

## **SUPPLY CHAIN INTEGRATION AND MARKETING COMPETITIVENESS OF PHARMACEUTICAL DISTRIBUTION FIRMS**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between supply chain integration and marketing competitiveness of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State. The study employed the quantitative and explanatory research design. The population of the study comprised 25 pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State. A total of 75 employee from the 25 firms provided data for the study. Primary data were collected from respondents through semi-structured questionnaire designed in the 5-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic. The study found that supply chain integration relates to marketing competitiveness of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State. Specifically, the study found that supply chain integration has very strong positive correlation with customer satisfaction and customer engagement, and a strong positive correlation with customer loyalty. The study concludes that supply chain integration has a strong correlation with marketing competitiveness; and recommends that managers of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State should properly identify key processes in their supply chains and ensure that they are properly “plugged in” to the operational systems of their partners.

**Keywords:** Customer engagement, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, supply chain integration

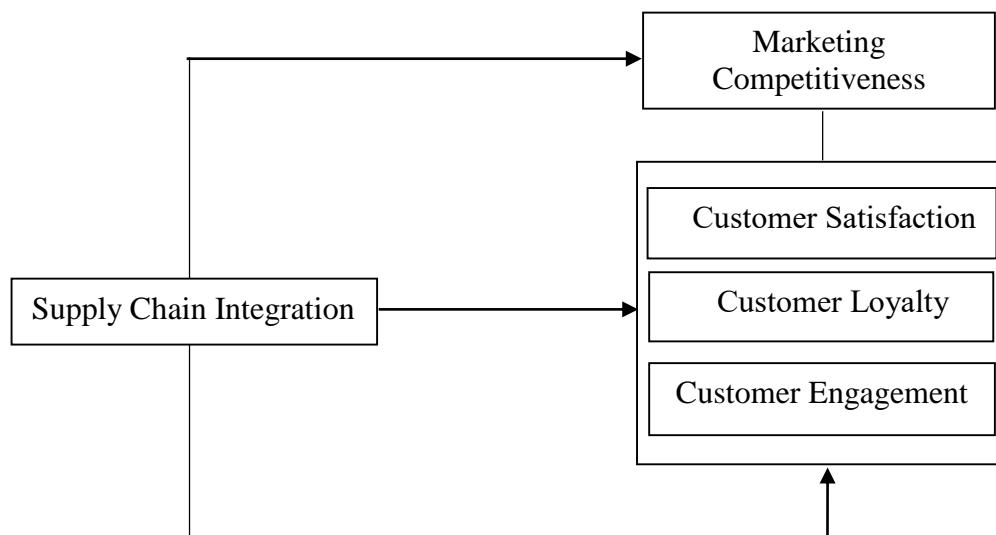
### **Introduction**

The pharmaceutical distribution sector play a critical roles in facilitating the delivery of pharmaceutical products in the Nigerian healthcare industry. Firms in the sector are responsible for storing, packaging and transporting pharmaceutical products to different markets. Specifically, pharmaceutical distribution firms play a pivotal role in the medical management value chain by acting as vital intermediaries that ensure efficient, timely, and safe movement of medical products from producers to hospitals, pharmacies and customers (Onwujekwe et al., 2021).

Pharmaceutical distribution firms also enhance access to essential drugs, maintain the integrity of temperature-sensitive products, manage inventory, and facilitate regulatory compliance in drug handling and traceability, thereby contributing significantly to public health outcomes, supply chain transparency, and economic viability of the pharmaceutical industry (Okeke, 2019; National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control [NAFDAC], 2020).

Supply chain integration connects and coordinates stakeholders involved in the flow of goods and services, from raw materials to material suppliers to end customers in the chains of supply (Oguzhan 2024). It is seen as the extent to which supply chain members work together in a cooperative and coordinated manner to achieve common goals and enhance overall performance. Supply chain integration is a foundational supply chain practices that emphasize collaboration between suppliers, producers, distributors, and retailers to enhance a seamless flow of products, information, and finances across the supply chain network, through demand planning and forecasting, inventory management, warehousing and transportation

Effective supply chain integration contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty by reducing lead times, improving customer service, ensuring the on-time delivery of pharmaceutical products and sustaining competitive advantage. Supply chain integration has turned into a substantial requirement for staying competitive (Ahmed, 2021). Previous research has shown that supply chain integration is pivotal to competitiveness of firms (Li et al., 2022; Lii & Kuo, 2016; Hong et al., 2010). However, there is scarcity of local studies to validate this relationship in the Nigerian context. Thus, this study joins the discourse of supply chain integration by assessing its correlation with marketing competitiveness of pharmaceutical distribution firms in River State. Fig. 1 conceptualizes the study.



**Fig. 1:** Conceptual framework of relationship between supply chain integration and marketing competitiveness of pharmaceutical distribution firms.

