as a dynamic organizational form, which consists of a set of interconnected players that control various resources and perform multiple business activities through interaction with each other to create value. PT4 noted that partnering with a hair stylist along with online ads and referrals have provided immense revenue increase of 50%.

An organization uses collocation strategy to expand its market penetration while reducing cost (Oner & Larsson, 2014). PT4 and PT5 echoed that associating with a company of similar business diminished overhead costs and underscored the significance of eCommerce. The use of eCommerce as a viable tool by organization in collocation relationship as such locations may serve as service or collection points of products (Oner & Larsson, 2014). Through collocation and leverage eCommerce platforms, a fashion boutique owner improves product marketing and profitability.

Findings from the literature review regarding eCommerce and online product marketing are in direct relation with the strategic store locations subtheme. Using eCommerce can boost quality of service, customer care, reduce costs to the customer, and increase faster execution of transactions (Udupa et al., 2014). Dawes and Nenycz-Thiel (2014) stated that online purchasing is the most rapidly growing form of trade, and currently, consumers can buy virtually anything online. Drew (2014) argued that consumption of goods via the Internet is still a relatively young activity when compared to commerce in general. According to Udupa et al. (2014), the growth of eCommerce in the past 5 years has increased by about 400%, and it is one of the most important facets of the Internet to have emerged in recent times.

The conceptual framework of SET was in alignment with the results of the study as it highlighted the processes of customer engagement and trade. Wu, Gide and Jewell (2014) advised SMEs explore new ways to describe and measure eCommerce success from a business perspective. Organizations intending to increase online visibility may

engage the services of professional online marketing companies to promote their products and drive traffic to their sites.

Subtheme 3: Product and Service Quality

All participants provided responses that supported the emergence of product and service quality as a subtheme. Participants responses to Interview Question 8 regarding additional information on how small businesses could utilize eCommerce were as follows: PT1 stated, “as a business owner, I ensure my products are of good quality, properly photographed, modeled and displayed on the eCommerce platforms I utilize because the visual appeal may instigate a purchase.” PT 2 noted that, “Quality products allow me to be a vendor of choice; I enjoy referrals and receive calls from existing customers who want to know when new stock will arrive.”

Business leaders are facing challenges on how to package their products and how branding affects the overall perception of their brands (Baumeister, Scherer, & Wangenheim, 2015). Companies must develop marketing strategies to advance a fair market environment, brand loyalty, product quality, and positioning (Taute et al., 2014). PT3 mentioned, “My trendy products, easy payment portal, hitch-free shopping experience and exceptional customer service encourages my clients to shop at ease from my website.” Product quality is the capacity of a product to fulfill the expressed or implied needs as contained in the company’s value proposition (Soares, Soltani, & Liao, 2017).

PT 4 stated:

Providing trendy and lasting products to existing and new customers has made it easy for me over the years to convert satisfied customers to loyal customers. Customer service is also crucial to the sustainability of my business. I also observed that even though my prices may be slightly higher than competition, most of my customers keep coming back. I attribute their loyalty to the quality of our product, and exceptional customer service.

An effective strategy for an upcoming fashion boutique owner is to align with a strong brand, which will help the boutique owner overcome weaknesses in their product category, and broaden product appeal by association (Radighieri et al., 2014). PT 5 stated, “I get a lot of positive reviews on the quality of my clothes. I also make sure to follow-up on purchases and deliveries to ensure customers receive their packages in good condition and are happy with the purchase.” Kwateng and Darko (2017) inferred that eCommerce has created a means for managers to improve awareness of quality management as a procedure of upgrading knowledge, creating aptitudes, and bringing attitudinal and behavioral change.

Other research in the literature review relating to product branding and online product marketing support the product and service quality subtheme. Research shows that there is a positive relationship among online consumer reviews, product quality, service quality, and product sales (Mishra et al., 2016). The propensity for customers to purchase a product is contingent on the product and service quality they receive.

