**IMPACT OF SUPPLY CHAIN INNOVATION ON CUSTOMER RETENTIONS**

**EGWUEKWE, NDUBUISI MARTINS**

**E-mail:** ebisimartins2019@gmail.com

**OBIEKWE, ONYEBUCHI (PhD)**

**Department of Business Administration**

**Ajayi Crowther University Oyo, Nigeria**

**E-mail:** obiekweonyebuchi@yahool.com, noobekhezson@gmail.com

&

**AKINADE, M. E.**

**Department of Business Administration**

**Faculty of Management Sciences**

**Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria**

 **Email Address:** akinademojisola2@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

*Effective supply chain has become a critical success factor that drive customer satisfaction and retention, which are vital keys for enhanced organizational performance and survival in today’s highly competitive business arena. This paper theoretically examines the impact of supply chain innovation on customer retention. The paper noted that supply chain innovation provides organizations with competitive advantage over their rivals in the market and help them to retain their customers. It also identifies effective timely delivery, after sale service and responsiveness as the dimensions of supply chain innovation. The paper concluded that supply chain innovation enhances customer’s satisfaction which is vital for their retention and loyalty. Additionally, customer retention and loyalty requires that manufacturing firms delivers on their customer’s expectation fully in a predictable and an ongoing supply chain relationship. Supply chain innovation results to more efficient and more productive processes within the supply chain and is essential for manufacturing firms to remain competitive. It is recommended that organizations should ensure that effective collaboration exist between all stakeholders in the supply chain process in order to promote successful customer satisfaction. Additionally, organizations need to provide customer purchase satisfaction before and after purchase since this is likely to lead to customer retention and satisfaction. Organizations should also ensure that they incorporate effective time delivery as one of their strategic options in their supply chain management as this will result to customer’s satisfaction which enhances retention, among others.*

**Keywords: Supply chain innovation, customer retention, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, effectiveness.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Across the globe several organizations are experiencing great pressures from their customers and other stakeholders to improve the efficiency and effectiveness their supply chain in order to deliver the best value of their product and services to their ever demanding customer whilst remaining competitive and very stable. Obiekwe (2018) noted that the increase competition from both local and foreign rivals, management of organizations and now devising strategies to outsmart others attract and retain their valuable customers as well as gain competitive advantage over its rivals. Lei (2017) states that the competitive edge of a company over its rivals depends heavily on its ability to cope with multiple challenges to rein in cost, improve the quality of product and superior customer’s services. This in essence, is to improve their customer’s satisfaction in other to use it to retain them.

Customer retention is vital in today’s hyper-inflated business competition where it is very difficult to attract valuable prospective customers and to gain customers loyalty due to array of improved, low cost, high quality product that competing organization have flooded the market with. The intense competition in market place thus requires effective and efficient use of limited resources and collaboration with supplies, wholesalers and retailers to generate success and other critical expected organizational positive outcomes.

Today management of organizations have identified customer’s retention as a crucial item in business and noted that the success of business depends on it to a very great large extent. Organizations also knows that it is difficult to prize away a customer that is loyal to a brand and, or an organization, but to gain this loyalty depend on the image the firm has created for herself based on the trust they have developed and the satisfaction that customers have derived from their product and services. Thus, there is a great and growing competition among organizations producing or offering similar products, existing customer, as well as attract new ones who have been patronizing their competitors. Customer’s retention is thus vital for firm’s profitability, growth and improve market share in today’s highly competitive market place.

In order to achieve these vital business objectives of retaining loyal and prized customers, organizations now utilize innovative supply chain activities to ensure customers retention. Seyedi, Moosavi and Heidari (2009) notes that today, new forms of structural reforms, competitive and exchange process now causes communication paradigm for the long-terms relationship between customers and the suppliers. As a result, marketing activities such as supply demand planning, materials preparation, product service delivery customer services are now perform by supply chain”. Some of the factors that have made supply chain essential in organization include the need to focus on operation, raise of quality, reduction of cost of maintaining inventory and greater capacity to march demand with supply. The importance of supply chain in marketing can never be overlooked any management that desires achieve organizations predetermined, and or emergent goals and objectives in today’s highly competitive market and which also want to retain its prized customers which is the very reason of their existence. Oztmen and Sevile (2009) posit that an effective an effective supply chain will be more powerful than single handed businesses today” Hendriks (1997) also note that supply chain relationships play an important role in the achievement of firm’s business goals.

