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MASTER OF COMMERCE DEGREE IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The effect of using e-commerce on performance of large retail organisations: During the COVID-19 pandemic: A comparative study of businesses in Harare

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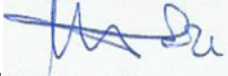
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DECLARATION

I Rofunwa Thabiso Muleya do hereby declare the contents of the research study to be true and not copied from anywhere or in any publication and previous degrees without acknowledgements.

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DEDICATIONS

I dedicate my parents.

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ABSTRACT

Locally, there have been no studies on the impact of e-commerce on organisational performance in the retail sector, despite calls by many researchers and the government of Zimbabwe calling retailers to intensify the adoption of online means of trading. The main objective of the study is to examine the influence of e-commerce on the performance of medium to large retail organisations in Harare during the COVID 19 pandemic. The study was guided by the pragmatic philosophy, ultimately the mixed method approach was employed. The study adopted a case study research design in which grocery retailers in Harare, Zimbabwe were studied. A sample of 291 respondents (determined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table) were chosen using simple random sampling from a population of 1200 administrators. On the other hand, qualitative data was determined by saturation point at 12, thus became the sample size. The researcher personally administered questionnaires by hand-delivering them to the respondents' work-stations during the whole month of September 2022. Both quantitative and qualitative results established that e-commerce strategies positively influence supermarkets as those retailers who used online means of trading had had their performance improved during the pandemic. More so, findings established that organisations using e-commerce perform better than those who do not employ the online methods. The study concluded that technological innovativeness is one of the sustainable key strategies in Zimbabwe retail supermarket industry during and after COVID-19 era. It is recommended that for retail organisations to effectively use e-commerce to improve their performance, they ought to invest into online initiatives by acquiring the necessary infrastructure. Future studies need to also look at barriers and driving forces for retailers in adopting ecommerce.

Key Words: E-commerce, Online, Strategies, Supermarket, performance, retailers, sustainable, COVID-19

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The project aims at investigating the impact of e-commerce on the performance of medium to large retail organisations in Harare during the COVID 19 pandemic. Chapter 1 presents the nature and background of the study. Thus, this chapter provides the research gaps and how the study sought to close them. The problem statement, research objectives and research hypotheses are given. Moreover, justification and significance of the study is given. Research delimitations, and assumptions are further outlined. The chapter concludes with the definition of key terms and the chapter summary.

1.1 Background of the study

The outbreak of corona virus disease (COVID 19) has caused a worldwide healthcare crisis with major problems on global economies. COVID-19 is unique in the severity of its impact as it is a humanitarian disaster that has caused both a supply and a demand shock to the global economic system. Contrary to other unpredictable shocks, the COVID-19 pandemic provided a twofold shock to the commercial system in addition to being unpredictable and dramatic. On the supply side, COVID-19 caused significant disruptions in international supply chains and the immediate halting of contact-intensive industry sectors were impacted by the lockdown restrictions. Due to COVID-19, demand for services like non-emergency healthcare, bars, restaurants, entertainment, and travel and tourism dropped significantly. Retail businesses are usually more susceptible to economic effects because of lower profit margins.

The social distance measures in virtually all industries throughout the world greatly complicated the supply systems and the inventory management process. Up to now, many researchers are still advocating retailers to use online means of operating to improve their competitive position and ultimately performance. Competition has increased due to the creation of an internet-enabled marketplace that competes with the physical marketplace (Dominici et al., 2021). Consequently, companies have integrated the electronic market in their strategies to increase visibility and access the global market, leading to the growth of electronic commerce (E-commerce) (Shi & Xu, 2019). E-commerce refers to the sale and purchase of goods and services through the internet, with the transfer of money and data to complete the transactions (Shi & Xu, 2019).

According to (Dominici et al., 2021), online shopping has not only helped to make consumers' lives easier during the pandemic but also has also shown reluctant shoppers how convenient e-commerce is. Sony (2020) claim that the number of online consumers dramatically increased over the last 15 months, and with that surge it is estimated that retailers have digitized about 20 percent of their activities during the pandemic, helping them expand their business globally.

In that same vein, Adobe's 2021 Digital Economy Index showed that the pandemic accelerated current e-commerce logistics trends, resulting in a tremendous growth of 27.6% in global e-commerce in 2020, reaching \$4.28 trillion. This year, Adobe Digital Economy Index (2021) indicated a 38 percent increase in worldwide e-commerce to \$876 billion in the first three months of 2021. This increase illustrated how consumer behaviour is changing as more people use digital media. This jump demonstrated the shift in consumer habits as they embrace digital platforms. Andonov et al. (2021) note that while there are many benefits associated with e-commerce, businesses also face numerous challenges while implementing it in an adequate manner. One of the most evident challenges related to E-commerce could be considered as cyber-security and heavy financial demands for its implementation and maintenance (Shaytura et al., 2017).

Many retail businesses are putting more and more emphasis on organizational performance. Organizational performance comprises the actual results or output of an organization as measured against its intended results or outputs (Ramli, Soelton, & Paijan, 2020; Hanum & Sinarasri, 2017). There are multiple studies that have been done on the influence of ecommerce on organisational performance. A study conducted by Hanum & Sinarasri (2017) found that e-commerce strategies are fundamental in enhancing firm performance. In Cameroon, (Mahliza, 2019) established a significant relationship between online marketing and firm performance. Abebe (2014) studied the electronic commerce adoption, entrepreneurial orientation and SME performance. They established that there is a positive relationship. Similar findings were submitted by (Soelton et al., 2020); (Dominici et al., 2021); (Shi & Xu, 2019) just to mention a few.

Locally, there have been no studies on the influence of e-commerce on firm performance in the retail sector, despite calls by many researchers and the government of Zimbabwe calling retailers to intensify the adoption of online means of trading. The review of literature shows that the effectiveness of e-commerce on organisational performance has been well documented in literature, however much focus was on SMEs (Abebe, 2014; Hanum & Sinarasri, 2017). The review of literature shows that none has conducted a study to investigate the influence of e-commerce on the performance of retail firms in Harare, especially during

the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the study aims to look into the impact of e-commerce on the performance of medium to large retail organisations in Harare during the COVID 19 pandemic. Consequently, the study makes a comparative analysis of the effects of e-commerce strategies on the performance of retail firms in Harare, Zimbabwe.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The retail industry in Zimbabwe faces performance challenges especially with regards to market share, profitability and customer satisfaction (**GoZ, 2021**). The challenging business environment following the COVID-19 pandemic has provided challenges more than opportunities for the retail sector. The majority of retail firms have recurring financial problems as they are operating below capacity, and have dismally failed to repay some loans which have been borrowed from other entities. During the COVID-19 period some organizations relied on e-commerce in their business transactions. The question that needs to be addressed is: Did such organizations experience better business performance as compared to their counterparts not using on line strategies? Therefore, the study makes a comparative study of the impact of e-commerce strategies on the performance of retail firms in Harare, Zimbabwe.

1.4 Research objectives

The study's goal is to investigate the impact of e-commerce on the performance of medium to large retail organisations in Harare during the COVID 19 pandemic. The study

- To establish the effect of Covid 19 on business performance in Harare CBD
- To identify those organizations that were using e-commerce during the period
- To compare performance of organizations using e-commerce with those without.
- To make recommendations for the use of online strategies in commercial transactions during unprecedented times.

1.5 Research Questions

- What is the effect of Covid 19 on business performance in Harare CBD?
- What organizations were using e-commerce during the COVID-19 period?
- Do retail organisations using e-commerce perform better than those without online means of transacting?
- What are the recommendations on the use of online strategies in commercial transactions during unprecedented times?

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 Practical significance

Given the paucity of previous research on e-commerce and retail performance, it is important to shed greater light on the influence of e-commerce especially during the COVID-19 period. The study provides recommendations on how Zimbabwean retail organisations can successfully manage their commercial activities in order to promote growth and survival in a volatile business environment.

1.6.2 Theoretical significance

The current study significantly expands the body of information. It improves comprehension of how e-commerce affects the efficiency of companies in developing nations. The study advances theory in relation to the adoption and relevance of e-commerce in a developing country context. This is on the background that the majority of the studies have been conducted in developed countries (Dominici et al., 2021). Hence, their findings are not necessarily transferable to a local developing economy, such as Zimbabwe, Harare to be specific.

1.6.3 Significance to various stakeholders

The results of this study should be important to the many academics, students, and researchers who may be interested in business management because the documented report would provide ready reference material that could give the stakeholders more knowledge and skills on managing successful retail businesses during unheard-of times. This research will benefit the researcher who will have acquired more knowledge regarding the acceptance of technology by medium to large retail organisations in Harare.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to retail supermarket businesses in Harare Urban. The study made use of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davies, 1989) and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1983). The review of literature was more focused on e-commerce (the independent variable) and organisational performance (dependent variable). Four sub-variables of e-commerce that is e-marketing, e-advertising, e-customer support service, and e-payment system guided the review of literature. The research objectives above guided the review of literature. The period concerned for the study was March 2020 to August 2021. This period was considered important because it was the period reflecting the declining trend in the performance of many businesses in Zimbabwe as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The cross-sectional nature of the research restricted the determination of the four e-commerce strategies and performance of retail enterprises. The mitigation measure to this is that the researcher resolved in focusing on more than one specific sector (retail) in order to obtain uniform results that can be generalised across the country. Time was limited in conducting the study. The researcher included all the study constructs to get comprehensive results that would give a fair picture of the relationship between the study variables. The study used closed ended questionnaires to gather data. Closed ended questions do not give respondents the opportunity to express their views. To address this, the researcher also collected data using interviews to confirm what he had found through questionnaires.

1.9 Research Assumptions

The research was underpinned by the following assumptions.

- Respondents (managers) would be truthful in their responses.
- Respondents are well knowledgeable about the topic under consideration and that they will not alter any contents of the research instrument.
- Retail supermarkets participants understand e-commerce.
- Time will be available to carry out the research.
- Financial resources would suffice to conduct the research.
- It will be possible to generalise the results of this study to other populations in Zimbabwe.

1.10 Definition of key terms

Organizational performance: According to Gregory et al. (2019) performance focuses on three areas of the company's outcome and they are identified as product market performance, customer satisfaction, and product service quality.

E-commerce: "The functions of information exchange and commercial transaction support that operate on telecommunications networks linking business partners (typically customers and suppliers)" Nyagwencha (2018:4).

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious illness brought on by a recently identified coronavirus.

