

WEBSITE SECURITY AND ONLINE PATRONAGE OF FOUR-STAR HOTELS IN RIVERS STATE**ZITE Augustine Banigo¹ AKEKUE-ALEX Nennaaton² OGONU Chituru Gibson³**^{1, 2, 3} Department of Marketing, Faculty of Administration and Management
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aubzite@gmail.com**Abstract**

The purpose of the research was to examine the relationship between website security and online patronage of 4-star hotels in Rivers State. Website security was the predictor variable while online patronage was the criterion variable with purchase intention, purchase action and repeat purchase as measures. Three alternate hypotheses were tested in the research. The study population consisted guests (customers) of 18 registered 4-star hotels in Rivers State. In view of the infinite and flowing nature of the population, the Cochran formula for computing sample size where the population is infinite, was used to derive a sample size of 384 guests. Structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data, while hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation with the help of the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences, version 23.0. The results from showed positive and statistically significant correlations between website security and all the indicators of online patronage used in the study. Therefore, the study concludes that website security relates to online patronage of four-star hotels in Rivers State. In order to increase their online patronage, four-star hotels in Rivers State; and recommends that managers of four-star hotels should constantly evaluate their website security status as this can ignite purchase intention, purchase action, and repeat purchase.

Keywords: Purchase action, purchase intention, repeat purchase, online patronage, website security

Introduction

The information technology golden era and with its many innovations that have engineered growth in many sectors of national economies, including the hotel sector. The boom in the hotel industry which started in 1980 (Jang, 2013, as cited by Nadube & Akahome, 2017), and led to the construction of more luxury hotels cater for the needs of locales and foreigners has also witnessed rapid adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) to provide unique and superior experience for guests.

This upsurge in the number of hotels, the facilities they parade and the range of service they provide led hotel specialists to analyse trends, and define better criteria and modern standards to improve quality of service rendered by hotels (Nadube & Akahome, 2017). So that hotels that offer free seamless internet access, local and continental cuisines, on-site cocktail bars, well-resourced fitness hubs and commodious apartments; as well as restaurants that offer standard catering services with well-trained staff that readily assist customers to the most sophisticated experiences are rated higher than others (Igwe & Ateke, 2021).

Ebere and Ateke (2019) states that hotels in Rivers State operate in an intensely competitive, dynamic and uncertain terrain, hence are compelled to expend aggressive marketing efforts to attract and retain guests (customers) in order to improve their performance and ensure their continuity. Consequently, Hotels in Rivers State vie to distinguish themselves through the services they offer and the experience they deliver (Igwe & Ateke, 2021). Ebere and Ateke (2019) notes that hotels leverage ICT solutions to improve their interface with guests. Chief among these solutions is online booking, which relies on the Internet and Internet-enabled applications to enable customer make enquiries, reservations and resolve issues via the Internet (Ataya & Ali, 2019).

Online booking has fundamentally reshaped customer interaction, allowing potential guests to choose hotel virtually from any location and hotel operators have capitalized on this by building

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websites that are not only attractive but secured. This is because security concerns have become central to e-commerce owing to its potential to increase or decrease users trust in e-commerce activities (Ataya & Ali, 2019). Ateke and Ogbuji (2017) states that exploiting Internet-enabled platforms for commerce offer great prospects, but also comes with challenges for firms and consumers, and online consumer protection is one of the many challenges of e-commerce.

The use of online platforms has become commonplace among hoteliers. Most hotels rely on their websites to attract, retain and interact with customers. Website security is therefore crucial to customer patronage of hotels, as online platform serves as interface between the firm and potential guests. Sophos (2019) aver that about 30,000 websites are hacked daily, making website security a critical concern for businesses, as it curtails online purchases. Nadube and Akahome (2017) opine that tourism destinations in South-South Nigeria suffer poor patronage due mostly to online security concerns of consumers.

Despite the significant role of website security in online patronage, a few studies have examined online security concern of consumer (Ateke & Isaac, 2020; Ateke & Ogbuji, 2017); and even fewer studies have been devoted to examining the relationship between Website security and online Patronage of hotels in Rivers State. This study is therefore an attempt to fill the knowledge gap by investigating the relationship between website security and customer patronage of 4-star hotels in Rivers state. The study is conceptualized in fig. 1.

