

SUPPLY CHAIN INTEGRATION AND MARKETING COMPETITIVENESS OF FIRMS IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between supply chain integration (SCI) and marketing competitiveness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. The study was anchored on relational view theory and adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study consist 269 registered and functional hospitality firms in Rivers State, while a sample size of 161 hospitality firms was studied. Primary data were collected using questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment Correlation served as test statistic, relying on Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. The study found a positive and significant relationship between the SCI and measures of marketing competitiveness (brand awareness, marketing innovation) of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. Thus, the study concluded that SCI enhance marketing competitiveness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State; and recommends that management of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State should encourage SCI, if they seek to enhance their level of marketing competitiveness.

Keywords: brand awareness, marketing competitiveness, marketing innovation, hospitality industry, Supply chain integration

Introduction

The hospitality industry plays a vital role in providing service experiences for guests. The industry encompass a wide range of businesses, including hotels, resorts, restaurants and event management companies. Competition in the industry has shifted from individual firms to their respective supply chains, therefore only a firm with agile and versatile supply chain can sustain effective competitive edge. With service demands being more customer-driven, there is need for effective management of supply chains rather than just internal factors (Hurst & Jennifer, 2002).

In today's uncertain economic conditions, organizations are constantly under relentless competition to make high-quality products at the lowest feasible prices in the shortest possible time. In order to be more responsive to customer preference for lower prices and boost performance, businesses need to have robust supply chain strategies that can streamline internal and external operational processes. Establishing integrated supply chain within the company and successfully connecting them externally with business partners, suppliers, and customers is vital to enhance firm's operational efficiency.

Supply chain integration (SCI) depicts firms' abilities to make strategic relationships, build unified processes, integrate resources and share information. It is defined as the management of activities aimed at seamlessly linking relevant business processes within and across firms, and eliminating duplicate or unnecessary parts for the purpose of building a better functioning supply chain (Chen et al., 2009). SCI emphasizes connectivity and simplification through coordination, collaboration, cooperation, interaction, and elimination of duplicate elements in business processes (Pagell, 2004).

Studies have found that SCI has positive impact on firms' marketing competitiveness (Bagchi & Chun Ha, 2005) while others proved that integration has a positive impact on supply chain performance (Lee et al., 2007) and operational performance (Flynn et al., 2010). Lee (2007) views the main benefits of integrated supply chains in terms of cost reduction, and increased value for firms and stakeholders. Yeung et al. (2009) posit that, the rationale behind SCI is to combine

partners' resources and perspectives into a firm's value proposition, and allow all firms in a supply chain to excel in performance.

However, little or no studies have been carried out in Nigeria, especially Port Harcourt, Rivers State on SCI and marketing competitiveness. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to fill the knowledge gap by investigating the relationship between SCI and marketing competitiveness of Hospitality Industry in Rivers State. This study is guided by the following hypotheses and conceptual framework.

H₀₁: supply chain integration does not significantly relate to brand awareness of hospitality firms in Rivers State.

H₀₂: supply chain integration does not significantly relate to marketing innovation of hospitality firms in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

The relational view theory (RVT) served as baseline theory for this study. RVT (Dyer & Singh, 1998) is an inter-firm theory which argue that firms can achieve supernormal benefits through the adoption of appropriate strategies. It argues that firms create value in alliances when they identify partners with complementary resources, build good relationships by sharing knowledge and make investments that are tailored to their partners (Dyer et al., 2018).

Many studies (Baum et al. 2014) have shown that inter-organizational relations constitute the basis for strategic actions by contemporary companies that want to collaborate with other parties in order to gain additional economic rents, which are called relational rents. (Dyer & Singh 1998). The relational rent is defined as a supernormal profit generated from the joint efforts of partners that invest in relation-specific assets, share knowledge, combine complementary resources and use effective governance mechanisms (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Seeking relational rents is thus the main motivation for creating inter-organizational relations systems, at the same time determining the relational view of a firm. This view is expressed in a firm's relational orientation (Gatignon & Xuereb 1997). Blackhurst et al. (2011) postulated that relational competencies developed through supplier relationship management programmes, communication networks, and monitoring systems contribute significantly to a firm's resilience. RVT is thus relevant to the present study because it provides a better understanding how mutual benefits could flourish in networked firms.

Concept of Supply Chain Integration

SCI is a set of activities concerned with the coordination of product flows between supply chain partners, including transactions, materials movements, procedures, and optimization processes, taking into consideration the underlying information flows. It is a formalized process of partnership or collaboration (Cao et al., 2010), and a set of practices that involve resource sharing across internal departments and external organizations (Leuschner et al., 2013). SCI is recognized as a strategy for improving business performance in highly competitive environments. In recognition of this, manufacturing firms have been pursuing a variety of SCI practices (Morash & Clinton, 2008).