1.11 Organisation of the dissertation

This dissertation is composed of five chapters as outlined below:

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces the study by providing a description of background and context of the study. It also presents the research problem, research objectives and research hypotheses. Lastly, it provides the significance of the research, the research delimitations, the study's conceptual framework and the dissertation structure. **Chapter 2:** This chapter presents the literature review pertaining to the research objectives. The chapter firstly provides an overview of the theories that guides the study and the conceptualization of study variables. The examination of empirical literature follows. **Chapter three:** Chapter 3 provides the research methodology used in carrying out the study. The chapter discusses the research philosophy, the research design, the population and sampling design. Furthermore, research instruments, data collection and analysis methods, issues of data quality and ethical consideration are provided. **Chapter four:** This chapter presents and interprets the results of the study. The chapter also discusses the research findings in relation to the four research objectives and reviewed literature. **Chapter five:** Chapter five presents the summary, conclusions, recommendations of the study. A summary of the dissertation chapters is followed by key conclusions and recommendations. The research limitations and some areas for future research given lastly.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the study by providing the background of the study and problem statement. It outlined the research objectives, research questions as well as the conceptual framework which outlines the relationship between the three variables and the dependent variable. The chapter further provided the statements of hypotheses, and the significance of the study. The delimitations of the study as well as the limitations of the study have also been outlined in the chapter followed by research assumptions and definition of key terms. The chapter ends with the chapter summary.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

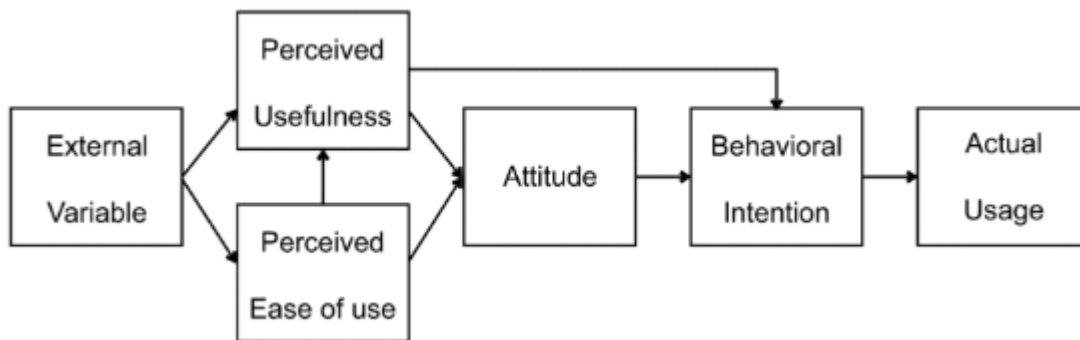
Chapter one provided the general background of the study with special emphasis upon the nature of the problem, study objective and hypotheses, research significance, delimitation and limitation as well as structure of the project. The literature review forms the bedrock of the study. Chapter two presents a review of related literature with focuses on e-commerce adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on performance. The chapter begins by an exposition of theories that guided the current study.

2.1 Theories guiding the study

This study was guided by Technology acceptance model (TAM) and Diffusion of Innovations Theory

2.1.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Figure 2. 1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989)



The bulk of the past decade has experienced historical research on e-commerce by applying theories which had traditionally been used in information and communication technology literature (Ramdhony & Munien, 2013). One of the most widely employed theory is the Technology Acceptance Model. This is a leading information systems theory that was put forward by Davies (1989) to determine and predict the attitude and behavioural intention to adopt technology.

The Theory of Reasoned Action served as the foundation for the Technology Acceptance Model. According to TAM, users adopt and employ new technologies over time. It explains how much confidence someone has in utilizing a specific method. It models how users come to accept and use technology (Alfonso, Boar, Frost, Gambacorta & Liu, 2021). Alfonso et al.

(2021) note that when users are presented with a new technology, numerous factors influence their decisions considerably about how and when to use it. Understanding the user's behavioural response to an innovation is significant in the technology adoption process (Mulwa & Ndati, 2013).

According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), the TAM aims at explaining and predicting the acceptability of an information technology, analysing and exploring factors influencing the acceptability of a certain information technology. The TAM highlights perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) as the two characteristics that can alter the attitude, according to Hossain, Wicaksono, Nor, Dunay and Illes (2021). (Hossain et al., 2021) claim that behavioural intention has a favourable and significant impact on real behaviours. These factors are believed to have an impact on how people embrace and use technology. Al-alak and Alnawas (2019) argue that people who have favourable attitudes about information technology are likely to experience higher rates of adoption than those who have negative views. The model explains that people perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and usage of the technology are significantly and positively correlated (Charness & Boot, 2016).

According to Hossain et al. (2021), with new technologies such as personal computers, an element of uncertainty exists in the minds of decision makers with respect to the successful adoption of them. In this regard, before making any attempts to use the new technology, people's attitudes and intents will change toward attempting to learn how to use it. According to Rosli & Songip (2017), attitudes about usage and plans to utilize it may be ill-formed, lacking in conviction, or else they may emerge only after initial attempts to learn how to use the technology have been made. Therefore, such attitudes and intentions may not have a direct or immediate impact on actual usage.

The theory is appropriate to the study since the study is about the impact of electronic commerce on the performance of retail organisations during COVID-19 and hence make a comparison with those firms not adopted e-commerce applications. The study sought to know how the e-commerce applications in commercial activities has an effect on performance of the retail organisations and whether firms without e-commerce applications may have poor performance. Thus, the researcher was able to make a comparison of performance of those firms with e-commerce applications and those without.

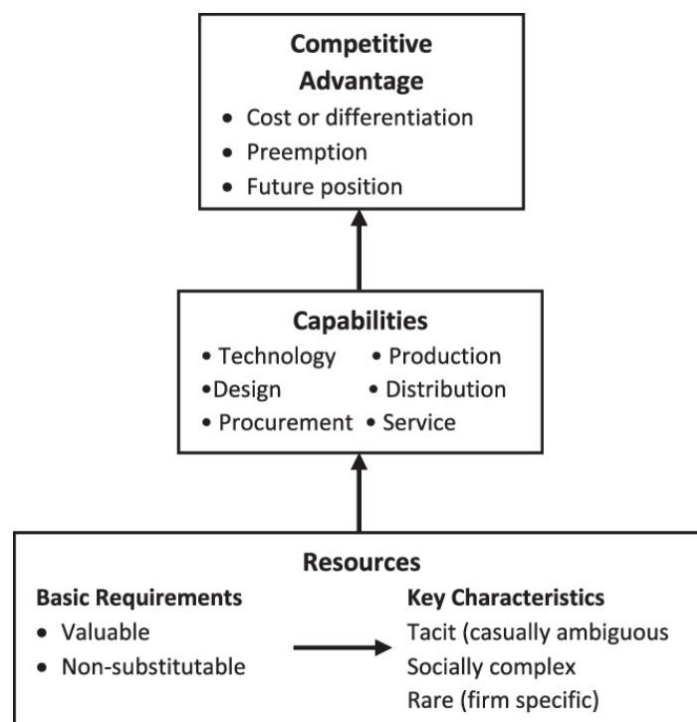
This theory is pertinent because it is an acknowledged, widely used, tested, and verified theoretical model that can be altered by the usage of other theories or constructs, (Karami et al., 2013). According to Lule et al. (2013), the use of TAM is a powerful model for predicting

how people would utilize various technologies. Several studies on e-commerce have used the TAM to support the aforementioned, including Hossain (2021), Gregory et al.

However, the TAM has its own limitations in predicting attitude and behavioural intention to the use of e-commerce and how it affects business performance. For instance, the model focuses only on product related characteristics, the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Mattila, 2003) yet consumers have the ability to accept or resist the e-commerce services on the grounds of perceived cost, and promotion of the service.

2.1.2 Resource Based Theory

Figure 2. 2: Resource Based Theory, Barney, 1991



The RBV focuses on internal resources and capabilities to identify the determinants of a firm's competitive advantage and performance (J. B. Barney, 2014). It has been argued that including the RBV is a worthwhile step that would enhance the literature on e-commerce by emphasizing dynamic capabilities, integrating concepts from several academic areas and taking into account the links between resources and capabilities.

The Resource Based Theory is a prevailing paradigm that helps to understand how and why firms develop the capability to gain and sustain competitive advantage (Penrose, 2009, Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). Its extension, the dynamic capabilities approach examines how these firms adapt and even capitalise on rapidly changing technological or volatile environments such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Teece, 2016). According to

Teece (2016), rival firms are viewed to compete on the basis of their internal characteristics, resources, through which they build competitive advantage and a superior long-term performance.

Barney (2012) note that the traditional strategic analysis considers a firm's resources as strengths that a firm uses to conceive of and implement their strategies. These strengths include "all assets, capabilities, organisational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etcetera controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive of and implement strategies which improves its efficiency and effectiveness" (Barney, 2020:12). Barney (2014) has narrowly defined the broader view of resources as "assets and capabilities that are available and useful in detecting and responding to market opportunities". Chen, Michel and Lin. (2021) views assets as any material or immaterial resource that a business uses in "its processes for creating, producing, and or offering its products (goods or services) to a market, whereas capabilities are repeatable patterns of actions in the use of assets to create, produce, and or offer products to a market".

According to Barney (2020), the RBT posits that to create and sustain a competitive advantage or achieve a performance beyond that of its competitors in the marketplace, a firm's resources must be heterogeneous and immobile, and to have that potential, the resources must simultaneously have attributes of being valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and not strategically substitutable or non-substitutable by other resources.

By establishing and replenishing resources, the company builds e-commerce competences that allow it to reap the paybacks of e-commerce and considerably influence socio-economic growth in its environment. E-commerce proficiencies are a group of activities that work together in a coordinated way to take use of e-commerce technologies and other company resources. These e-commerce skills are created through methods for developing resources that are distinctive to each company, such as coordination, learning, and reconfiguration.

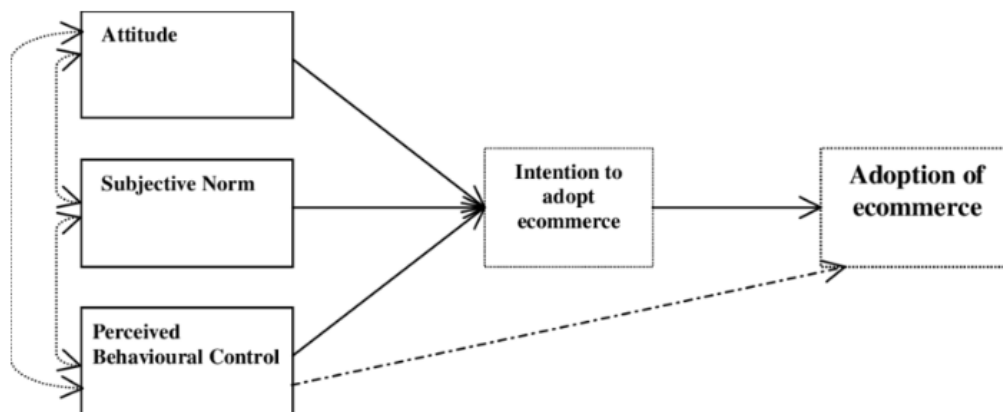
These e-commerce capabilities are often used, which makes them tacit and imperfectly mobile. As a result, they significantly contribute to the creation and maintenance of strategic benefits. The argument of this dissertation is that a company's resources are the starting point for a process of resource development that yields skills that allow the company obtain benefits of e-commerce at the corporate level and, in some cases, help with socioeconomic development in a developing context.