Findings of this study coincide with the SET conceptual framework. Key propositions underlying SET include (a) interdependent relationships, (b) potential to generate high-quality relationships, and (c) relationships evolving over time into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments (Choi, Lotz, & Kim, 2014). Consumers often expect satisfaction with both products and services in online purchases (Tsai & Zhang, 2016).

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how some small business owners in the fashion boutique industry utilized eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. The findings of this study are valuable to SMEs, government agencies, and community partners looking to explore and understand the benefits and challenges of eCommerce adoption. The study finding contributes to the body of knowledge on factors that influence eCommerce adoption among SMEs in Lagos, Nigeria. The fashion industry has contributed significantly to economic development, poverty alleviation, and job creation in both developed and developing countries (Tarute & Gatautis, 2014). However, fashion boutique owners in Lagos are confronted with multiple challenges in achieving profitability, growth, and competitiveness locally and globally. The use of Facebook and other Social Media was the overarching theme and the three subthemes were, generating sales and improving profitability, strategic store locations, and product and service quality. The overarching theme and subthemes contribute to the professional practice among SMEs, particularly in Lagos, Nigeria.

Benefits of eCommerce to SMEs

SMEs may utilize eCommerce to survive in the new business economy (Rahayu & Day, 2015). Organizational leaders adopt and use eCommerce to achieve significant growth by becoming more efficient, effective, innovative, and globally competitive (Tarute & Gatautis, 2014). Most significantly, business leaders in the fashion industry may use eCommerce to compete at the same level as their larger counterparts in the global market (Agwu & Murray, 2015). The findings from this study may help SMEs make informed decisions on eCommerce adoption and its relevance toward achieving their strategic objectives through innovation, growth, profitability, and competitiveness.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this study contribute to social change by facilitating an increase in eCommerce adoption by SMEs in Nigeria; addressing many of the challenges confronting small businesses, advocating the benefits of eCommerce platforms, and providing recommendations for action. Adopting eCommerce may result in the success and growth of businesses, job creation for youth of the community, poverty alleviation, and development of the local economy. The research findings could also provide information for increasing knowledge on the factors that influence eCommerce adoption among fashion boutique owners and SMEs in Nigeria.

Recommendations for Action

The findings and recommendations of this study could be applicable to any business in the fashion industry utilizing eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability in Nigeria. Critical roles in the successful adoption and utilization of

eCommerce include increased awareness among SMEs and the role of government. Small businesses are significant contributors' job and the socioeconomic development of any region. The central focus of small business leaders is to create awareness of the importance of utilizing eCommerce as an effective platform upon which businesses are built (Azman & Ali, 2015; Mazzarol et al., 2014; Tarute & Gatautis, 2014). The governing body of Nigeria ought to improve technological daises and infrastructure to enable operability of eCommerce platforms. Government could also seek to create systems with the potential to assist small businesses in transporting their products at more affordable prices, both locally and globally. Government support and intervention programs may help small businesses remain sustainable, further utilize eCommerce platforms, and record increased sales and visibility.

Recommendations for Fashion Boutique Owners and SMEs

SMEs must ensure the decision to adopt eCommerce within their organizations is based on adequate business logic toward growth, efficiency, effectiveness, and competitiveness (Agwu & Murray, 2015; Keller & Von der Gracht, 2014). Fashion boutique owners and SMEs must take critical steps to support the adoption and use of eCommerce in their organizations by (a) identifying the appropriate eCommerce platforms to utilize based on their product and service offerings, (b) identifying the cost of financing online adverts, (c) hiring skilled eCommerce and social media personnel, and (d) providing ongoing training and support for employees and partners.