Sources: Nwokah, N. G. (2018), Nwokah, N. G., & Aeenee, F. L. (2017).

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Resource-Based View (RBV). RBV was conceptualized by Penrose (1959) and developed by Wernerfelt (1984). It argues that organizations should focus on obtaining and developing unique resources instead of merely responding to market forces. Penrose (1959) stressed the relevance of internal resources to competitive advantage. Barney (1991) later refined RBV by introducing the VRIN framework (valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable), arguing that to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, organizations must possess resources that meet the VRIN criteria.

Peteraf (1993) expanded RBV by introducing the concept of resource heterogeneity and resource immobility, which suggest that not all firms possess the same resources, and certain resources cannot be easily transferred or replicated by competitors. This implies that a viable differentiation strategy is important to sustaining competitive advantage. Similarly, Wernerfelt (1984) emphasized the importance of resource accumulation and how firms can strategically manage their resource portfolios to achieve long-term success. Despite its widespread acceptance, RBV has faced criticism. Priem and Butler (2001) argue that RBV is tautological and lacks predictive power. They indicated that the RBV's principles for defining valuable resources are often established *ex post facto*, that is, after a firm has already achieved success making it difficult to apply the theory predictively in real time.

RBV is widely applied to explain how organizations leverage strategic resources like supplier relationships, customer relationship, logistics infrastructure and technological capabilities to achieve superior supply chain performance. Dyer and Singh (1998) aver that firms that cultivate strong, trust-based supplier relationships create valuable and difficult-to-imitate resources that enhance supply chain efficiency. Additionally, RBV provides a framework for achieving competitive advantage through the development and management of unique resources.

According to Barney (1991), firms that develop and maintain VRIN resources outperform competitors. It emphasizes the role of supply chain integration capabilities as strategic resources. Organizations that are able to establish healthy partnership with pharmaceutical producers, hospitals, and regulatory agencies can gain access to exclusive supplies, high quality products and market intelligence that enhance their ability to meet customers' requirements consistently (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

### **Concept of Supply Chain Integration**

Mentzer et al. (2001) define supply chain integration as the extent to which supply chain members work together in a cooperative and coordinated manner to achieve common goals and enhance overall performance. Flynn et al. (2010) describe it as the degree to which a firm collaborate with its supply chain partners and manages intra- and inter-organizational processes. Pagell (2004) states that supply chain integration involves the coordination and collaboration among firms to manage material, information, and financial flows seamlessly across the supply chain.

It is the alignment and intertwining of business processes among supply chain partners to achieve greater proficiency and responsiveness (Narasimhan & Kim, 2002; Stevens, 1989). The goal of supply chain integration is to create a seamless, efficient, and transparent supply chain that optimizes processes, reduces costs, and improves customer satisfaction (Pellathy et al., 2018).

Supply chain integration manifests when key supply chain processes across functional boundaries are aligned to achieve operational excellence (Christopher, 2016; Stock et al., 2010). When done correctly with appropriate technology, supply chain integration allows contributors throughout the entire supply chain to access the same up-to-date information. It facilitates close interaction, collaboration and information sharing between supply chain partners to improve visibility and improve decision-making (Van der Vaart & Van Donk, 2008; Lee, 2000); as well as achieve a unified system that enhances overall performance (Bowersox et al., 2013).

### **Concept of Marketing Competitiveness**

Kotler and Keller (2016) define marketing competitiveness as the ability of a company to deliver superior value to customers while upholding or achieving a competitive advantage over competitors. It emphasizes delivering superior value to customers, which is fundamental to gaining and maintaining a competitive edge. Marketing competitiveness is not just about outperforming competitors but creating lasting value for customers, which is central to business success (Wali, et al., 2015).

Rosenbloom (2013) views marketing competitiveness as the dynamic capability of an organization to position itself to outperform competitors by leveraging market intelligence, marketing capabilities and customer engagement. Staying attuned to market trends and

consumer needs, allow companies to maintain competitive edge and innovate effectively. Keller and Kotler (2021) observe competitive firms sustain superior customer value delivery, distinguish its products and maintain market leadership over time.

According to Narver et al. (2020), marketing competitiveness is a continuous process of aligning a company's strategies with market and customer dynamics to achieve superior performance, sustained by ability to adapt and innovate in response to competitive forces. This highlights the need for firms to adapt to changing market conditions and consumer behaviours, making innovation and strategic flexibility key components of marketing competitiveness.

Day and Moorman (2019) observe that marketing competitiveness involve the firm's capacity to establish and defend a competitive position by focusing on a customer-oriented culture, marketing excellence and continuous value improvement. Marketing competitiveness enable brands differentiate themselves in a crowded market attract and retain customers, which leads to a competitive advantage that is harder for competitors to replicate. Marketing competitiveness determines success and sustainability of businesses in the face of increasing competition, changing market conditions and customer preferences (Homburg et al., 2017).

