

# Positive responses enhance online purchase intention: illuminating the explanatory power of customers' emotions in e-commerce (EC) adoption

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## 1. Introduction

This study argues that the kind of experiences people have in the online environment could influence their feelings about adopting or avoiding such purchase channels, particularly where the levels of uncertainties and risks are higher compared to the offline traditional stores that they are more familiar with. Research shows that people adopt or use technology not only for its functional benefits but also for the emotional advantages. Such knowledge could help companies compete best in the ever-changing digital landscape and further provides useful insights on theory and guidance for managerial practice.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The issues identified and their interplay form the background for this research, with evidence from Nigeria. Therefore, the following questions are posed:

1. What are the key factors that influence the adoption of E-Commerce (EC) in the context of Nigeria?
2. How do customers' affective responses (emotions) impact their EC adoption and online purchase intention?
3. Why do customers respond positively or negatively to EC adoption factors?
4. How effective is the applicability of the proposed model in explaining and predicting EC adoption behaviour?

### 1.2 Research Aim

Based on the research questions, this study aims to investigate how technology innovation influences customers' emotional responses, which could result in EC adoption or avoidance. The study uniquely focuses on the importance of customers' emotions to the critical, context-specific EC adoption factors.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

Stemming from the overall aim, this study addresses the following research objectives:

1. To critically investigate the key factors influencing customers' intention to adopt EC.
2. To examine how customers' affective responses (emotions) impact their EC adoption and online purchase intention.
3. To develop an explanatory model relating to the technology acceptance of EC and customers' emotional responses.
4. To empirically test the applicability of the proposed model in explaining and predicting the impact of the internal and external factors on purchase intention.

### 1.4 Justification for Research

For businesses and customers in the modern age, accessibility, flexibility, and convenience make EC the perfect platform for transactions (Costa and Castro, 2021). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2020) reported 1.4 billion people globally shopped online on a weekly basis in 2018, which translated to a staggering online shopping frequency equating to around 20% of the world population. However, there is a gap in our knowledge relating to EC adoption among Nigerians when benchmarked against global standards (Chidike, Osuagwu and Ekwuonwunne, 2018). It is projected that in 2025, 14% of all sales in Nigeria will be conducted over the internet via electronic systems (Statista, 2022). Therefore, the call to research the implementation of the factors that influence the use of EC in a developing country context (Sila, 2019) is vitally important.

In addition to identifying these factors, the important question remains “how are the Nigerian customers in particular responding to these factors in relation to buying online?” Empirical research has provided clear evidence that exploring the antecedents and outcomes of EC adoption from the psychological and emotional perspectives remains an area that warrants further investigation (Lu, Papagiannidis and Alamanos, 2019). This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by filling this important research gap, considering this is one of the earliest studies to explore the online shopping behaviour (psychological response) of urban customers in Nigeria. In sum, the interconnection of human emotions and technology adoption in the online retail sector of developing countries is still a relatively new research area. Therefore, further investigations are needed on the influence of emotion on EC adoption decision making.

## **2. Literature Review**

Historically, research into the role of emotion (or affect, more generally) in decision making rarely appeared for most of the 20th century and, compared to affective states, most studies focused primarily on understanding cognitive processes (Lerner, 2015). However, there was a consensus that emotions have various and quite significant functions in motivating and focusing individual endeavours, and facilitating social interactions, among others (Izard, 2010). Emotions are mental states that occur as a result of certain events, and are divided into two dominant, independent dimensions: positive and negative, characterised as intentional (directed at an object), appraisal (evaluation-based) and concerned-based (Steinert and Roeser, 2020). Oftentimes, our world is infused with diverse changes and people respond or react to them differently. As humans, losing a friend makes us feel sad. In contrast, the birth of a new baby brings us joy. When the weather is bright and sunny, we feel happy; when we have no clue about a situation, we feel frustrated. In like manner, there is a connection between our emotions and technology acceptance/usage. Thus, how online customers respond to transaction cues when choosing which digital channel to shop on could be defining for EC adoption and may influence customers' purchase intentions.

Arguably, people adopt or use technology not only for its functional benefits but also for the emotional advantages. This is because customers view EC adoption as both technological and personal decisions that can impact their sanity and emotional well-being socially, mentally, and psychologically (Loketkrawee and Bhatiasevi, 2018). Pappas et al. (2014) found that positive emotions significantly affect intention to purchase; the better customers feel about online shopping, the more likely they are to make purchases. In the adoption of new technologies, as negative emotions (anger, frustration) pose problems, positive emotions (happiness, satisfaction) may give solutions to them. This study applied Stimulus Organism Theory (SOR) within the framework of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to show that EC factors (stimuli) can prompt positive and negative emotions which directly or indirectly influence purchase intention. Prior framework that considered emotions emphasised that how people feel can have more explanatory power in predicting their purchasing behaviour than cognition, under certain circumstances (Zhang, 2013). Resultantly, this current study focuses on customers' responses in the online retailing sector and proposes emotion as a principal determinant for explaining online purchase intention, thus demonstrating ways in which emotions can predict choices related to EC adoption.

## **3. Research Design/Methods**

The suitable research design adopted for this study was an explanatory mixed methods approach of post-positivist philosophy. It employed a two-part, explanatory, sequential research design of using a mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures). Phase one started with the quantitative and was followed with the qualitative to seek explanations to the quantitative findings. Using convenience sampling, online survey responses from 327 internet users, 18-65 years old, were analysed to examine the impact of customers' emotions on purchase intention. In phase two, the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews (8 participants) triangulated the quantitative findings of EC adoption and customers' responses. This was to further seek explanations and interpretations to the findings from the quantitative data analysis.

#### 4. Presentation of key findings

The quantitative phase of this study specifically found that: (1) Positive and negative emotions are distinguishable dimensions of technology-related responses (2) There is an increased positive influence on purchase intention when customers experience positive emotions (3) Only positive emotions are significant predictors of purchase intention, negative emotions are not (4) Bad reputation of online retailers causes customers to experience the highest level of negative emotions. A notable result of this study is that, in relation to purchase intention, positive emotional responses had the highest explanatory power (56.3%) amongst the factors examined. Moreover, positive emotional responses was 34.5% more influential in determining online purchase intention than negative emotional responses. This indicates that the positive impact on intention could increase online sales for retailers and influence customers to adopt EC. Compatibility, reputation (good) and website quality predicted customers' positive emotions.

In conclusion, the quantitative data analysis revealed that positive emotions had a strong, direct effect and positive significance on purchase intention (PIT), whilst negative emotions had no direct effect or significant impact on PIT. This indicates that positive emotional responses can enhance the tendency for customers' online purchase intention to increase more than negative emotions, with evidence from Nigeria. The interviewees also confirmed the role of positive emotions, as has been critically reviewed in the literature. They linked positive emotional responses to mental health and well-being when they shopped online and which motivated them for repeat purchases. Thus, this work illuminated the undermined yet important power of emotional responses in the Business-to-Consumer EC adoption.

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