Today, the importance of supply chain management has become widely evident that most organization have started adopting it is a part of their organizations marketing strategy, but since almost all the organization are involved in supply chain activities, there is thus, the need to adopt a supply chain activity which is underpinned by innovative ideas. In other words, a supply Chain activity, there is thus, the need to adopt a supply chain activity which is underpinned by innovative ideas. In other words, a supply chain that involves the use of new method or technology which results in efficient and more productive processes with the network. Rice (2013) thus defines supply chain innovation as the adoption of new processes, method and /or technologies that result in a positive change in cost, quality, cash and or service”. Supply chain innovation is essential if an organization must remain competitive, and operate in the most effective manner. Rice (2013) asserts that, “for many companies, supply chain innovation is their key source of competitive advantage; and that highly successful innovation in the supply chain field are established ideas which have been redeployed in creative ways to drive organization’s effectiveness.

The importance of supply chain innovation can never be overemphasized due to our present high competitive. Market and rapid changes which his compelled different organizations to take actions on systems that can positively influence the progress of organizational activities in order to overcome their competitions. Since organization have discovered customer satisfaction and retention as key tools to survival, organizations are developing effective supply chain management and innovation to interact together with the suppliers and customers in order to coordinate and share information. As it is in this age of global competition, customer demand for high quality and fast services has increases pressures on companies which they cannot manage alone.

This paper thus seek to theoretically examine the impact of supply chain innovation on customers retention and also outlines some advantages and innovative approaches to supply chain management in organization and the several benefit that supply chain innovation can yield to organization s and its stakeholders.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Concept of Supply Chain**

Today, interest on organization’s supply chain and its management has continue to grow due to its ability to enhance firms competitive advantage and overall performance, Generally, there is no concept that has a universal or generally agreed upon definition this is also the same for supply chain as authors have defined it differently. Kenton (2019) defines supply chain as, a network existing between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product to the final consumer. “it is several steps required to get a product or services from the manufacturer to the final customer that will consume the product or service thus Supply chain is the network of all individuals, organizations, resources, activities and technology required in the creation, sale and delivery of product from the manufacturer to the final end user.

Supply chain encompasses organizations and flows of goods and information between organizations from raw materials to end-users (Handfield and Nichols, 2002). According to Aiktken (1998), it is a network of connected and interdependent organizations, mutually and co-operative working together to control, manage and improve the flow of material and information from suppliers to end users, while Christopher (1998) defines supply chain as network of organizations linked through up and downstream relationship in uses or customers. Thus, supply chain entails set of three or more organizations or individuals directly involved in the up and downstream slow of goods, services and information between a firm and their customers. Tan, Kanan and Handfied (1998) contend that all the business in the supply chain should be integrated and act as a single entity in order to be dominant in a market.

**Concept of supply chain management**

Supply chain management refers to the integration of key business processes from end users through original suppliers that provide products, services, and information that add value for customers and other stakeholders. (Gilaninia et al (2012) define supply chain management as integration of vital business processes from final user until main supply which increases the products, services and information and give more value to customers and shareholders. According to Rajabzadeh, Khadivar and Kazemi (2007), most definitions of supply chain management include coordinating production, inventory, transportation, information and knowledge between the components of a supply chain to obtain the best possible combination of responsiveness and efficiency for the market where it is feed. According to Rudderg, Klingenberg, and Kronhumn (2013) supply chain management refers to the network of interlocking organizations movement, through various operations and activities to provide desired value in the form of goods and services to the final consumer”. In other words the processes of unifying the combined production capacities to create and deliver goods and services to that produced satisfactory values the end user.