Recommendations for Federal Government of Nigeria

The national climate for innovation, such as favorable government policy, cost of doing business, and quality of telecommunication and other infrastructural facilities, are key factors that influences SME growth (Mazzarol et al., 2014). The adoption and use of eCommerce has helped SMEs achieve the strategic objectives of growth, efficiency, effectiveness, innovation, and global competitiveness (Agwu & Murray, 2015; Tarute & Gatautis, 2014). Government leaders need to implement policies to support SMEs, manufacturing, provide tax incentives, and offer financial incentives and loan guarantees to SMEs toward eCommerce adoption. The government should support ICT training centers and take appropriate steps to promote and adopt eCommerce within government agencies. It is imperative for SMEs to have access to reliable infrastructure, regular electricity, reliable telecommunication, good roads, and other infrastructural facilities that could facilitate increased trade in Nigeria. This doctoral study will be disseminated in scholarly journals, business journals, magazines, periodicals, or other conference or training materials for easy access by stakeholders for implementation.

Recommendations for Further Study

I recommend that future researchers conduct further studies to explore other factors that influence small business adoption of eCommerce as a strategy to increase profitability and achieve competitive advantage in the global market. Future researchers may focus on addressing the limitations and delimitations of my study. The assumptions of truthfulness and unbiased responses from participants were a study limitation, as inaccurate information could invalidate the study outcome. Researchers should address

this limitation by comparing the findings from other qualitative multiple case studies with the findings of my study. Further studies may extend the scope of this study to include other geographical areas in Nigeria, as Nigeria has 36 states and 774 local government areas (Ayo, Oni, Adewoye, & Eweoya, 2016). The outcome of such studies may extend the body of knowledge on the factors that affect eCommerce adoption in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria. The findings of such studies may be a source of information for SMEs, researchers, and government agencies to address many of the challenges confronting small businesses in Nigeria.

The impact of culture on eCommerce adoption by small businesses is one aspect of this study that needs further research. Individuals' attitudes influence decisions to adopt technology (Ayo et al., 2016). The culture or belief system of a group or society plays a role in the decisions made by individuals of that group (Awa, Baridam, & Nwibere, 2015). Culture influences the success of eCommerce projects at the organizational and the team levels (Awa et al., 2015). Culture and language can therefore be a significant factor in the decision to adopt and use ICT across nations (Ayo et al., 2016). These reasons make culture an important factor that requires further exploration.

Researchers can also explore leadership style and its impact on eCommerce adoption among SMEs in Nigeria. Leadership style plays a significant role in how organizational leaders or knowledge managers make strategic decisions, including the use of ICT to create competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Awa et al., 2015). Leaders of organizations should be aware of the leadership style adopted by their knowledge managers (Ayo et al., 2016). Studies exist on the factors that affect ICT

adoption by SMEs in developing countries; however, researchers have largely ignored the role of leadership in eCommerce adoption among SMEs. Further research on the influence of the lived experiences of decision makers and the correlation between their leadership styles and ICT adoption may increase the understanding on how SMEs adopt ICT.

Reflections

Having confronted numerous challenges during my doctoral study, I believe that with great challenges come greater rewards. This doctoral study has been a life lesson for me because it led me to broaden my scope of knowledge as I reviewed existing literature. In my line of business, I made several assumptions on the role, benefits, and challenges of eCommerce adoption, but through this doctoral study, I gained the information needed to confirm or refute some of my assumptions. I had the opportunity to meet with SMEs and to interview business owners in person, which led to an increase in self-confidence and communication skills. All of the participants were fashion boutique owners utilizing eCommerce for at least three years, and they provided valuable insight into areas unknown to me. I chose a research topic that reflected my professional experience and passion for eCommerce and the value technology offers in both business and personal life. I ensured my professional experience as a fashion specialist did not create any bias by using member checking during data collection to validate my data transcription and interpretation. I started this research study without any preconceived notion of the outcome or findings of the study and ensured the findings of this study reflected the views of the participants through repetitive interviews, transcription, and member

checking until data saturation occurred. I ensured that participants did not feel uncomfortable participating in the study and provided full disclosure in an informed consent form provided to and signed by each participant to ensure each participant fully understood the terms and conditions of participation. With great mentorship and guidance by my Walden University Chair, Second Committee Member, University Research Reviewer, and the IRB, I successfully navigated the challenges and unknown terrain of my doctoral study.