The integration of ecommerce skills with these tools makes them more firm-specific and reduces their mobility, increasing their capacity to contribute to the production of benefits from e-commerce and their impact on development. Therefore, the degree of e-commerce adoption

and incorporation by businesses in developing nations varies according to resources and skills. Therefore, companies that invest a lot of resources are more likely to develop e-commerce capabilities that result in (mostly) operational and informational advantages.

Researchers have established that IS resources (like IS infrastructure and technical skills which have gained much focus in IS literature), must interact with other constructs non-IS resources (like firm reputation and brand) to create e-commerce benefits (Barney, 2018; Davey, 2018). The growing success stories of e-commerce in developing nations point to the importance of other non-Information System resources like networks and socio-cultural capital in e-commerce adoption.

Figure 2. 3: Framework for the Adoption and Diffusion of Ecommerce



2.2 The COVID-19 Crisis

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic of the highly transmissible coronavirus disease (*Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*, 2020) COVID-19, signalling its global spread. Since then, an urgent global health crisis has been brought on by the new coronavirus's quick global spread. According to Ngalawa & Derera, 2020) COVID -19 is a mild to severe respiratory illness that is caused by a coronavirus (severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) 2 of the genus Beta corona virus). (Brown, Rocha and Cowling (2020), the disease is mostly spread through contact with objects or surfaces that have been exposed to the causing virus or infectious substances (such as respiratory droplets). Shortness of breath, coughing, and fever are its primary symptoms, and it can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure. A contagious illness called coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is brought on by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most virus-infected individuals will suffer from mild to moderate respiratory illnesses and recover without the need for special care. But some people will get quite sick and need to go to the doctor. Serious illness is more likely to affect the elderly and people with

underlying medical conditions including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or chronic respiratory ailments. COVID-19 can cause significant illness or death in anyone, at any age.

COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Morgan, Anokhin and Ofstein, 2020). Numerous thousands of people have died in China as a result of an infectious coronavirus that has spread to more than 44 other nations. Governments in numerous nations have implemented policies that significantly impact society's day-to-day operations. The public health strategy of "social distance" has been widely used to impede the transmission and spread of the coronavirus. Currently, most public gatherings, including athletic events, concerts, and even weddings, are prohibited worldwide, and entire regions and even entire nations have been put under complete lockdown (ranging from contact restrictions to a rigid curfew). These measures not only affect the populations' daily life, but have caused significant economic consequences in economies around the world (Baker et al., 2020), with economists consistently forecasting harsh economic recessions (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). Governments have set severe restrictions on firms in various industries, mandated social distancing and health protection policies and even locked down non-essential businesses in many countries, triggering simultaneous demand as well as supply-side issues (del Rio-Chanona et al., 2020).

Derera and Ngalawa (2020) note that in Zimbabwe a national lockdown was put in place since 30 March 2020 to reduce the spread of the virus; this was extended indefinitely on 16 May 2020, though the restrictions will be reviewed after every two weeks. The implemented lockdown policy aims to stop the transmission of the virus; meanwhile, it highly affects economic activity and employment (Brussevich et al., 2020). The retail industry is among the most delicately impacted by these pandemic restrictions. Globally and nationally, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens retail operators' service delivery and consequently survival (Gustavsson & Larsson, 2020). This situation is influenced by government policies, such as social distancing (Barrot et al., 2020), isolation, household quarantine, closure of schools or workplaces, travel restrictions, and stay home.

2.3 The concept of E-Commerce

E-commerce has been regarded as the activity of buying and selling products and services using the internet (Nyagwencha, 2018). Rukasha et al. (2019) defines e-commerce as the process of exchanging goods or services through many electronic networks such as the internet. E-commerce uses technologies like Internet marketing, mobile commerce, online transaction processing, electronic funds transfer, automated data interchange, automated electronic data collection systems and inventory management systems (Davey, 2018). E-

commerce allows the flow of information between organizations (Schmitz, 2016). The complete online system of developing, selling, delivering, servicing and paying for merchandise and services is included in e-commerce (Sharma et al., 2019).

The business model is designed in a way that it provides its offerings online and gives the opportunity to the consumers for selecting and purchasing the desired products (Davey, 2018). Planning for Ecommerce business is critical as this allows the firm to take into consideration the related dynamics and implementation of the business model, consider the probable adversities and challenges that may arise during the process and functionality (Tzavlopoulos et al., 2019).

E-commerce has engendered advantages such as enhanced organisational performance, lower cost structure, increased scope and scale of services and faster transactions (Orendorff & Dopson, 2022). The importance of e-commerce has grown over time; in 2018, e-commerce accounted for 18% of all sales in the countries of the European Union. Additionally, it was disclosed that one in five businesses in EU nations used e-commerce in 2017. Similarly, companies that adopted e-commerce had a 7 percent rise in sales from 2008 to 2018 because they were adopted. However, cost of human capital has dramatically lowered as a result. Ayo et al. (2011) asserted that electronic commerce technology offers a level playing ground for large businesses as well as small and medium sized firms to operate in the international marketplace and for regional markets and local communities to partake in social, economic and cultural networks seamlessly across international boundaries.

2.3.1 Types of Electronic Commerce Technology

Extant studies reported that the perspective of e-commerce is not only to provide information but majorly to transact or facilitate the selling of products and services online between buyers and sellers (Samuel and Carter, 2013). Businesses (B), consumers (C), and governments (G) are the three main categories of buyers and sellers that are emphasized in this study.

These markets primarily engage in business-to-consumer (B2C), business-to-business (B2B), business-to-government (B2G), and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) e-commerce activity. This combination only informs us that, if a need emerges, any of the three groups—consumers, businesses, or governments—can seek to buy and sell online. The various forms of electronic commerce that can be found in empirical literature are discussed here.

2.3.1.1 Business to Consumer

E-commerce between firms and consumers involves customers gathering information, purchasing physical goods or information goods: and for information goods, receiving products over an electronic network (Sabou et al., 2017). Business-to-consumer (B2C) E-commerce

refers to the behaviour of consumers using online technology to obtain information and make purchases. Despite wide touted, Abebe (2014) posited that for these information technology-enabled benefits to materialize, consumers must first adopt online activities, such as getting information and purchasing products from commercial websites. It is important to understand that online customers are also concurrent IT users since the consumer's involvement in online exchange relationships with Web providers in B2C ecommerce adoption goes beyond the purview of traditional marketing.

A unique chance to study a consumer's interaction with a sophisticated IT system is provided by B2C e-commerce. E-commerce adoption is an illustration of IT acceptability and use in a context that mixes commercial and technological factors. Despite growing interest in business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce, little is known about how people behave online. In this regard, there are some notable distinctions between B2C e-commerce and conventional customer behaviour. (Abou-Shouk, 2012). For instance, the physical distance between customers and online vendors raises concerns about both buyer and seller opportunism as a result of ambiguous identities and unclear products. Furthermore, both parties risk losing personal data because it is simple for multiple parties who are not involved in the transaction to obtain and utilize it. Lastly, prospective consumers' needs to be actively engaged in extensive IT use before and during their interaction with online vendor's website.

2.3.1.2 Business to Business

According to Abbad et al. (2011), a business-to-business (B2B) system is one in which one company sells to another company via the internet or a private network in order to reduce transaction costs and boost efficiency. This essentially means that firms can use the B2B commerce system to bypass traditional middlemen and sell or trade goods and services that are required for the creation of finished goods or for direct resale. Thus, business to business system replaces the old-fashioned bureaucratic procurement process built on phone calls and fax machines and provided substantial cost savings (Azam & Quaddus, 2013). According to Abor & Quartey (2010), about 80% of e-commerce is of this type and most experts predict B2B e-commerce will continue to grow faster than the B2C segments. Applications for managing suppliers, inventories, distribution, channels, and payments make up the majority of B2B applications.

Janita & Chong (2013) found that some academics and practitioners have admitted that ICT has brought significant transformation to business practices. The impacts of ICT are also found to be profound in Business to Business (B2B) sectors (Ayo et al., 2011). For instance, in the United States of America, B2B online transactions reached the total amount of US\$56.8 billion which accounted for about 70% of the Internet economy revenues (Apulu & Latham, 2011).

Additionally, the growth of ICT has made it possible for B2B to use the Internet as a tool for business in order to gain more competitive advantages, penetrate international markets, and boost the effectiveness of commercial transaction processes. Due to the advantages mentioned above, a lot of businesses are being persuaded to use Internet-based technology as their e-Business application infrastructure.

2.3.1.3 Business to Government (B2G)

Business-to-government e-commerce or B2G is generally defined as commerce between companies and the public sector (Harrigan et al., 2010). The writers made it clear that it applies to using the internet for government-related duties, such as licensing applications and public procurement. This kind of e-commerce has two features; first, the public sector assumes a leading role in establishing e-commerce usage; and second, it is assumed that the public sector has the greatest need for making its procurement system more effective (Hawkins et al., 2011). According to Ayo et al. (2011), e-government is part of the civil service reforms which was designed to make the Zimbabwean state institutions proactive and respond quickly to the needs of the general populace. In the same vein Pham et al. (2011) pointed that the project was designed to reduce bureaucracy that attends to government businesses in the country through the introduction of e-tax, e-learning, e-procurement, e-pricing, e-mail, e-tourism, e-payment, e-revenue, e-policing, e-judiciary, e-health, e-agriculture, etc.

2.3.1.4 Consumer to Consumer (C2C)

Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) trade was seen by Harrigan et al. (2010) as private consumer trade. Therefore, as ICT has developed, businesses can now buy from and sell to a wide range of customers, including people. This kind of e-commerce opens up opportunities for the growth of new consumer or private markets.

2.3.2 Electronic Commerce Applications

2.3.2.1 E-marketing

Molenaar, (2013:24) explains e-marketing as “an integral strategy based on customer behaviour”. However, Gilmore et al. (2007:2) in their study define e-marketing as utilising both the internet and those technologies which are associated with the internet to assist in the achievement of marketing objectives in combination with other marketing communication techniques. Molenaar (2013) highlights that in e-marketing the 4 P’s are changed according to each separate customer relationship. He explains that with electronic marketing, the recognized relationship is prioritized over the market, allowing the 4 Ps to be used in a tailored or client-centred manner. According to Gregory et al., (2019), digital marketing prompts and propels the production of demand, created through marketing.

Sabou et al. (2017) maintains that “marketing is about conversations, and the internet has become a hub of conversations”. E-marketing is interactive because it makes use of the internet, which allows businesses to monitor and follow the discussions they have with their clients. Kotler & Keller, (2016) notes that this assists the organisations to keep up to date with new trends and create an awareness of the changing needs of its customers. E-marketing improves business processes while strengthening the awareness in new markets of the organisation (Sabou et al., 2017). Strauss et al. (2014) identify several strategic areas in which e-marketing can assist an organisation. E-marketing can be used to improve a variety of benefits, including online mass customisation, personalization, round-the-clock convenience, self-service requests and tracking, one-stop buying, and education, connection, and contact.