Ross (2010) define supply chain management as, the continuous development of management philosophy, which seeks to unite the combined production capacities and human resources that are present within and outside an organization, determine the significance of the supply channels in the context of competitive advantage, the synchronization of the client in the flow of products and services to the market, and the information needed to find excellence as the only source of value to a customer. It is also the design, planning, execution, control and the monitoring of supply chain activities to create net value, building a competitive infrastructure, leveraging worldwide logistics, synchronizing (matching) supply with demand and measuring performance globally (Harland, 1996).

From these various definitions above, it can be deduced that supply chain management is an integral key business process and activities that connect end-users and original supplies that provide products, services, and information that create positive value for customers and an organizations stakeholders. Supply chain management thus involves coordinating and integrating the products information and finance flow within and among different companies.

**Supply Chain Innovation**

Inactivation could be seen as the process of turning creative ideas into useful products and work methods. It is the ability to combine two or more knowledge to create new things (Robbins and Coulter, 2006; Parasher and Singh, 2005). Supply chain innovation refers to the adoption of new processes, methods and or technologies that result in a positive change in cost, quality, cash and/ or service. Rice (2013) contends that supply chain innovation results to organizations effectiveness and enhanced competitive advantage. Thus it involves the use of new method or technology which results in efficient and more productive processes within the supply chain. The Institute of Management Service (2019) note that the application of supply chain innovation means that organizations must re-appraise everything they one doing in order to remain competitive, just as they need to manage all aspect of the supply chain to improve customer service and to reduce cost. Generally, some major dimensions of supply chain innovation are timely delivery, effective after sales service and responsiveness. A major benefit of supply chain innovation is the ability for businesses to deliver their products to the customers who need or want them in the most effective manner.

**Benefits of Supply Chain**

Several benefits results from the application of supply chain by business organizations processes in their marketing and product delivery activities. Najjar (2010) posit that supply chain improves control and efficiency in product manufacturing and distribution, by building a strong relationship with suppliers and distributors, as a mechanism to improve organizations competitiveness, and achieve customer satisfaction. According to Ou, Liu, Hung and Yen (2010), an effective supply chain management enhances a firm competitiveness and overall performance, and results to enhanced customer’s satisfaction. It also helps organizations to cope with high-paced global competitions and sustenance of profits (Power, Sohal and Rahman, 2001; Moberg, Cuttler, Gross and Speh, 2002).

Maboodi, Javanshir, Rashidi and Valipour (2010) notes that supply chain management provides firm with fast and reliable service with high quality and lowest cost to customers. This view is shared by Gilaninia et al, (2012) when they described supply chain management as effective approaches which reduces production costs and provides waiting time. Radwan and Kassem (2016) outlines some benefits organizations derives from supply chain management as quick decisions and reduce time needed to reach the market achievement of better contact with the market, strengthen business relationships with existing customers, and faster and more effectively works through the rapid distribution of documents. Oztiiren and Sevil (2009) note that the supply chain management improves firms profitability by creating less costly processes, higher productivity and sales volume, as well as improvement in product quality. Mentzer, et al, (2001) also considered supply chain management as a critical source of competitive advantage in a market.

**Customer Retention**

Customers’ retention is now one of the main priorities for most companies; as no organization will survive if it is unable to attract and retain customers who will supply the much needed fund it needs to run it businesses through consistent customer’s purchase& Customer retention refers to the activities and actions companies and organizations take to reduce the number of customer defections. It is the process of engaging existing customers to continue buying products or services from your business. Customer retention refers to the ability of a company to retain its customers over some specified period. High customer retention means customers of the product or business tend to return to, continue to buy or in some other way not defect to another product or business, or to non- use entirely. Customer retention refers to the ability of a company or product to retain its customers over some specified period. Customer retention therefore means that customers of the product or business tend to return to, continue to buy or in some other way not defect to another product or business, or to non-use-entirely. In other words retained customers are customers who are loyal to an organization today offering.