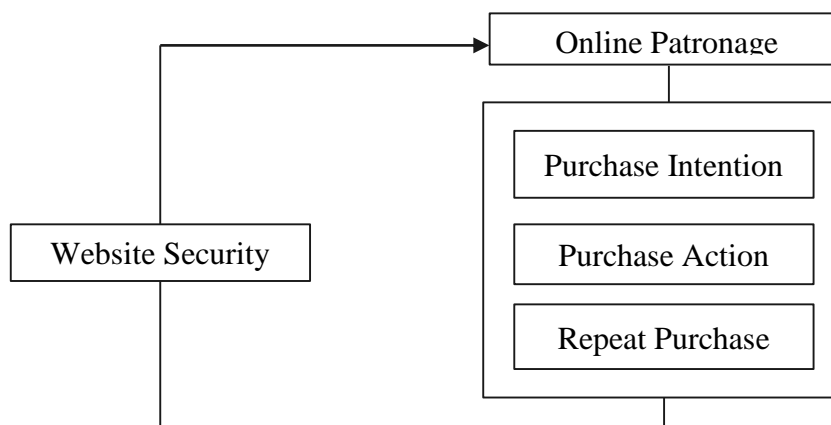


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of relationship between website quality and online patronage of 4-star hotels in Rivers State.

Theoretical Foundation of the Study

This study was founded on technology acceptance model (TAM) espoused by Davies (1986). TAM suggests that perceived utility and ease of use are two critical factors that influence individuals' acceptance and utilization of new technology. Adopting TAM as a baseline theory in a study on website safety, Lee et al. (2003) states that Website security enhance consumer loyalty and expenditure; and emphasized the importance of cultivating trust and confidence in security measures. Gefen et al. (2003) incorporated trust into TAM to examine influence of individuals' perceptions of security on online shopping behaviour. This model, when applied to the website security, suggests that a hotel's website characterized by safeguarding privacy, authenticity and accessibility of data will positively influence consumers' intentions to utilise the site for booking services, ultimately resulting in heightened patronage (Davis, 1989).

Concept of Web Security

Website security encompasses the measures and practices implemented to protect a website from unauthorized access, data breaches and malicious activities (Zhang et al., 2018). It

involves protecting customers' personal information, transaction procedures, and mitigating risks. Website security foster customer trust, privacy and confidence in online transactions (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2009). Security features and protection mechanism on a seller's website, give online consumers the confidence that the firm intend to safeguard their information during online transactions (Kim et al., 2009). The relevance of website security to online patronage therefore, self-evident.

The preoccupation Website security is safeguarding privacy of data provided by online consumers. Mugobo and Malunga (2015, as cited in Ateke & Isaac, 2020) referred to Website security as efforts made by the firm to protect consumers' personal data. Parasuraman et al. (2005) articulate that Website security as the effectiveness with which a Website protects personal information of users. It characterizes the firm's ability to protect consumers' personal data, enhance website traffic, and provide clear purchasing procedures on a digital platform (Ho & Lee, 2007).

Online shopping presents various risks, as indicated by previous studies (Ateke & Isaac, 2020; Ateke & Ogbuji, 2017; Kwon et al., 2002). Therefore, trust and satisfaction in online transactions are significantly affected by elements associated with security (Kim & Kim, 2004). In order to mitigate risks of unauthorized access, data breaches and other detrimental activities, it is imperative for websites to comply with established security protocols (Zhang et al., 2018).

Online patronage

The concept of "online patronage" encompasses the various methods through which individuals express their support for digital enterprises and content creators (Nagar, 2016). This trend has evolved over time due to changing preferences and behaviours of consumers, influenced by the rise of online shopping and production of digital content (John, 2022). Online patronage has been articulated and examined by various scholars, each concentrating on a unique aspect of online consumer behaviour.

Online patronage refers to intentions and behaviors of consumers in selecting and consistently using an online store based on various attributes, such as outcome quality, service recovery, and price, which influence their shopping decisions in the online environment (Ghatak et al., 2016). According to Burhanudin and Noviza (2023), online patronage refers to the inclination of consumers to regularly engage with and buy from online retailers.