2.3.2.2 E-advertising

According to Abebe (2014), e-advertising is a marketing strategy that involves the use of the internet as a medium to obtain website traffic and target and deliver marketing messages to the right customers. Online advertising aims to define markets through special and practical uses. Online advertising has grown exponentially since the early 1990s and is now considered normal practice for both small and large businesses. In the 21st century, e-advertising is becoming a very efficient and effective communication tool in distributing information about the products and services. In marketing, e-advertising is very important as messages can be distributed instantly to various people who are geographically separated at a lower cost. According Bala & Verma (2018), online advertising has the benefit of being a lot cheaper than conventional alternatives, providing a greater return on investment than TV and print marketing strategies (Madamombe & Kashora, 2018).

2.3.2.3 E-Customer service

The internet now provides a low-cost communication tool, making it the most strategically important use of technology for organizations in twenty-first century because the internet is so widely used. Firms are now searching for means to better interact with customers and influence them, they understand that technology affect customer service performance (Navimipour & Soltani, 2016). Customers worldwide require businesses to offer greater quality at lower cost, and businesses understand that achieving these objectives has becoming a significant factor to acquire competitive advantage and compete globally (Bergek et al., 2008). Also, most businesses organizations are recognizing customer service as a significant strategic issue used to measure competitiveness of the customer service process (Ray et al., 2005; Rust et al., 2001; Szymanski & Henard, 2001); Zeithaml, 2000).

Many authors have illustrated that business firms have used innovative technology to impact customer service (Takeddine & Sun, 2015). Recent ICTs empowers customers more than

ever as the Internet allows continuous contact with them anytime anywhere (Jesu et al., 2019). Moreover, authors have determined that recent innovative technologies improve customer services expertise and performance in many ways (Chen & Nath, 2016), for instance, increasing convenience of provided services, better customer service management, and ultimately increasing the offered services (Jesu et al., 2019).

2.4 Business performance

Firm performance is perhaps the most often utilized dependent variable in academic research, according to Jahanshahi et al. (2012). However, firm performance remains was of the loosely defined constructs (Ojha et al., 2019). Measuring organizational performance is difficult (Mashingaidze, 2006). Organizational performance is the difference between a company's actual results or outputs and those that were anticipated. According to Strauss and Frost (2014:60) "key performance indicators (KPI's), are specific measures designed to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation's operations, both online and offline". Molenaar (2013:161) states that these success factors or KPI's can be determined from a 'financial perspective' (such as profitability), 'customer perspective' (such as retention of customers), 'website perspective' (such as ease of use) or from the 'organisational perspective' (such as processes).

According to Venkatraman & Ramanujam, (1986) organizational performance have three dimensions: financial performance, operational performance, and stakeholder performance. According to literature review, most common types of organizational performance measures that are used in recent empirical researches are: Financial/accounting performance, operational performance/market-based performance (Carton & Hofer, 2006). Financial and accounting performance is typically measured using accounting-based metrics (such as profitability metrics like return on assets, return on investment, return on sales, and return on equity), market-based metrics (such as stock market returns), or a combination of the two (such as the price-earnings ratio). According to Carton and Hofer (2006) operational performance can be further subcategorized into market share, new product introduction, product/service quality, marketing effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

The metrics used in this study to evaluate business performance were "new or repeat businesses," "market share," and "business growth." Additionally, "gross profit," "sales," and "visitor counts" were utilized as KPIs to assess a company's success in achieving its goals or objectives.

2.5 Empirical literature

2.5.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Business performance

The covid-19 epidemic resulted in lockdowns and social isolation, which had an impact on consumer purchasing behaviour. People have discovered new methods to adapt to the new normal. Consumers were discouraged from visiting the physical retail outlets due to lockdowns, social isolation, and a stay-at-home edict. As a result, purchasing habits significantly changed as the majority of consumers started obtaining necessities online. The restrictions significantly decreased the retailers' reported sales.

Customers started purchasing less expensive things in addition to the necessities, which resulted in a decline in client loyalty. Most clients prioritized their health over all else, which caused them to turn to businesses that offer online retail sales. However, at the time, the majority of shops lacked reliable internet shopping systems. The majority of shops consequently started developing and deploying their online purchasing platforms.

The covid-19 epidemic has prompted the deployment of stringent restrictions like social seclusion, lockdown throughout the world, and these policies have had a significant impact on the retail sector. Hence, Jung & Jeon (2021) conducted a study to examine the negative impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on the acceleration of start-ups innovation in the retail industry. The study followed a qualitative content approach, in which data was gathered by qualitative interviews. The findings showed that Covid-19 had considerably altered customer behaviour, merchandise demand, retail store availability, factory and logistics service availability. Retail businesses have been found to be able to overcome the negative impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the accelerated adoption of start-up innovation, nevertheless. Studies advised shops to encourage innovations and modifications in order to counteract the undesirable consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic.

According to Naeem (2020), the covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted business globally. Consumers' reduced shopping behaviour at retail establishments as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic has had an adverse economic impact, resulting in lower sales and earnings. When compared to their online storefronts in the retail industry, the United Kingdom government's announcement of the lockdown in March 2020 resulted in a large loss in their physical stores. Due to the epidemic, retail sales in the United Kingdom drastically decreased. Likewise, many jobs were lost due to the pandemic, as more than 125000 United Kingdom retail agents lost their jobs (Naeem, 2020). In comparison to 2019, the overall retail turnover volumes declined by 1.9 percent in year 2020, the largest decline in a decade. Online sales generally climbed by at least 33%.

The covid-19 epidemic and the public health response had a significant negative influence on the world economies, according to Crick and Crick (2020). Due to lockdown regulations, social exclusion, and other pandemic effects, the retail industry has been impacted, which has changed how consumers behave and how they consume goods and services. Therefore, some retail sector areas recorded worse sales than others (Crick & Crick, 2020). Similarly, according to Williams & Kayaoglu (2020), policy measures imposed towards minimizing the spread of the pandemic lead to the closure of non-essentials retail stores in March 2020. Non-essential retailers, however, were later permitted to reopen but under certain stringent conditions. As the epidemic got worse, the stores were once more ordered to close. The overall volume of retail sales decreases as a result, particularly for non-essential retailers. Following the start of the pandemic, consumers turned to internet shopping, which caused online retail sales to soar. The second lockdown's implementation resulted in a 4 percent decrease in sales volume.

According to the prior research (Ogundijo et al., 2021), the level of competition greatly increased while demand greatly decreased; therefore, online well-established retailing companies in the sector could benefit from the few demands available. According to Griffith et al. (2020), few retail companies developed agile, high-performing digital selling platforms and greatly benefited from the online shopping shift. However, the majority of companies who prioritized physical stores suffered significantly. Likewise, retailing companies not dealing with inessential goods scaled down their operations or closed their physical stores due to the sharp decrease in the demand caused by the covid-19 restrictions by the government (Ogundijo et al., 2021). As a result, the majority of merchants started to experience declining sales revenue, which reduced their capacity to make investments in the creation of new products and innovations. Covid-19 has a detrimental effect on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses worldwide. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, venture and retail turnover have plummeted by at least 13 percent, while the unemployment rate has grown by 6 percent. Likewise, Sayyida et al. (2021) figured out that Online retails sales in the United Kingdom increased by 5.7% from the previous year to 27.5% in 2020. However, retail sales in physical stores decreased from 78.2% to 72.5% in 2020 (Jung and Jeon 2021).

According to Jung and Jeon (2021), there was an increase in online sales than physicals retail stores sales. Since 2018, retail e-commerce has been increasing while non-e-commerce retails sales have been decreasing (Sayyida et al., 2021).

In India, Al-Omouh et al. (2020) led a study to synthesize the influence of COVID 19 on the retail performance. The study followed a single design of cross-sectional research, using the quantitative questionnaire. Results showed that while consumer and brand protection, use of

technology, and supply chain have a large beneficial impact on retailers' performance, staff well-being and government policies had a considerable positive impact. According to Al-Omouh et al. (2020), most of the stores were shut throughout the country, except stores selling essential food and medicine. Non-grocery/food store revenue has decreased by 80 to 100%. Distributors of essential commodities, however, run the risk of not being able to offer non-essential products, which would decrease their earnings. Indian retailers were impacted by the pandemic during a recession, especially those selling luxuries like apparel and jewellery.

In South Africa, Redda (2021) carried out research to offer a preliminary evaluation of Covid-19's effects on the South African retail industry. The research design used in the study was descriptive. The study established that the effect was jagged across all retail categories. Merchants who sell textiles, apparel, footwear, leather goods, home furnishings, appliances, equipment, hardware, paint, and glass, as well as all other retailers that didn't fit into any of the other categories, were among the seven categories that showed a considerable contraction. Sellers that fall under the categories of pharmaceutical and medical items, cosmetics, and toiletries, as well as general dealers and food, beverage, and tobacco retailers in specialty stores, were the least impacted.

2.5.2 E-commerce and business performance

In Bulgaria, Andonov et al. (2021) directed a study to examine impact of E-commerce on business performance. The findings shows that e-commerce has transformed the way businesses used to run and function. On the other hand, Sjödin et al. (2020) in Italy conducted a study to establish the influence of e-commerce on business performance and found that the relationship between e-commerce and firm performance is negative, however it is positively mediated by certain types of internet sales channels. Particularly, when businesses use commercial websites and online marketplaces, the advantages of e-commerce in terms of increasing sales turnover are more noticeable.

Qtaishat (2015) examined the impact of e-commerce on organizational performance in Jordanian insurance companies. All insurance companies in Jordan were taken as the population. The study took a deductive approach where data collection was through the questionnaire. It was discovered that people have favourable opinions on online shopping. and those firms with e-commerce applications had enhanced performance. Thus, the study accepted the hypotheses: In Jordanian insurance firms, there is a statistically significant correlation between organizational effectiveness and electronic commerce.

Sadi-Nezhad (2017) carried out a study on measuring the effect of e-business on organizational performance in project-based organizations in Canada. The study used a quantitative descriptive approach to explore potential relationships between integrated consumers and suppliers, e-business and suppliers, and organizational performance. The survey's findings suggest a strong connection between all of these elements, either directly or indirectly.

Uchenna et al. (2019) examined the impact of e-business and organizational performance in selected service industry in Nigeria. In this study, self-administered questionnaires were used in the survey design. The outcomes of the study showed that e-business and organizational performance had a favourable and significant link. Additionally, it was shown that there is a strong positive correlation between organizational success and customer happiness in e-business.

Azeem et al. (2015) investigated the impact of e-commerce (B2B, B2C, C2C) on organization performance (Business operation, Job performance, Customer satisfaction). The study collected samples from the banking sector of Pakistan. The study's conclusions showed a strong correlation between e-commerce and organizational performance.