Send Pulse (2022) sees customer loyalty as a measure of customer’s likeness to recent business with a company or brand when a customer comes back and continuously repeat purchase of service of product, one explanation for it could be the customer is loyal and can tolerant few negatives from the firm. Although too many negatives: and break the strength it the emotional connection between the customer and the firm that he was once loyal do. Thus a firm can chain to his achieve retention of a certain customer” when the customer repeat purchases of their products/ services, preferring them to other organizations that offer similar or alternative products/ services (Obafemi, Obiekwe and Oiku, 2022).

The strong emphasis on customer retention is influenced by today is heightened competition between organizations and that is assuming that customers’ retention will definitely achieve cost efficiency (Al-Saa’da et al., 2013). Successful customer retention involves more than giving the customer what they expect. Generating loyal advocates of the brand might mean exceeding customer expectations. Reicheld (1996) asserts that, “Creating customers that are loyal means putting customer’s values at the centre of a firm’s strategy rather than maximizing, profits and shareholder value strategy.” Customer retention thus, starts with the initial contact an organization has with a customer and continues throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship, and every successful retention efforts take this entire life cycle into account. According to Abdallah (2013), “the creation and use of relationship marketing as a tactic to keep customers loyal can boost the company with strong and long term competitive advantage.”

Therefore, an organization’s ability to attract and retain new customers is not only related to its product or services, but also in the way it services her existing customer in this sense, Hence, improving long- term relationship between customers and suppliers might be affected throughout different variables like responsiveness, trust, customer relationship, after sales service and delivery through information sharing. Moreover, when the customer’s need is met, there will not be a problem in retaining the customers (Iddrisu, Nooni, Fiankoc, &Mensah, 2015). Customer retention thus is developed over a period of time from a consistent record of meeting, and sometimes even exceeding customer expectations such as high responsiveness in good delivery. Research by Iddrisu, Nooni, Fiankoc, &Mensah (2015) show that the degree to which a customer exhibits repeated buying behaviour from a service provider, possesses a positive attitudinal disposition toward the provider, and considers using only this provider when a need for this service exists.

One key factor in a competitive environment that often separate competing organizations is their ability to consistently deliver high standard of customer service. Furthermore, in the emerging world of customer success, retention is a major objective (Mehta, Steinman and Murphy, 2016). Thus, the goal of customer retention programs is to help companies retain as many customers as possible, often through customer loyalty and brand loyalty initiatives. Organizations always attempt to retain their customers and reduce customer defections by seeking to satisfy their customers through moderate cost, timely delivery, customize services, and by providing quality products that customers will find difficult to resist. Customer retention is also very vital from a financial viewpoint to the business. Wagner (2008) notes that acquiring a new customer is up to six to ten times more expensive than to retain an existing one. Customer retention can also generate a mutual benefit situation for both the companies and its customers, while offering economic, social and psychological transactions through out for customers. Customer retention therefore, is important to all organizations since satisfied retained customers tend to spend more, cost less and make valuable references to new potential customers. A high level customer retention is often achieved when the end-consumer is satisfied with protect or service offerings, and this requires the entire supply chain to understand what the requirements of the customers are.

**Supply Chain Innovation and Customer Retention**

The new age of customer relationships recognizes the power shift from the seller to the buyer. Organizations emphases is no longer about helping sellers sell; the focus of the future is on helping buyers buy (Ako-Nai), 2016). This requires company to look at customer-focused, people-driven. Pragmatic and customer relationship management (CRM) processes (Ghavami&Olyaei, 2006). The fundamental principle behind customer satisfaction and its measurement is that business performance creates retention, customer retention and more likely to be loyal (recommend service to others) and create greater market shares and profits (Ghavami&Olyaei, 2006).

On the general relationship between the various dimension of supply chain innovation and customer retention, timely delivery has become a strong factor that generate customer retention. Organization can sell great product, provide an excellent after sales services, yet the final step in the method is often in the hands of third parties who do not necessarily share the company’s values (Li, Ragu-Nathan, &Rao, 2006). A dependable logistic and close monitoring of service levels helps, but company can also keep customers informed on the progress of their delivery and make the process as convenient as possible. Supply chain innovation impact not only overall organizational performance, but also competitive advantage of an organization (Li, Ragu-Nathan, Ragu Nathan, &Rao, 2006). They are expected to improve an organization’s competitive advantage through cost, quality, delivery dependability, time to market, and product innovation. In addition, recent studies have included time-based competition as an important competitive priority. For example, high level of supply chain integration by enabling organization to make dependable delivery and introduce products to the market quickly. Supply chain integration contributes positively to customer retention (Li. Ragu-Nathan, &Rao, 2006.