The significance of online patronage in fostering brand loyalty was emphasized by Kotler and Keller (2016), who characterized it as engagement in digital transactions across diverse e-commerce platforms. The metrics of online patronage utilized in this study are purchase intention, purchase action, and repeat purchase (Han et al., 2018; De Cannière et al., 2010)

Purchase intention

Purchase intention is a significant concept in consumer behavior. It refers to the inclination and aspiration of a person to acquire a particular good or service in the future (Ajzen, 1991). Organisations must possess a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences to anticipate and shape customer behaviour, thereby enhancing sales and profitability. The perceived value significantly influences the intention to purchase. As articulated by Zeithaml (1988), the perceived value of a product is defined as the aggregate of the benefits derived by the consumer in relation to the costs incurred.

Consumers exhibit a greater propensity to express a desire to purchase and finalize the transaction when they recognize a favourable value in comparison to the cost. The perception

of risk constitutes a significant element that affects the intention to purchase. Individuals exhibit a diminished propensity to express an intention to purchase and may opt to postpone or entirely forgo the acquisition when they discern a considerable level of risk, encompassing financial or performance-related uncertainties (Bauer, 1967).

Purchase action

A purchase action occurs when a customer opts to acquire a product or service from a specific business. The process of purchasing encompasses the identification of a need or desire, the evaluation of alternatives, the selection of a particular option, and the completion of the transaction. This sequence is a crucial component of the consumer decision-making framework (Engel et al., 1995). Several factors shape a consumer's purchasing decisions. These include personal preferences and experiences, perceptions of the brand, pricing considerations, and the impact of promotional strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Consumers are more likely to purchase a product when they perceive its quality positively, recognize a favourable price-to-quality ratio, or possess a strong emotional connection to the brand (Winer, 2011). Also, External factors such as social influences, cultural standards, peer recommendations, and marketing messages significantly affect purchasing behaviour (Franke & Iwan, 2020).

Repeat purchase

Repeat purchases occur when customers consistently acquire the same product from the same business on multiple occasions (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). It is imperative for businesses to prioritize this behaviour, as it holds the capacity to enhance revenue and profitability, cultivate customer loyalty, and promote brand advocacy (Jain & Singh, 2020). The influence of various factors, including consumer satisfaction, perceived worth, brand allegiance, and the holistic experience, plays a significant role in determining repeat purchases, as articulated by Kumar and Reinartz (2016).

Hu et al. (2009) indicates that consumers who express satisfaction with their purchases are more inclined to repurchase from the same brand. Also, Vazquez-Casielles and Coelho (2011) indicates that consumers exhibit a greater propensity to repurchase from a company when they perceive its products to possess significant value. Moreover, fostering repeat purchases represents an additional advantage of cultivating brand loyalty through robust customer engagement.

Website Security and Online Patronage

Lee et al. (2023) examined the interplay between aesthetic qualities and functional effectiveness of websites. Their research suggests that while aesthetics hold significance, it is the practicality that make individuals to return consistently. Websites that exhibit visual appeal and user-friendly design are likely to foster extended user engagement and higher conversion rates. The functional dimensions are essential for enhancing the user experience and fostering client loyalty. The elements encompass navigation, load speed, interactive capabilities, and security features.

Tran and Nguyen (2022) examined the relationship among online shoppers' attitudes, cognitive trust, perceived risk, individualism, reputation, and the probability of making a purchase. The data indicates that perceived risk has a negative impact on cognitive trust, while website security and reputation have a positive impact. Similarly, Siagian et al. (2022) examined the applicability of TAM within the context of social media-based digital payments. The study focused on impact of various factors trust, perceived usefulness, security and ease of use on

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consumers' purchasing intentions. The results show that level of security perceived by consumers significantly impact trust and behavioural intentions; while consumers' intention to engage in certain behaviours is shaped by their perceptions of ease of product utilization.

In addition, in an investigation on influence of interactive features, including chat assistance and personalized recommendations on consumer loyalty, Johnson and Nguyen (2021) revealed that incorporation of interactive elements significantly enriches the user experience, fostering a deeper connection between e-commerce platforms and consumers, as indicated by their study. This imply that firms must prioritize mobile optimization and responsiveness in order to engage online users effectively.

More so, Chen et al. (2020) highlighted the growing importance of mobile website functionality and argue that it is imperative for businesses to ensure that their websites are optimized for mobile devices. This is because user engagement and likelihood of purchase significantly increase when mobile compatibility is prioritized. Sharma and Gupta (2019) established the significance of website credibility and perceived security as factors affecting consumer trust and likelihood of repeat purchase; while Ateke and Lawson (2019) reports that social media handle credibility is a precursor to online purchase intention.