In Zimbabwe, Hurasha & Chiremba (2017) explored the impact of electronic commerce on business performance on business organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study used a structured questionnaire. The study found a favourable correlation between e-commerce investment and business performance. It was discovered that investing in e-commerce will raise profit margins, better service delivery, and lower transaction costs.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter analysed pertinent literature on e-commerce and its effect on business performance. The chapter began by discussing the theories that guided the study that is the TAM model and RBV model. This was followed by a discussion of the COVID-19 crisis with special focus on its impact on the business community and the lockdown regulations. The concept of e-commerce was also discussed, special focus was on the e-commerce applications and strategies. The chapter concluded with a critique of the existing literature. The following chapter presents the research methodologies used to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the study approach taken to examine how e-commerce has affected the effectiveness of retail supermarket organizations in Harare. Saunders & Rojon (2014:3) views research methodology as “the theory of how research should be undertaken”. Research methodology is the implementation plan of the research (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). Chapter 3 presents the research methods used in the study. Thus, the chapter is organised into the following sections: section 3.2 presents the research philosophy; 3.3 research approach; 3.4 research design; 3.5 the sampling strategy; section 3.6 research instruments; 3.7 data collection procedure; 3.8 data analysis procedure; 3.9 quality measures, and 3.10 ethical considerations. Finally, section 3.11 presents the chapter summary.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The study was guided by the pragmatism philosophy. Saunders et al. (2016) postulate that, “Pragmatists holds that the most important determinant of the epistemology, ontology and axiology adopted is the research question”. The choice of the pragmatism philosophy was mainly informed by the recommendations of Saunders et al. (2016) (Bryman, 2016). They emphasize that pragmatism takes a balanced and practical approach to research studies. The researcher was able to study the phenomena in a variety of methods that he felt were appropriate for responding to research questions by adopting the pragmatic philosophy. The researcher had complete discretion over which methods and strategies would best address the research topics. The researcher was free to choose the tactics and procedures that would best answer the research questions. It is also in this context that the philosophy has been an attractive alternative to positivism, post positivism, critical realism and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2016; Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Research design

This study is a descriptive case study, it focuses on the holistic description and explanation of e-commerce and its performance implications among retail supermarket organisations in Harare. The strategy’s ability to afford an in-depth analysis of the study problem also contributed to it being the strategy of choice. The retail industry is also one of the sectors which evidently echoes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected business

operations globally. Hence, the researcher felt that it needs real retail and business management models that allows owners to realise economic benefits that can meaningfully contribute to the economic growth of the country. Case study approach was achieved through the systematic selection of retail supermarket organisations in Harare who had relevant data to answer the research questions.

3.3 Target Population

Sekaran & Bougie (2016) define population as “the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate and to make statistical inferences”. The target population for the current study was defined as all retail supermarket organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe. The researcher focused on retail supermarkets that are registered, with the Harare City Council. According to the database there are approximately 1 200 retail supermarkets in Harare. This formed the target population of the study. The study draws targeted retail supermarkets’ personnel such as marketing, ICT and finance managers as they are the office bearers involved in commercial issues hence their predisposition to furnish rich data.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

Sample size is the limited number of elements selected from a population which is representative of the whole of that population that will ultimately participate in the actual study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In determining the sample size for the quantitative study, the researcher used Krejcie and Morgan (1970) tables. Given the 1 200 retail supermarkets in Harare, the required sample size was 291, calculated as illustrated below. The sample size drawn for this study fits very well with Roscoe (1975)’s rules of thumb. Roscoe (1975) cited in Sekeran and Bougie (2013:269) proposes that a sample size larger than 30 but less than 500 are suitable for most studies. On the other hand, sample size for the qualitative data was determined by saturation point. The saturation point was reached at number 12. This became the sample size for the qualitative study.

3.5 Sampling Techniques and Methods

Bell (2016) view sampling as “the process of selecting a subset from the population to estimate characteristics of the whole population”. It is almost certain that the researchers, select respondents from the total population because of the following arguments: lower cost and public acceptability (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Cooper & Schindler, 2017). Sampling techniques can be classified into two categories, which are probability sampling and non-probability

sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders *et al.*, 2016:213). The study used simple random sampling to select the study participants. The use of this technique gave every member of the population an equal chance of being selected into the study.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Creswell (2021) define a questionnaire as “a pre-formulated written set of questions to which set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives”. Questionnaires are mainly used for gathering quantitative data (Rowley, 2014). The current study was descriptive making it explicit for the researcher to adopt the questionnaire as the instrument.

Questionnaires can be in printed or electronic form structured, semi-structured or unstructured, self-administered or electronically delivered (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:363, Bryman & Bell, 2015:169). The current study employed the self-administrated questionnaires. Given a high literacy rate in Zimbabwe, the researcher employed self-administered questionnaires being aware that the respondents could read and write the questionnaire for the study composed of closed ended questions to enable statistical analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The questionnaire had a brief covering letter as a way of introducing the study to the respondent. The letter served to present the purpose of the study, and as such motivated research respondents thereby enhancing the response rate (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The researcher used the "funnel" strategy to questionnaire development when creating the questionnaire. In constructing the instrument, the researcher, according to Saunders *et al.* (2016), first starts with more general level and/or broader questions before focusing on specific questions intended to address the study's particular research questions and objectives.

Section A: Demographical information; **Section B:** Company information; **Section C:** E-commerce strategies; **Section D:** Firm performance.

3.6.2 Interview guides

In this study the researcher used interview guide for the semi-structured interviews with the managers of the retail outlets. The research questions in the interview guide were aligned to the study's objectives (Appendix **B**). The interview guide gave the researcher direction and made sure that all the crucial issues were covered. The interview guide only contained

questions that related to the main study constructs that is: COVID 19 effects, firm performance, e-commerce strategies. The goals of the study served as a guidance for the collection of questions. The researcher made sure that interview guides were kept in a standard format to enable comparisons to be made and at the same time maintaining consistency throughout data analysis (Gliga, 2016).

3.7 Data collection procedure

The researcher personally managed questionnaires by hand-delivering them to the respondents' work-stations. The researcher managed to distribute 291 questionnaires. Data was collected in one month, the whole month of September 2022. The surveys were delivered to respondents with time to complete them. The researcher followed up by phoning participants on various days of the week to remind them to complete the questionnaires. Personal administration of the questionnaires ensured maximum cooperation from the respondents (Saunders et al., 2019).

In order to get a deeper understanding and have an undisturbed flow of communication, the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' work places, in a closed room. During the interview session, the interviewer was flexible and at times departing from the guide giving insight into what the interviewee regarded as relevant in answering the questions (Bryman, 2016). As the interview went on, the researcher took notes, which also made the subject realize that what they had to say mattered. The researcher immediately created a comprehensive record of the interview.

3.8 Data quality

According to Pellisseir (2007) the quality and rigour of research stems from the validity and reliability of the research design. Reliability and validity are the two most important quality measures in research (Saunders & Rojon, 2014). The following sections discusses how reliability and validity were ensured in the study.

Saunders et al. (2016:156) views reliability as "the extent to which data collection technique or analysis techniques yield consistent findings". The fundamental premise of reliability is that research instruments should produce similar results when re-tested on the same people at different times (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, the researcher created the instrument in a way that "instrumentation, data, and findings were controllable, predictable, consistent, and replicable" in order to assure the questionnaire's reliability. (Bell, 2016). Furthermore, the instrument was made complete by standardizing and controlling the environments under

which the data was gathered (Cooper & Schindler, 2017). The instrument was created by the researcher with the goal of making it simple for the respondents to grasp.

A model study was also done ensure to ensure reliability of the instrument. The pilot study was also meant to remove ambiguous questions and simplify wording in the instruments to avoid misinterpretation by the respondents. The questionnaire's internal consistency was checked using the widely used index of Cronbach's Alpha test. The findings are in chapter four.

According to Saunders et al. (2016:157) validity is concerned with "whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about". Sekaran and Bougie (2013:225) concurs and add that validity is a "test of how well an instrument measures the concept it intends to measure".

In order to ensure that the instruments measured the impact of e-commerce on business performance, the researcher carefully planned his research methodology that is sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of the data (Cohen et al., 2007). The researcher followed the scientific approach to research to ensure that the study and its results were valid.

Through the use of triangulation, the study ensured external validity. The entire study effort was also evaluated by the researcher's supervisor and co-workers. The study instrument items were aligned with the theoretical underpinnings in attempt to improve construct validity for the current investigation. In order to ensure content validity, the researcher made sure the study instruments adequately addressed the components of strategy development and the characteristics of financial performance. To determine how well the instrument complies with the standard, the researcher also solicited advice and comments from the supervisor and other postgraduates from the Management of Studies.

3.9 Pilot study

Pilot study involves a small study conducted prior to a larger piece of research (Saunders et al., 2019). Hence, the questionnaire together with the interview guides were tested at a limited scale in Chegutu town using a sample of 20 retail supermarkets. Pilot testing the research instruments helped to identify items that made the respondents feel uncomfortable (Cooper and Schindler, 2017). Furthermore, the pilot study helped to check if all questions tested the variables that were included. Furthermore, the piloting ensured that the researcher gathers enough experience and an enhanced sense of confidence, important for the ensuing

interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The instruments were later refined according to the findings of the pilot study.

3.10 Data analysis

The quantitative data underwent statistical analysis using SPSS version 23. Statistical analysis involves the process of computing certain indices or measures and searching for a pattern of relationships that exist among the groups of data (Kothari, 2009:130). The current study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the collected data (Bhattacharjee, 2012). On the other hand, content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data from interviews.

3.11 Ethical considerations

According to Dich et al. (2013), ethics refers to norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. However, it helps to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in research or professional practice. The following is the explanation of ethical consideration as described by (Wassenaar, 2007), and this was adhered to strictly in the course of conducting this research.

All willing research subjects were fully informed beforehand that the study will not likely cause any damage. Despite the fact that there was no damage, research participants were nonetheless given complete flexibility to share or not share their personal tales in whatever manner they chose.

For the purposes of informed consent, complete and understandable information was provided to research participants so that they may decide to participate in the study voluntarily and in an informed manner. The emphasis was on the participants who were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, understood the nature of the investigation, and were competent to provide consent. A consent form expressing each participant's desire to take part in the research process was also obtained by the researcher.

Saunders et al. (2016) note anonymity of study participants is a fundamental ethical consideration in research. Hence in this study, no identifying information was collected and the researcher assured all the participants that effort will be made to ensure that in the final report the data they would have provided will not be traced. The researcher also used numbers, for instance questionnaires were marked like "Q1" to preserve anonymity of study participants. Q1 meant that it's the first questionnaire to be administered.

In research, informants give their information on the grounds that it will be used in the strictest confidence (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Thus, the researcher had a non-disclosure of information agreement with the study participants. Information on CSR practices, and their firm's performance data was to be kept in strict confidence. The researchers assured the participants that all questionnaires will be kept in a lockable safe.