I have come to appreciate the entire research process and respect the commitment to excellence. I gained experience and knowledge on how to conduct research in an ethical manner, and to overcome my personal bias by relying on the perspectives of the participants for the study. Despite the challenges, my learning from the entire process including the interview and member checking sessions provided an appreciation on the relevance of crafting good business strategies. Customer trends are dynamic and business leaders need to adopt dynamic strategies in utilizing eCommerce to optimize the inherent opportunities.

Conclusion

Many researchers have shown that the adoption of eCommerce, particularly by SMEs, have led to increased growth opportunities for both large and small enterprises in developing and developed countries (Awa et al., 2015). I focused this study on exploring how some small business owners in the boutique fashion industry could utilize eCommerce to improve product marketing and profitability. I addressed the gap in existing literature regarding other factors such as the influence of culture on eCommerce

adoption, cost of eCommerce implementation, available ICT skills, available infrastructure, and eCommerce knowledge gap as the primary impeding factors of eCommerce adoption among SMEs in Nigeria.

In Section 2, I restated the purpose of my study, described my role as the researcher, identified the study participants, expanded on my chosen research method and design, described the population and sampling methods, and elaborated on the data collection and analysis techniques used for this study. Section 2 included a discussion of my ethical research process, as well as a discussion on how I ensured the reliability and validity of this study. Section 2 included the framework for data collection.

In Section 3, I provided an overview of the study, presented my findings, discussed the application of this study to professional practice, and included the implications for social change. I further offered recommendations for action based on my study findings, recommendations for further study, and reflections of my experience within the DBA doctoral study. Section 3 included the themes I identified as part of my data analysis, a discussion on how these themes related to my findings, and how my findings connected to the conceptual framework used as the research basis for this study.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The interview protocol will include participant interviews, business process observation, and archival document reviews. Interview process will occur on the scheduled date as follows:

- Meeting with participant at the time and place scheduled
- Exchanging salutations with participant
- Explaining the interview process to the participant
- Giving participant copy of the questions before commencing
- Start asking the questions
- Probing further if answer to a question warrants so
- At the end of the interview, asking the participant if any other thoughts arise that I must note.
- Expressing appreciation of the interviewee's precious time and knowledge the interviewee conveyed in answering the questions.
- Departing from the interview location.

Observation exercise will occur as follows:

- Arriving at the participant's location\ Meeting with the small business owner
- Meeting with other executives of the small business owner
- Sitting at the participant's office during the business hours observing the business and social media activities as factors that stand out in the business owner's routines.

Archival records will occur as follows:

- Archival records review of business strategy documents will take place on the day each owner will be interviewed.

The review of archival records will occur as follows:

- The participant will provide documents she regards as pertinent; such as evidence of profitability or increased sales due to eCommerce utilization
- I reviewed the document to note any elements that might apply to the study.
- The process will occur until I collect enough data or until the close of business that day. It was necessary, so I used the second day of archival records to review.

Interview Questions:

Participants will respond to the following interview questions:

1. How long have you been using eCommerce to market your product?
2. What aspect of eCommerce do you frequently use to market products?
3. What products do you market using eCommerce?
4. What strategies do you use to market products with eCommerce?
5. How effective are your marketing strategies using eCommerce?
6. How has your use of eCommerce to market products contributed to company profitability?
7. How can government agencies contribute to promoting eCommerce as a tool for product marketing in Nigeria?
8. What role can small business owners play in promoting knowledge about using eCommerce to market products in Nigeria?

9. What other information can you provide on how small businesses could utilize eCommerce to effectively market products?