FasterCapital (2024) indicates that marketing competitiveness is a concept with multiple components including customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer engagement (Homburg et al., 2017). Baker (2003) identify brand equity, customer loyalty and market differentiation as indices of marketing competitiveness. In this study, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer engagement are adopted as measures of marketing competitiveness.

### **Customer satisfaction**

Satisfaction is a function of product performance in relation to expectations. Szymanski and Henard (2001) define customer satisfaction as the general affective response to a consumption experience, influenced by the gap between expectations and supposed performance of the product. They emphasized the emotional element of satisfaction, which reflects overall emotional response that customers have toward a product after consumption. LaTour and Peat (1979) opine that customer satisfaction is a post-purchase evaluative judgment regarding a product's capacity to meet or exceed expectations.

Tomas and Forrest, (2023) indicate that businesses thrive by delivering customer satisfaction through a combination of quality, value and complaint handling. Matzler et al. (2013) indicate that customer satisfaction is the outcome of customers' perceived discrepancy between their expectations and actual product performance. According to Zeithaml et al. (2023), customer satisfaction is the total evaluation of a product based on customer's cumulative understandings and perceptions of quality, value and emotional engagement.

Anderson et al. (1994) posits that customer satisfaction results from comparing perceived quality and expectations. This indicates that satisfaction is influenced by quality perceived during the consumption experience in relation to previous expectations (Gianluigi, 2015; Oliver, 1980). It also means that customer satisfaction results in positive emotional response to service experience (Klaus & Maklan 2007). In addition, Spreng and Mackoy (1996) observe customer satisfaction is the result of cognitive and affective evaluation that contrasts performance with expectations in a manner that is emotionally charged. In the view of Fornell (1992), customer satisfaction is a precursor to loyalty, and is central to fostering long-term customer relationships.

### **Customer loyalty**

Kotler and Keller (2021) define customer loyalty as an intensely held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a chosen product consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. It emphasizes long-term commitment of customers and their resistance to competitors' marketing tactics. Oliver (1999) opine that customer loyalty is a deeply held predisposition to repurchase a preferred product steadily in the future, causing repetitive same-brand purchase despite situational influences and competitive efforts.

According to Han and Hyun (2021), customer loyalty reflects both transactional behaviors and psychological attachments, prompting future purchase choices and brand engagement. They acknowledged the intricate nature of loyalty, considering both customer emotions and repeated transactions. For Dick and Basu (1994), customer loyalty is a relationship between an individual's relative attitude toward an entity (brand/service/store/vendor) and repeat patronage behaviour.

Reichheld and Sasser (1990) connected loyalty with customer lifetime value, reinforcing its financial implications for businesses. Zeithaml et al. (1996) observed that customer loyalty is the possibility of customers to continue doing business with a firm, commending it to others, and resisting competitive offers. Improving customer loyalty requires an all-inclusive approach that combines high quality service, personalization, engagement, and value-driven interactions.

Baldauf et al. (2003) indicate that customer loyalty is a consumer's commitment to rebuy a product based on positive brand-related attitudes and prior experiences. Brands that focus on relationships, not just transactions can develop and build sustainable customer loyalty. Therefore, customer loyalty is the long-term preference for a brand or business, demonstrated by repeat purchases and active engagement, such as supporting the brand through word-of-mouth and online reviews.

### **Customer engagement**

Customer engagement refers to customers' behavioral manifestations toward a brand, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. Customer engagement includes actions like word-of-mouth, social media interactions, and participation in brand communities, which enhance brand loyalty and advocacy.

Customer engagement also reflects a customer's psychological state induced by specific interactive experiences with a focal engagement object (e.g., a brand) (Brodie et al., 2011). Understanding this psychological state help firms design interactive experiences that foster deeper emotional connections with customers. Customer engagement drive volitional investment of operant resources (e.g., knowledge, skills) and operand resources (e.g., equipment) into brand interactions.

Customer engagement focuses on the active role of customers, which can lead to co-creation of value and personalized experiences (Hollebeek et al., 2019). According to Hollebeek (2011), customer engagement encompasses emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions, reflecting a customer's level of investment in their interactions with a brand. Customer engagement manifests in interactive, co-creative experiences with a brand. This view underscores the role of customers as co-creators of value, which can lead to innovative products that better meet customer needs (Brodie et al., 2011).

### Supply Chain Integration and Marketing Competitiveness

Several studies have been conducted at different times and in different domains to determine drivers of marketing competitiveness. Lii and Kuo (2016) examined the combined impact of innovation orientation, supply chain integration and combinative competitive capabilities on firm performance. The results show that supply chain integration had effect on innovation orientation and business performance.

Li et al. (2022) examined the relationship among supply chain integration, operational performance and competitiveness. The results demonstrate that supply chain integration has positive effect on logistics cost performance and service quality performance, which further improves competitiveness.