3.12 Chapter summary

Chapter three presented research methodologies that guided data collection and analysis. Research paradigm, design, the sampling strategy were addressed as well as their justifications in the current study. The data collection method used structured questionnaires with closed ended questions and interviews. The chapter also highlighted the measures adopted to ensure data quality. Since this study was abductive in nature, the researcher adopted the mixed method choice to data analysis. The chapter wrapped with the ethical considerations and measures adopted to improve moral obligations are adhered to. The following chapter, Chapter 4 presents, analyses and discusses the research findings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

Chapter three covered the research methodology employed for the study. This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis, and discussion of the study's empirical results. The SPSS Version 23 and Microsoft Excel was used to analyse the research data. The first section covered the questionnaire response rate followed by the reliability of the instrument. Data was analysed in the order of their appearance in the questionnaire that is from section A to section D. The chapter wraps with the chapter summary.

4.1 Questionnaire response rate

The study had a sample size of 291 managers and administrators of retail supermarkets' key personnel in Harare. Hence, a total of 291 questionnaires were hand delivered to study participants and from this, 250 questionnaires were collected fully completed, yielding a response rate of 85.91 %. This is an acceptable response rate, considering studies of this nature (Saunders et al., 2019). Baruch and Holton (2008) assert that a response rate of 65% is suitable and for a well-designed questionnaire. This study had a response rate of 85.91% - well above the acceptable 65%. This implies that meaningful descriptive and inferential analyses can thus be performed.

4.2 Questionnaire reliability

The study used the Cronbach's alpha as discussed in section 3.8.1, chapter 3. Table 4.1 illustrates that the alpha coefficient values ranged from 0.892 to 0.927, with an average index above 0.907. This demonstrated that questionnaire reliability was high and acceptable.

Table 4. 1: Questionnaire Reliability

SECTION	CONSTRUCT	QUESTIONS	ALPHA VALUE	COMMENT
B	Impact of COVID-19 pandemic	7	0.892	Internally reliable
C	Extent of e-commerce	16	0.927	Internally reliable
D	E-commerce and firm performance	5	0.902	Internally reliable
	Average	28	0.907	Internally reliable

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

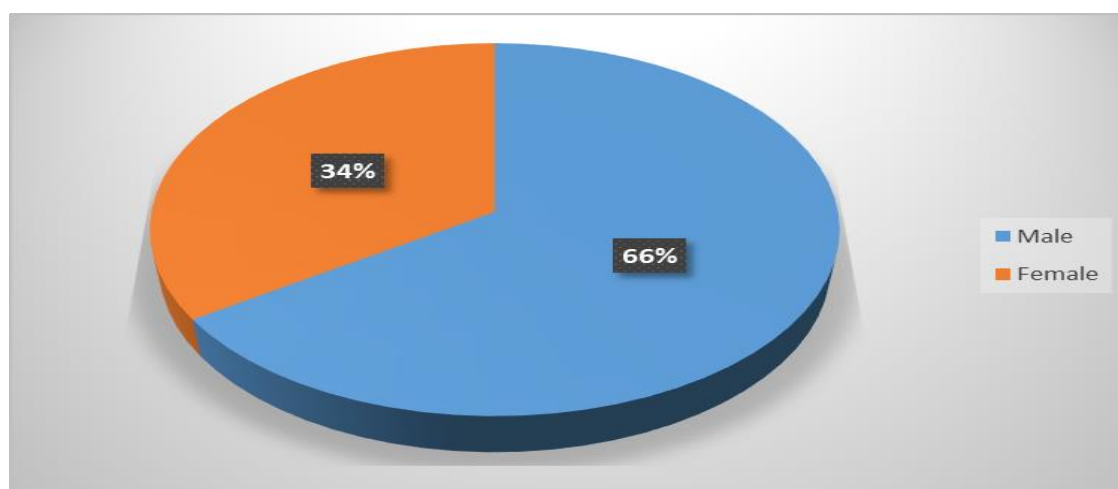
4.3 Demographic data for respondents

The first section solicited for respondents' demographic data. Thus, this section covers results from the first section of the questionnaire.

4.3.1 Gender

Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of study respondents based on their gender. 66% were male while thirty 34% were female. Thus, the study results reveal that the majority of the respondents were males.

Figure 4. 1: Gender distribution



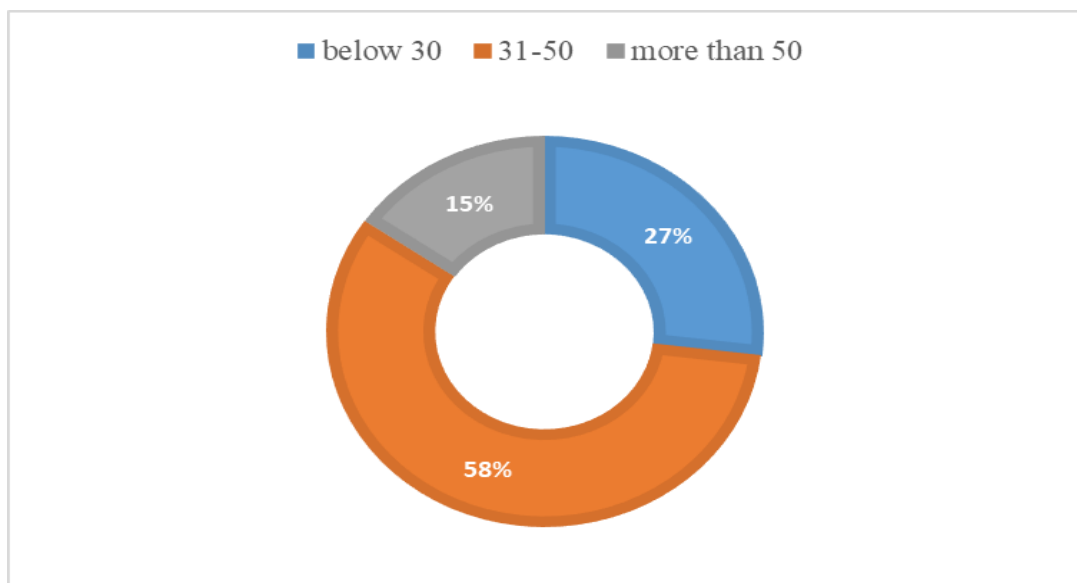
Source: Survey results (2022)

This can be considered a true reflection of the population structure of staff concerning gender in the manufacturing sector. ZIMSTAT (2015) labour statistics in the industrial sector claim that 72% of the workforce are males and 28% are females. This concurs with Dumbu (2014) who observes that they are more male entrepreneurs in Masvingo as compared to females.

4.3.2 Age

The results indicates that 58% of the study respondents were aged between 31 years and 50 years while a few 27% and 15% were aged between below 30 years and 50 years and above respectively. These results are illustrated in figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4. 2: Age distribution



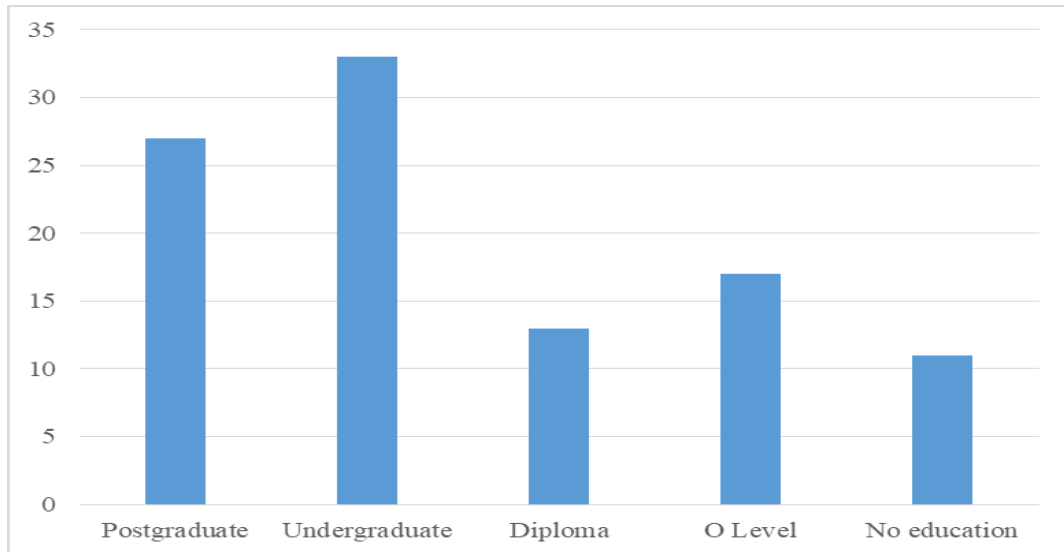
Source: SPSS Output (2022)

This group is considered as the economically active group (Bomani, 2017). However, the results indicate that in Zimbabwe are managed by persons of all ages.

4.3.3 Level of education

The educational level is an important issue in business management (Mashingaidze, 2021). The researcher requested the participants to show their level of education. The results are illustrated in figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4. 3: Level of education



Source: SPSS Output (2022)

Figure 4.3 shows that the study's sample was mainly made up of educated people. It can be noted that the majority of the respondents hold at least a diploma this could imply that these respondents were more responsive as they appreciate the importance of research. It is likely that these people have done research in their previous tertiary education. Findings above illustrate that 12% had no education that is they had either primary education not attended any educational institution.

4.4.1 Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on business performance

This section analyses descriptive data for the seven items on the impact of COVID-19 epidemic on business performance. Analysis of data is done using mean, and standard deviation. The combination of mean, and standard provide a clear picture of description of results.

Table 4. 2: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on business performance

CODE	ITEM	M	SD
B1	Demand of our products was reduced	4.03	1.41
B2	Market share was reduced	4.49	1.12
B3	Supply chains were disrupted	4.27	1.35
B4	Sales revenue were reduced	4.39	1.23
B5	Gross profit was reduced	4.92	0.95
B6	Product availability was very low	3.89	1.53
B7	Customer traffic was reduced	4.39	1.26
	Overall rating	4.21	1.26

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

The influence of e-commerce on financial performance is shown in table 4.7. Item D5 “Our sales revenue has increased ...” received the highest rating (M=3.89; SD=1.36). This reflects those respondents agree that e-commerce enhance daily revenue. On the contrary Item D1 “Our firm is able to meet special customer specification requirements ” had the lowest rating (M=3.21; SD=1.24). Respondents were almost neutral in their feelings towards the impact of e-commerce on cost cutting (M=3.01; SD=1.07).

The overall scale mean \pm SD was 3.54 \pm 1.15 out of a possible 5 indicating that respondents generally consented that e-commerce was very good at enhancing the performance of retail supermarkets in Harare. These results find support in other previous studies that indicate that online selling improves the performance of enterprises (Casillas & Moreno, 2010; Neneh & van Zyl, 2017; Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). For instance, Qtaishat (2015) examined the impact of e-commerce on organizational performance in Jordanian insurance companies and concluded that there are positive attitudes towards E-commerce and those firms with e-commerce applications had enhanced performance. In Bulgaria, Andonov et al. (2021) conducted a study to investigate impact of E-commerce on business performance and concluded that e-commerce has changed the way businesses used to operate and function.