SCI connects an organization with its customers, suppliers, and other channel members by integrating their relationships, activities, functions, technologies, processes, and locations (Huang et al., 2014). The ultimate aim of SCI is to move products, information, money, and decisions effectively and efficiently through coordinated endeavors and exchange information to provide maximum value to the customer at a low cost without any delay (Wong et al., 2011).

Previous studies have reported that SCI improve operational performance and confer competitive advantage (Tseng & Liao, 2015; Seo et al., 2014). SCI is thus a powerful weapon an organization

can use to gain competitive advantage thereby increasing operational performance (Kim et al. 2020; Kinya, 2016).

Concept of Marketing Competitiveness

D'Cruz (2021) posits that marketing competitiveness is ability of firms to design, produce and sell products superior to those offered by competitors, considering price and non-price qualities. Competitive marketing is the process of creating and executing a marketing strategy with the goal of outmaneuvering rivals to gain market share. In order to be successful, businesses must have a clear understanding of their competitors, their own strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of their target market (Abubakar & Garba, 2022). The competitiveness of a firm can be measured by factors like productivity, human resources, quality, cost, financial and sustainability (Ajitabh & Momaya, 2004).

Marketing competitiveness translates to outmaneuvering rival businesses to gain market share. In order to be successful, businesses must have a clear understanding of their competitors, their own strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of their target market (Abubakar & Garba, 2022), and possess the ability to compete effectively in a market (Porter, 2015). It comes by creating a unique brand identity and delivering value to customers. Marketing competitiveness is a key determinant of a company's success in attracting customers, generating sales, and maintaining a sustainable market position (Aaker, 2016).

The importance of marketing competitiveness is underscored by the fierce competition in today's global marketplace, where businesses are constantly seeking to differentiate themselves and to capture market share (Kotler et al., 2020). Marketing competitiveness can be measured by factors like productivity, human resources, quality, cost, financial and sustainability (Momaya, 2001). In this study, we adopt brand awareness and marketing innovation.

Brand awareness

Brand awareness represents consumers' familiarity with a brand based on accumulated brand-related exposures and experiences (Ateke et al., 2025; Aaker, 2010); and consists brand recognition - consumers' ability to identify the brand when there is a brand cue and brand recall - consumers' ability to recall a brand name, sign or logo when they see it (Chi et al., 2009).

Thus, brand awareness embraces brand acquaintance and recall of information and ideas about a brand. It involves a brand taking a useful place in the minds of the consumers when compared to competitors' brands (Kopp, 2020). Brand awareness helps to promote new products and to revive older ones, since it has the power of holding consumers to acknowledge a brand in the midst of other brands (Horsfall & Ubaka, 2018).

Brand awareness is a precursor to buying decisions (Lee et al., 2008) because people's ability to recall or recognize a brand in sufficient detail helps them make informed purchase (Keller, 2008). Generating and maintaining brand awareness has been a major marketing objective because firms believe that brand awareness strongly affect consumers' consideration set (Mcdonald, 2020).

Ateke et al. (2025) and Okwong et al. (2025) aver that brand awareness is created through perceived value, product quality, customer satisfaction and robust marketing communication efforts. Brand awareness is a key concern for firms because it has high strategic value for firms (Omoruyi & Chinomona, 2019). It confers competitive advantage by providing opportunities for successful brand extension, and leads to superior performance (Omoruyi & Chinomona, 2019).

Also, brand awareness differentiates a brand from competitors, insulate firms from competitive pressures and create barriers to incursion by competitors (Okwong et al., 2025).

Marketing innovation

Innovation in marketing refers to significant changes in the way a firm accept major changes in product design and packaging, new methods of promotion and distribution, new branding, new methods of selling, new methods in pricing policies and new presentation methods. Marketing innovation is the ability of firms to develop and implement new and creative marketing strategies and practices (Singh, 2021). This includes the ability to identify and capitalize on new market opportunities, develop new products and create unique marketing campaigns. Marketing innovativeness has significant impact on organizational performance, since innovative firms gain competitive advantage and achieve higher levels of profitability (Li & Li, 2013).

Marketing innovativeness can take many forms: developing new product features, developing new channels, implementing new pricing policies and implementing new promotional strategies. For example, companies like Amazon and Apple achieve success through their ability to innovate (Minniti & Del Giudice, 2017). A key driver of marketing innovativeness is ability to understand customer needs and preferences (Khan, 2019). Organizations that effectively identify and respond to customers' needs and preferences develop successful new products and effective marketing campaigns (Chakrabarti, 2018).

Supply Chain Integration and Marketing Competitiveness

Gollo and Paul (2018) determined the effect of SCI on operational performance at county government of Marsabit and revealed that sharing operational information such as inventory levels, costs and schedules, production and transportation capacities, lead times, and shipments, within the organization has led to improved customer service. In respect to the operational performance, the study found that both information technology and customer service resulted in positive effect on the operational performance while the customer orientation and information sharing had negative relationship with the county operational performance.