Hong et al. (2010) explored electronic commerce applications for supply chain integration and competitive capabilities. The results show the importance of applying two specific ECTs (EDI and internet-based) for both supplier and customer integration; and the significant impact of supplier integration and customer integration on manufacturing competitive capabilities. In line with the foregoing, the study proposes as follows:

**H<sub>o1</sub>:** Supply chain integration has no significant relationship with customer satisfaction of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State.

**H<sub>o2</sub>:** Supply chain integration has no significant relationship with customer loyalty of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State.

**H<sub>o3</sub>:** Supply chain integration has no significant relationship with customer engagement of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State.

### Methodology

This study examined the relationship between supply chain integration and marketing competitiveness. The study employed quantitative approach and an explanatory research design. The population of the study comprised 25 pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State. The study took a census. 75 employee were draw from the 25 pharmaceutical distribution firms on a sample frame of 3 managers from each firms. Primary data were collected from respondents through semi-structured questionnaire designed in the 5-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Univariate descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, variance, skeweness and kurtosis were used to classify the data. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the three (3) hypotheses based on the dimensions and measures of the study. Table 1 below presents a summary of the result of test of reliability.

**Table 1: Reliability Analysis of Items on All Variables**

Constructs	Cronbach Coefficient Alpha	Number of items
Supply Chain Integration	0.958	3
Customer Satisfaction	0.962	3
Customer Loyalty	0.945	3
Customer Engagement	0.961	3

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 1 indicates that all the variables have high Cronbach alpha; surpassing the threshold of 0.70. This means that the instrument was reliable. The Pearson Production Moment Correlation was the statistical tool used for data analyses, with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23.0.

## Results

**Tables 2. Relationship between supply chain integration and customer satisfaction**

		Supply chain integration	Customer satisfaction
Supply chain integration	Pearson Correlation	1	.975**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Customer satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.975**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

Source: SPSS Output 2025

The strength and direction of the relationship between the variables are indicated a correlation coefficient of 0.975. This very high value means that a very strong relationship exists between supply chain integration and customer satisfaction. Also, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 indicating that the relationship between supply chain integration and customer satisfaction is statistically significant. That is to say, there is a very strong and statistically significant relationship between variables ( $r = 0.975$ ;  $P = 0.000$ ). Thus, we rejected the null hypothesis which state that supply chain integration has no significant relationship with customer satisfaction of the pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State.

**Table 3: Relationship between supply chain integration and customer loyalty**

		Supply chain integration	Customer loyalty
Supply chain integration	Pearson Correlation	1	.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Customer loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.887**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The strength and direction of relationship between the variables are indicated by a  $P(r)$  of 0.887. This correlation coefficient shows that there is a very strong relationship between supply chain integration and customer loyalty. Also, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between supply chain integration and customer loyalty is statistically significant. That is to say, there is a strong and statistically significant relationship between variables ( $r = -0.887$  and  $P = 0.000$ ). Therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis which state that supply chain integration has no significant relationship with customer loyalty of the pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State.

**Table 4: Relationship between supply chain integration and customer engagement**

		Supply chain integration	Customer engagement
Supply chain integration	Pearson Correlation	1	.968**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Customer engagement	Pearson Correlation	.968**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The strength and direction of the relationship between the variables are indicated by the correlation coefficient of 0.968. This very high value shows that there is a very strong relationship between supply chain integration and customer engagement. Also, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 indicating that the relationship between supply chain integration and customer engagement is statistically significant. That is to say, there is a very strong and statistically significant relationship between variables ( $r = -0.968$ ;  $P = 0.000$ ). Thus, we rejected the null hypothesis which state that supply chain integration has no significant relationship with customer engagement of the pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study examined the link between supply chain integration and marketing competitiveness of pharmaceutical distribution firms in Rivers State. The results of the statistical analyses shows that supply chain integration relates to marketing competitiveness in terms of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer engagement. These findings support by findings of Lii and Kuo (2016) whose study on impact of innovation orientation, supply chain integration and combinative competitive capabilities on firm performance found that supply chain integration affect innovation orientation and business performance.

The findings also align with the report of Li et al. (2022) that supply chain integration a positive effect on logistics cost performance and service quality performance, both of which leads to marketing competitiveness. Furthermore, our study confirm the report that supply chain integration improve competitive capability of firms (Hong et al., 2010).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, this study concludes that supply chain integration has a strong correlation with firm marketing competitiveness meaning that integrating key supply chain processes with external partners help pharmaceutical firm achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction, loyalty and engagement. Therefore, the study recommends that managers of pharmaceutical distribution firms should properly identify key processes in their supply chains and ensure that they are properly “plugged in” to the operational systems of their partners. The use of systems like just-in-time systems and electronic data interchange should be emphasized and developed.

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