With regard to after sales service, it is well known in that sales services are considered a key revenue generator in food and beverage manufacturing industry. Hence, offering a large number of after-sales services to customer leads to higher profitability (Rizaimy, Muzani, Shamsul, & Wan, 2009). Recent marketing management focuses on lifetime value of a customer and maintains long-term relationships with customers. From this customer relationship viewpoint, after-sales service is regarded as an important factor that has an impact on establishing good relationships with customers. On the other hand, a default and free basic after-sales service, also plays a vital role of attracting more customer attention in a market faced with severe brand competition (Rizaimy, KhaizirMuzani, Shamsul, & Wan, 2009). Thus, offering sufficient after-sales service to customers has become a key creator of revenue, profit, and competency in modern industries (Alireza, Fatemeh, &Pegah, 2011). Accepting the claim that returning customers are the most profitable ones, as they require less marketing effort and relationship building after-sales service acquire a significant function as a means to realize customer retention (Alireza, Fatemeh, &Pegah, (2011).On the part of responsiveness and customer retention, being responsive helps an organization to gain their customer’s trust and higher confidence.

Responsiveness is the willingness of employees to provide service. This is achieved when an organization can deal with and handle customer’s requests, questions and complaints promptly and attentively (Iddrisu, Nooni, Fiankoc, &Mensah, 2015). A responsive company communicates to its customers the time frame it would take to get answers or have their problems dealt with. To be successful therefore, companies need to look at their level of responsiveness from the view point of the customer rather than the company’s perspective. When the customer’s need is met, the organization will not have a problem in retaining such customers (Iddrisu, Nooni, Fiankoc, &Mensah, 2015). Customer retention is developed over a period of time from a consistent record of meeting, and sometimes even surpassing customer expectations such, as high responsiveness in goods delivery. Iddrisu, Nooni, Fiankoc, &Mensah (2015) maintain that a customer exhibits repeat purchasing behaviour for a product, possess a positive attitudinal disposition toward the provider, and consider using only this provider when his need for this product or service exists.

**CONCLUSION**

The successful management of supply chain innovation management in terms of relations with collaboration of all stakeholders’ results to improved organizations improved performance and profitability, as well as customer satisfaction, retention and loyalty. The existence of collaboration with key supply chain innovation activities results to enhanced performance and ensure maximum satisfaction of the product end users. The adoption of supply chain innovation is vital for organization’s effectiveness and performance, industry and also helps them to generate competitive advantage over their rivals. Supply chain innovation enhances customer’s satisfaction which is vital for their retention and loyalty.

Customer retention and loyalty requires that organizations deliver on their customer’s expectation fully in a predictable and an ongoing supply chain relationship. Supply chain innovation thus results to more efficient and more productive processes within the supply chain and is essential for organization to remain competitive.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the acknowledged benefits of supply chain management, it is recommended that to achieve high customer retention within the supply chain, organizations should ensure that it achieve a high customer satisfaction with the end consumer at the end of the supply chain. It is also important to understand that customer service encompasses all the points of contact between the customer and the supplier in terms of fulfillment of orders, and includes delivery service, pre- and post-sales services, technical support, financial packages and so forth. Manufacturing and service providing firms should ensure that effective collaboration exist between all stakeholders in the supply chain process in order to promote successful customer satisfaction to enhance their retention and loyalty.

Furthermore, organizations need to provide customer purchase satisfaction before and after purchase since this is likely to lead to customer retention and satisfaction. Organizations should ensure that they incorporate effective time delivery as one of their strategic options in their supply chain management as this will result to customer’s satisfaction which enhances retention among others.

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