Yunus and Tadisina (2016) studied the effect of SCI integration on firm performance. The findings show that there is a positive relationship between SCI and firm performance, and that SCI is driven customer orientation. Similarly, Cao et al., (2015) investigated the impact of organizational culture on SCI using data assembled from 317 manufacturers' across ten countries. The findings reveal that both development and group culture have positive relationship with all three dimensions of SCI.

Ikegwuru and Damian-Okoro (2022) investigated the effect of organizational culture on SCI of oil and gas companies in Rivers State. The study reveal that developmental culture has moderate, positive and significant influence on SCI, group culture has positive and significant influence on SCI, rational culture has strong, positive and significant influence on SCI, and hierarchical culture has weak, positive and significant influence on SCI. Relatedly, Uwamahoro (2018) studied the effects of SCI on performance of manufacturing firms in Rwanda. The findings indicate that SCI relates to both operational and firm performance; and that internal and customer integration more strongly relate to improved performance than supplier integration.

Also, Riaz et al. (2020) examined the impact of SCI on firm performance. The results show that SCI has positive impact on financial and competitive performance. Bedilu (2018) on their part evaluated the effect of SCI on operational performance Plastic Products Manufacturing Company in Sebeta. The study showed that, there was better existence of integration along the supply chain as the mean values of internal integration, information integration, and customer integration were

above the minimum requirement, which is 3 except supplier integration as its mean value was below the limit. Moreover, internal integration, customer integration, and information dimensions of SCI has a positive and significant effect on operational performance.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised 269 registered and functional hospitality firms in Rivers State as obtained from the Yellow Pages Directory, Rivers State Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2014). The study used the Taro Yamane formula to determine a sample size of 161 firms. Therefore, 161 copies of questionnaire were distributed to managers of 161 hospitality firms in Rivers State. The Cronbach alpha test was adopted to assess the reliability of the study instrument with a threshold of 0.7 established by Nunally (1978). Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha of Study Variable

S/No	Study Variables	Reliability Coefficient
1.	Supply Chain Integration	.864
2.	Brand Awareness	.883
3.	Marketing Innovation	.851

Source: Research Data Output, 2025

Bivariate Analyses - Hypotheses Testing

The relationship between SCI and the measures of marketing competitiveness (brand awareness, marketing innovation) was examined using PPMC. The study adopted a criterion and significance value of 0.05, based on level of confidence (95%). The decision rule was: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of insignificant relationship between the variables.

Table 2: Correlation between Supply Chain Integration and Brand Awareness

		Supply Chain Integration	Brand Awareness
Supply Chain Integration	Pearson Correlation	1	.569**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	123	123
Brand Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.569**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	123	123

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.569^{**}, suggesting that there is moderate and positive relationship between SCI and brand awareness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. The result further shows a probability value of .000, meaning that the correlation between SCI and brand awareness is statistically significant. This result indicates that proper SCI will lead to improved brand awareness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3: Correlation between Supply Chain Integration and Marketing Innovation

		Supply Chain Integration	Marketing Innovation
Supply Chain Integration	Pearson Correlation	1	.833**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	123	123
Marketing Innovation	Pearson Correlation	.833**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	123	123

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 3 display a P(r) value of .833**. This high correlation coefficient means that there is a very strong and positive relationship between SCI and marketing innovation of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. The result further shows that the correlation between SCI and marketing innovation of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State is statistically significant with a probability score of .000. Hence, null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between SCI and marketing competitiveness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. The findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between SCI and the measures of marketing competitiveness through brand awareness and marketing innovation. These findings resonate with the idea that proper SCI lead to improved brand awareness and marketing innovation.

This findings are in line with the findings of Yuen and Thai (2017) that a positive relationship exists between SCI and firm performance; and that of Atasevena and Nairb (2017) which shows a significant relationship between SCI and firms' operational performance using. In a similar vein, our findings support the report that a positive relationship exists between SCI and performance of manufacturing firms (Dametew et al., 2016; Ralston et al., 2014).

The findings are also in accordance with the results that SCI is related to both operational and firm performance (Uwamahoro, 2018) and that SCI improve performance of suppliers in the automotive industry in Malaysia (Othman et al., 2016). In addition, our findings support the study of Riaz et al. (2020) which reported that SCI impacts competitive and financial performance of firms. More so, our results corroborate the findings of Ogonu and Agburum (2021) that there is a significant relationship between supplier integration and organizational success of multinational firms in Rivers State; and that of Mogaka et al. (2022) and Madzimure (2020) that supplier integration has a positive significant linear relationship with competitive advantage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study assessed the relationship between SCI and marketing competitiveness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it is concluded that SCI enhances marketing competitiveness of firms in the hospitality industry in Rivers State. The study therefore, recommends that management of hospitality firms in Rivers State should encourage SCI, if they seek to improve their marketing competitiveness.

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