Their foregoing indicate that customers exhibit a greater propensity to transact on a Website that incorporate features that instill confidence, such as encrypted payment gateways, transparent privacy policies, and robust user authentication procedures. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- H₀₁:** There is a relationship between website security and purchase intention of customers of 4-star hotels in Rivers State.
- H₀₂:** There is a relationship between website security and purchase action of customers of 4-star hotels in Rivers State.
- H₀₃:** There is a relationship between website security and repeat purchase of customers of 4-star hotels in Rivers State.

Methodology

This quantitative study adopted a correlational research design. The study was conducted in a natural setting with no artificial variables, and its time horizon was that of a cross-sectional survey. Customers of 18 licensed 4-star hotels in Rivers State made up the study's population; since these businesses do not keep client records, the population size is infinite. The study used the Cochran (1963) method to calculate the sample size for an infinite population with a 95% confidence level, a 0.05 margin of error, and a 0.3 probability of success. This ensures that the sample is statistically representative. The researcher selected 384 guests from among the 18 4-star hotels to serve as survey respondents. Primary data for this study was obtained through questionnaire designed in Likert scale. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted and the data subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability test with a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). Table1 summarizes the results of the reliability test.

Descriptive statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation and frequency tables were used at the primary level of analysis. At the secondary level of analysis, the study utilized Pearson's Product Moment Correlation to test the direction and degree of relationships between Website security and indicators of online patronage. All the statistical analyses was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Table1: Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

S/N	Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients
1	Website Security	4	0.847
2	Purchase Intention	4	0.821
3	Purchase Action	4	0.867
4	Repeat Patronage	4	0.963

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

Data Analysis and Results

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Website Security

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel secure entering my personal information on the hotel's website.	372	1469.4	3.95	1.216
The hotel's website uses secure connections (e.g., HTTPS, SSL) to protect user data.	372	1517.76	4.08	.662
The website has clear security and privacy policies.	372	1536.36	4.13	.788
Valid N (listwise)	372			

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

Table 2 illustrates elevated mean scores for the questionnaire items, exceeding 3.00. This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents demonstrated considerable levels of acceptance regarding the research question related to website security. It is evident that question 3, which aimed to assess the clarity of security and privacy policies on the websites of four-star hotels in Rivers State, achieved the highest mean score of 4.13. This indicates that question 3 exerts the most significant impact on the variables.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Purchase Intention

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The website is easy to navigate and user-friendly.	372	1275.96	3.43	1.491
The hotel's website loads quickly and works without issues.	372	1302	3.50	1.086
The booking process on the website is straightforward and simple.	372	1417.32	3.81	.981
Valid N (listwise)	372			

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

Table 3 illustrates elevated mean scores for the questionnaire items, exceeding 3.00. This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents demonstrated a strong level of acceptance regarding the research question related to purchase intention. It is evident that question 3, which aimed to assess the degree of straightforwardness and simplicity in the booking process on the website for four-star hotels in Rivers State, received the highest mean score of 3.81. This indicates that question 2 exerts the most significant impact on the variables.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Purchase Action

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have booked a room at a four-star hotel in Rivers using the hotel's website in the past year.	372	1562.4	4.20	.770
The quality of the hotel's website influenced my decision to book.	372	1398.72	3.76	1.031
The website's ease of use encourages me to complete my booking online	372	1324.32	3.56	.741
Valid N (listwise)	372			

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

Table 4 illustrates elevated mean scores for the questionnaire items, exceeding 3.00. This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents demonstrated a strong level of acceptance regarding the research question in relation to purchasing behaviour. It is evident that question 1, which aimed to assess the degree to which individuals have utilised the hotel's website to reserve accommodations at a four-star hotel in Rivers over the past year, has achieved the highest mean score of 4.20. This indicates that question 1 exerts the most significant impact on the variables.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Repeat Purchase

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I intend to book a room again at a four-star hotel in Rivers using the same website.	372	1417.32	3.81	.981
I would recommend booking rooms through the hotel's website to others.	372	1465.68	3.94	.683
I will always book reservations based on website information	372	1298.28	3.49	1.192
Valid N (listwise)	372			

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

Table 5 illustrates elevated mean scores for the questionnaire items, exceeding 3.00. This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents demonstrated a strong degree of acceptance regarding the research question related to repeat purchases. It is evident that question 2, which aimed to assess the degree to which managers in the four-star hotels of Rivers State have advocated for booking rooms via the hotel's website to others, has achieved the highest mean score of 3.94. This indicates that question 2 exerts the most significant impact on the variables.