4.4.2 E-commerce implementation

4.4.2.1 Business to Customer communication

The descriptive results for each item used to measure B2B are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4. 3: Business to Customer communication

CODE	ITEM	M	SD
C1	We provide customers with information about our company through the web sites	4.27	0.98
C2	We provide solutions to customers' problems	4.01	1.29
C3	We provide after-sales service to our customers	3.35	1.00
C4	When placing an order, customers can link to other places of interest e.g., referral program	3.54	1.51
	OVERALL RATING	3.79	1.20

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

Table 4.3 above shows that item C1 “We provide customers with information about our company through the web sites” was important to respondents as it had the highest rating (M=4.27; SD=0.98). However, owner/managers placed the least significance on item C3 aspect of proactiveness “We provide after-sales service to our customers” as it scored (M=3.35; SD=1.00). The findings show a grand mean \pm SD of 3.79 \pm 1.20 (agree) out of a possible 5 (strongly agree). This reflects an above average level of agreement on business to customer communication amongst retail supermarkets in Harare. These findings imply that retail supermarkets in Harare have adopted ecommerce to involve their customers through gathering information, purchasing physical goods or information goods: and for information goods, receiving products over an electronic network (Sabou et al., 2017). This is supported by Neneh and van Zyl (2017) who also established that consumers are now actively engaged in extensive IT use before in shopping and communicating with retailers.

4.4.2.2 Business to Customer ordering and payments

The descriptive results for each items used to measure “Business to Customer ordering and payments” are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4. 4: Business to Customer ordering and payments

CODE	ITEM	M	SD
C5	We accept bookings electronically	4.18	0.94
C6	We allow customers to track and inquire about their bookings electronically	3.97	1.06
C7	We accept payments electronically from customers	3.86	1.03
C8	We allow customers to check out electronically	3.52	1.00
	OVERALL RATING	3.88	1.01

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

The study measured the extent of “Business to Customer ordering and payments” using four items, and their mean scores and standard deviations are as illustrated in the Table 4.4 above. The overall item mean \pm SD was 3.88 \pm 1.01 (agree) out of a possible score of 5 (strongly disagree). This is evidence of a high level of agreement to the statements. These results indicates that administrators agreed that customers are using e-commerce means to order and pay for items. Items C5 “We accept bookings electronically” had the greatest mean scores (M=4.18; SD=0.94) indicating that the study respondents placed much significance on this aspect. Item C8 “We allow customers to check out electronically” had the least rating (M=3.52; SD=1.14). This implies that the respondents placed less importance on this aspect.

Generally, these findings imply that retail supermarkets in Harare agree that they are using e-online means of selling their commodities, and customers are able to order and pay online. This is in line with literature that assert that business firms have used innovative technology to impact customer service (Takeddine & Sun, 2015). Recent ICTs empowers customers more than ever as the Internet allows continuous contact with them anytime anywhere (Jesu et al., 2019).

4.4.2.3 Business to Business (B2B) Inbound Communication

The descriptive results for each items used to measure “Business to Business (B2B) Inbound Communication” are presented in Table 4.5

Table 4. 5: Business to Business (B2B) Inbound Communication

CODE	ITEM	M	SD
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C9	We share product and inventory planning information with our suppliers through e-mail	4.13	0.94
C10	We permit suppliers to link up to our database through Enterprise Resource Planning	3.87	1.25
C11	We send suppliers regular updates about new developments of our company	3.45	1.13
C12	We provide specific online information about product specifications that our suppliers must meet through e-mail	3.51	1.17
	OVERALL RATING	3.74	1.12

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

Table 4.5 illustrate that item C9 “We share product and inventory planning information with our suppliers through e-mail”, received the greatest rating (M=4.13; SD=0.94). This implies that respondents strongly agree to share pertinent information and data with their counterparts to enhance performance. Item C11 “We send suppliers regular updates about new developments of our company” had the lowest scoring (M=3.45; SD=1.13). This indicates that respondents were almost impartial in their feelings concerning sending updates on new product development with others. The overall scale mean \pm SD was 3.74 \pm 1.12 out of a possible 5 signifying that respondents agreed that they are involved in communicating with other using online means.

These findings support the claim that businesses use internet or a private network to cut transaction costs and increase efficiencies in the 21st century. Thus, business to business system replaces the old-fashioned bureaucratic procurement process built on phone calls and fax machines and provided substantial cost savings (Azam & Quaddus, 2013). By using the B2B commerce system, firms can sell or trade items and services that are necessary for the production of finished goods or for direct resale, bypassing conventional middlemen.

4.4.2.4 Business to Business (B2B) Outbound Communication

The average mean scores and standard deviation for all the four items of “Business to Business (B2B) Outbound Communication” are illustrated in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4. 6: Business to Business (B2B) Outbound Communication

CODE	ITEM	M	SD
C13	We search and locate potential suppliers on line	3.26	1.68
C14	We always place and track orders with suppliers electronically i.e., online order placement	3.65	1.31
C15	We use on line market places to source suppliers	3.78	1.22
C16	We allow suppliers to submit bids online	3.77	1.03
	OVERALL RATING	3.62	1.31

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

Table 4.6 above illustrate that all the four items of “Business to Business (B2B) Outbound Communication” had an above average mean score. Mean score ranged from 3.26 to 3.78. These results are an indication that “Business to Business (B2B) Outbound Communication” is common practice amongst retail supermarkets in Harare. Interesting to note is that retail supermarkets are use on line market places to source their suppliers. This explains why they are more able to be have a diverse range of products in their wares. In this respect Sabou et al. (2017) note that most B2B applications are in areas of supplier management, inventory management, distribution management, channel management and payment management. This shows that ICT has brought significant transformation to business practices (Janita & Chong, 2013). Apulu & Latham (2018) note that the development of ICT has enabled B2B to use internet as a business tool to obtain greater competitive advantages, capture global markets and increase the efficiency of business transaction processes.

4.5.2.1 E-commerce and firm performance

Table 4.7 shows the descriptive statistics for the relationship between E-commerce and firm performance” amongst retail supermarkets in Harare.

Table 4. 7: E-commerce and firm performance

CODE	ITEM	M	SD
D1	Our firm is able to meet special customer specification requirements.....	3.21	1.24

D2	Our operations are characterised by a high level of integration of information systems in our firm.....	3.58	0.91
D3	Our firm is able to reach wider markets	3.60	1.17
D4	Our firm has cut down costs immensely.....	3.01	1.07
D5	Our sales revenue has increased.....	3.89	1.36
	OVERALL SCORING	3.54	1.15

Source: SPSS Output (2022)

The influence of e-commerce on financial performance is shown in table 4.7. Item D5 “Our sales revenue has increased ...” received the highest rating (M=3.89; SD=1.36). This reflects those respondents agree that e-commerce enhance daily revenue. On the contrary Item D1 “Our firm is able to meet special customer specification requirements” had the lowest rating (M=3.21; SD=1.24). Respondents were almost neutral in their feelings towards the impact of e-commerce on cost cutting (M=3.01; SD=1.07).

The overall scale mean \pm SD was 3.54 \pm 1.15 out of a possible 5 indicating that respondents generally consented that e-commerce was very good at enhancing the performance of retail supermarkets in Harare. These results find support in other previous studies that indicate that online selling improves the performance of enterprises (Casillas & Moreno, 2010; Neneh & van Zyl, 2017; Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). For instance, Qtaishat (2015) examined the impact of e-commerce on organizational performance in Jordanian insurance companies and concluded that there are positive attitudes towards E-commerce and those firms with e-commerce applications had enhanced performance. In Bulgaria, Andonov et al. (2021) conducted a study to investigate impact of E-commerce on business performance and concluded that e-commerce has changed the way businesses used to operate and function.

4.5 Qualitative Results

4.5.1 The effect of Covid 19 on business performance

The first part of the interview sought to elicit for the effect of COVID-19 on the performance of retail supermarkets in Harare. The following were some of the comments made by some of the participants during data collection.

P1:

“It is clear that a lot of the businesses collapsed because of their absence on the marketplaces as all businesses were commanded to close their operations”

P3:

“A lot of the retailers lost their manpower as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic much of them had tacit skills. It would be difficult for these retail firms to replace those workers without a loss of some of their clients.

P6:

“The majority of retailers were paying rentals when in fact they were not in business.....More so customers turned towards buying less expensive commodities alongside the essential goods leading to a decrease in customer loyalty”.

P8:

“Uuum, COVID-19 impacted in a negative way as we experienced a number of challenges....customer traffic reduced, sales declined and profitability was reduced to levels beyond zero”.

P10:

“A lot of the businesses had disrupted business during the pandemic and were failing to manage their costs even though they were small profits”

P12:

“Uuum, COVID-19 has greatly reduced our capacity to make money, calling us to employ capital intensive machinery for online operations.... The lockdowns and social distancing alongside a stay-at-home order prevented consumers from visiting the physical retail stores”

The participant's views illustrates that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected their business. The worst part is that the COVID-19 pandemic led to the shutdown of business activities. The stay-at-home edict, together with the lockdowns and social seclusion, prevented customers from entering the real retail outlets. All the study participants showed that they have suffered losses due to the pandemic, as they were not prepared for the global pandemic.

The findings illustrate that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused formidable operational and sustainability challenges with respect to retail businesses around the world.

This is because most of the retail businesses rely on customer visiting the shops physically. The other participant echoed those customers turned towards buying the essential goods leading to a decrease in customer loyalty. Given this information, it is not surprising to observe that the COVID-pandemic has caused unprecedented economic and health-related negative effects both in developed and developing economies (Sannegadu, 2020).

4.5.2 Organisations using e-commerce during the period COVID

The second part of the second section sought to find out which retail. Thus, study participants were asked if they were using e-commerce applications to source from suppliers and sell their products to customers. They had this to say:

P1:

“Funny as I may sound, I never had prior knowledge regarding trading online in Zimbabwe. However, we tried to be reactive in operating on these online marketplaces, but it was just too late”

P2:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, we had no option but to establish ourselves in the online marketplaces. This is just how the business will be like going forward.”

P5:

“We did not attempt using e-commerce strategies because we had no financial resources to get the equipment and infrastructure that support buying and selling online. Even so, our local markets are not well versed with buying things online”

P7:

“There was no choice but to open online means of selling and buying. It was our first time but we managed to open a very beautiful website with our services and products. It is unfortunate that in the beginning we did not realise much but it’s starting to bear fruits”

P9:

“Previously we were not all that active on social media platforms but on the onset of the pandemic and its lockdown measures instigated, we revived our social media platforms. Hence, to a great extent, we applied e-commerce strategies during the pandemic and we are still doing it”

P12:

“We adopted online methods such as advertising and selling on WhatsApp and Facebook”

It has arisen from the content analysis that many interviewees agreed that they opted for e-commerce applications and strategies in buying, selling their products. However, it was revealed that the majority were caught unaware by the COVID-19 pandemic and some have resorted to simple and inexpensive online ways such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This was a way to sustainability in the COVID-19 pandemic period. These findings validate the quantitative data which showed that the majority of retail supermarkets in Harare are now using online means of selling and buying.