Table 6: Correlation between Website Security and Purchase Intention

		Website Security	Purchase Intention
Website Security	Pearson Correlation	1	.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	372	372
Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	.422**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	372	372

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

The correlation coefficient of 0.573** in Table 6 suggests a weak positive relationship between website security and purchase intention. The probability value (0.000) being lower than the critical value (0.05) suggests that the relationship between website performance and purchase intention is statistically significance. This indicates that 2-star hotels in Rivers State could leverage Website security to elicit purchase intention. Thus, we accept the alternate hypothesis that a significant relationship between exists between website security and purchase intention of customers of 4-star hotels in Rivers.

Table 7: Correlation between Website Security and Purchase Action

		Website Security	Purchase Action
Website Security	Pearson Correlation	1	.867**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	372	372
Purchase Action	Pearson Correlation	.867**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	372	372

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

The correlation coefficient of 0.867** in Table 7 suggests a strong positive association between website security and purchase action. The probability value (0.000) being less than the critical threshold (0.05) suggests that the association between Website security and purchase action of customers of 4-star hotels in Rivers State is statistically significant. This suggests that 4-star hotels in Rivers State could leverage Website security to induce purchase action of consumers. Consequently, the alternate hypothesis was accepted.

Table 8: Correlation between Website Security and Repeat Purchase

		Website Security	Repeat Purchase
Website Security	Pearson Correlation	1	.593**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	372	372
Repeat Purchase	Pearson Correlation	.593**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	372	372

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of data analyses on Website security and online patronage

The correlation coefficient of 0.593** in Table 8 suggests a moderate positive association between website security and repeat purchase. The probability value (0.000) being lower than the critical threshold (0.05) suggests that the relationship between website security and repeat purchase of is statistically significant; meaning that 4-star hotels in Rivers State can secure repeat visits of guests by leveraging Website security. Consequently, we accept the alternate hypothesis which acknowledges the existence of significant relationship between website security and repeat purchase of customers of 4-star hotels in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

This examined the correlation between Website security and online patronage of 4-star hotels in Rivers State. The results of the statistical analyses conducted in the study showed that Website security has weak positive correlation with purchase intention, strong positive relationship with purchase action and moderate positive relationship with repeat purchase of customers of 4-star hotels.

These findings are in agreement with evidence in extant literature. The findings align with the report that online security is one of the factors influencing e-loyalty (Qatawneh et al., 2023). The findings validate the findings of Tran and Nguyen (2022) that perceived risk has negative impact on cognitive trust, while website security and reputation have a positive impact; and that of Ateke and Ogbuji (2017) that verification, privacy and security concerns are the most recurring concerns of e-consumers in Nigeria.

Also, our findings support the report that that students' perceptions of trust and security significantly influence their intention to continue using e-payment methods (Nguyen & Tran, 2022). This suggests that perceived safety and trustworthiness are critical to e-payment adoption. Similarly, our findings corroborate the report of Siagian et al. (2022) trust, perceived usefulness, security and ease of use are key factors that influence consumers' online purchase intention.

Furthermore, our findings support the view that level of security perceived by consumers significantly impacts their trust and behavioural intentions in online settings (Ateke & Isaac, 2020). And also that the credibility of online platforms influence online purchase intention (Ateke & Lawson, 2020). The implication of our findings and the extent of their alignment with views and reports of earlier studies, as well as with hindsight about consumers' sense of concern for security, is that Website security is a prerequisite to online patronage of 4-star hotels in Rivers State.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study and their level of agreement with previous studies, this concludes that the website security relates with online patronage of four-star hotels in Rivers State. In order to increase their online patronage, four-star hotels in Rivers State must prioritize the security of their website. Therefore, this study recommends that managers of 4-star hotels should constantly evaluate their website security status as this can ignite purchase intention, purchase action, and repeat purchase, thereby boosting the overall online patronage of four-star hotels in Rivers state.

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