The findings illustrate that e-commerce is a lasting solution that retailers can employ in order to endure the operations in this unpredictable marketing environment (Shafi et al., 2020). The results also show that, given that most business transactions are now completed online, simply and conveniently, adopting an e-commerce strategy is now more crucial than ever. The majority of the businesses were caught unprepared by the COVID-19, and e-commerce was employed as a reactionary strategy.

4.5.3 Performance difference between organizations using e-commerce and those without.

Interviewees were asked whether the use of online ways in doing business has had any performance differences between those using online and those not using online ways of selling/buying. It emerged from the content analysis that many interviewees sounded that retail supermarkets that applied e-commerce are in a better position to perform better than those not employing online means of buying or selling. Notably, the intercepts of the interviewees are captured below as follows:

P1:

“Yes, there is a difference as everything can be done online. We have managed to reach many potential customers and converting them to clients at a lower cost. Instead of incurring huge costs on advertising we simply posted on social media platforms and people responded”

P2:

“We never thought selling online would give us such money, at first we did not get customers as they were sceptical...now our online sales have exceeded our expectations, the budgeted sales. Indeed, online selling in the COVID 19 pandemic was beneficial for us”

P4:

“Our performance has improved, both financially and non-financially....the use of e-commerce strategies have allowed us to trade with customers anytime and wherever they are. However, there is need to harness online and offline means of trading...these have to be balanced. During the pandemic, the online means allowed us to sell more when other shops were closed”

P6:

“We managed to retain the majority of our key and high valued customers because of the online selling and communication platforms. We thought we would completely cease our operations but we just shifted to online means and it's paying off already”

P9:

“Obvious those who compliment offline with online means of selling are better able to make money and acquire more customers than those with brick-and-mortar operations only”

Employing e-commerce tactics is one of the sustainability solutions that retail supermarkets in Zimbabwe implemented throughout the pandemic, as evidenced by the respondents' answers given above. Williams & Kayaoglu (2020), online retails sales began increasing highly following the rise of the pandemic as consumers switched to online shopping. The volume of sales increased due to online retailing. The findings illustrate that those retailers who used

online means of trading had their performance improved. This was validated by Ogundijo et al. (2021) who observed that online well-established retailing companies in the supermarket sector could benefit from the few demands available.

The findings also illustrate that this was because they were able to reach many customers and sell or buy anytime of the day. More so, retailers were able to create and strengthen their relationships with key customers using online social media platforms, a thing that could have suffered during the pandemic had they totally ceased their operations. Davey (2018) notes that with online retailing, consumers are given an opportunity to select and purchase the desired products anytime. Findings from Sayyida et al. (2021) also support empirical evidence as they concluded that online retail sales in the United Kingdom increased by 5.7% from the previous year to 27.5% in 2020 while Jung and Jeon (2021) note that there was an increase in online sales than physical retail stores sales.

4.5.4 Recommendations on the use of online strategies in commercial transactions during unprecedented times.

Interviewees were asked to give their recommendations on the use of e-commerce by retailers in Zimbabwe during unprecedented times. Notably some of the quotes interview quotes are captured below as follows:

P2:

“Post-COVID-19 pandemics, the retailers have no option but to establish themselves in the online marketplaces. This is just how the business will be like going forward.”

P5:

“Well, even the ministry on behalf of the government needs to create an online market for businesses. There is need for a policy on online marketing in Zimbabwe. This is because the online markets are the only way to remain sustainable and competitive in the business”

P7:

“We need serious education for the public regarding online marketing. It is disheartening that the youths are the majority of the people who are plying trade in this sector but they seem to be not knowledgeable of these platforms”

P10

“One way of promoting the sustainability of the Zimbabwean retail players in the post-COVID-19 period is to ensure the usage of technology so as to reach out and attract a lot of clients. Technology does create an opportunity that retailers can take advantage of which ensure that they enhance their efficiency as well as reach more customers”

One of the sustainability measures in the Zimbabwean retail grocery industry during and after the COVID-19 era is technological innovation, as shown in the above conclusions from the interviewees. This is buttressed by Makanyeza & Dzvuke (2015) who recognised that innovations can ensure the business continuity in Zimbabwe. The results show that, in the post-COVID-19 era, retailers in Zimbabwe could join an online marketplace as a sustainable approach to acquire a competitive advantage in selling. Sibanda et al. (2018) concluded that businesses need to add an online platform and embrace it as the panacea to the majority of their problems over the COVID-19 pandemic. Shafi et al. (2020) stressed that e-commerce is a sustainability strategy at the disposal of retailers given the prominence of the global economy in the 21st century. However, the participants called for the government to assist in the development of an online marketing policy so that the parties to transactions are protected from any dangers that may arise in the process of trading. In addition to that, the participants also requested the government to educate the general population on e-commerce as the only new normal today.

The sections that came before this one presented the conclusions of the qualitative and quantitative data. In fact, COVID-19 had a disastrous impact on the operations and performance of the retail supermarkets in Zimbabwe, according to both the quantitative and qualitative findings. Both quantitative and qualitative findings show that both financial (sales revenue and gross profit) and non-financial performance (demand of our products, market share, supply chains disruption, customer satisfaction, flexibility, service quality customer traffic and operating hours) were greatly reduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, qualitative findings indicate that the majority of the retailers adopted e-commerce trading that

is online buying and selling, advertising on social media, e-ordering and e-payments. The qualitative findings illustrate that those organisations using e-commerce have better performance as compared to those which are not employing e-commerce in their business. This was due to the advantages and benefits of online trading such as 24/7 operations, richness and availability.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented results of the study. The chapter presented the socio-demographic descriptive statistics, the correlation between E-commerce dimensions and performance and tested the study hypotheses set in Chapter One. Qualitative data from interviews were also presented and discussed in this chapter. The discussion was based on the objectives of the study. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendation of the study based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four presented, analysed, and discussed data collected from small scale retailers in Beitbridge. Chapter five represents the final chapter of the dissertation report. It covers summary of findings, conclusions and study's implications. The chapter also covers the recommendations. The chapter wraps with the limitations of the study and areas for further study.

5.2 Summary of the study findings

5.2.1 Impact of COVID 19 on business performance

The first objective aimed at establishing the effect of Covid 19 on business performance in Harare CBD. The findings of the study established that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected their business. The worst part is that the COVID-19 pandemic led to the shutdown of business activities. The stay-at-home edict, together with the lockdowns and social seclusion, prevented customers from entering the real retail outlets. All the study participants showed that they have suffered losses due to the pandemic, as they were not prepared for the global pandemic. More so, it was found that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused formidable operational and sustainability challenges with respect to retail businesses around the world.

5.2.2 Organisations using e-commerce during the period COVID

The second objective of the second study sought to find out which retail outs used e-commerce in their business. The findings of the study illustrated that many respondents opted for e-commerce applications and strategies in buying, selling their products. This was despite being caught unaware by the COVID-19 pandemic and some have resorted to simple and inexpensive online ways such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Findings show that the majority of retail supermarkets in Harare are now using online means of selling and buying.

5.2.3 Performance difference between organizations using e-commerce and those without.

The findings of the study shows that retail supermarkets that applied e-commerce are in a better position to perform better than those not employing online means of buying or selling. More so, the volume of sales increased due to online retailing. The findings illustrate that those

retailers who used online means of trading had their performance improved. The findings also illustrate that this was because they were able to reach many customers and sell or buy anytime of the day. More so, retailers were able to create and strengthen their relationships with key customers using online social media platforms, a thing that could have suffered during the pandemic had they totally ceased their operations.

5.2.4 Recommendations on using e-commerce strategies

The final objective aimed at finding recommendations on the use of e-commerce by retailers in Zimbabwe during unprecedented times. The results show that, in the post-COVID-19 era, retailers in Zimbabwe could join an online marketplace as a sustainable approach to acquire a competitive advantage in selling. However, the participants called for the government to assist in the development of an online marketing policy so that the parties to transactions are protected from any dangers that may arise in the process of trading. In addition to that, the participants also requested the government to educate the general population on e-commerce as the only new normal today.

5.3 Conclusions

5.3.1 Conclusion 1

Thus, the study concludes that the lockdown restrictions coupled with social distancing significantly disrupted consumer behaviour, product demand, retail store, and factory and logistics services availability.

5.3.2 Conclusion 2

The study concludes that e-commerce is a lasting solution that retailers can employ in order to endure the operations in unpredictable marketing environment.

5.3.3 Conclusion 3

The study concludes that retail supermarkets need to adopt e-commerce to enhance their performance during difficult times. Therefore, service operations will be improved, operational expenses will be decreased, and profit levels will be improved if organizations in Zimbabwe adopt and implement e-commerce.

5.3.4 Conclusion 4

The study concludes that innovations in retailing can ensure the business continuity, especially in the Zimbabwean environment. In order to obtain a competitive edge in trading, the study

advises Zimbabwean retailers to join an online marketplace as a viable strategy in the post-COVID-19 era.

5.4 Recommendations

The following suggestions are offered in order for retail businesses in Zimbabwe to leverage e-commerce to further enhance their performance:

- They should step up their social media marketing campaigns to increase client knowledge of and interest in e-commerce while also giving them access to proper online security.
- The right usage of e-commerce software should be taught to staff by retailers so that they can increase productivity, customer base, and performance.
- The government should put into place policies and practices through the appropriate line ministries to foster an environment that is favourable for e-commerce. Both customers and businesses must be protected by the policy environment that is developed.

5.5 Theoretical and practical implications

5.5.1 Managerial implications

The prevailing dynamic business environment driven by globalization challenges how retailers conceptualize e-commerce to enhance their both financial and non-financial performance. In the contemporary context of marketing, unlike in the past, enterprises now have no choice of either adopting e-commerce or not since the operating environment has created more opportunities for them to enhance their competitiveness. Thus, the survival challenge is to formulate online marketing strategies that enhance performance as induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Retailers need however to combine traditional and modern online marketing strategies.

5.5.2 Practical implications

As the study underscored that COVID-19 induced lockdowns negatively affected business performance, it is recommended that retail marketers enhance their sales and reach through online marketing strategies. This is important because shoppers have difficulties in accessing the shops physically. It is also hoped that the e-commerce strategies adopted by retailers enhance people's awareness and loyalty. Retailers are advised to lobby and work with the Government of Zimbabwe through the CCZ so that a more security tight and robust e-commerce environment can be created. Marketers should also come up with aggressive marketing programmes that seek to educate Zimbabwean consumers of their rights and

responsibilities in the online market place. Thus, this can be achieved through social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp).

5.6 Limitations of the study

The cross-sectional nature of the research study restricted the determination of the four e-commerce strategies and performance of retail enterprises. The mitigation measure to this is that the researcher focused on more than one specific sector (retail) in order to obtain uniform results that can be generalised across the country. Time was limited in conducting the study. The researcher included all the study constructs to get comprehensive results that would give a fair picture of the relationship between the study variables. To address this, the researcher also collected data using interviews to confirm what he had found through questionnaires.

5.7 Areas for further study

Firstly, future investigators need to examine at barriers and driving forces for retailers in adopting e-commerce. Future academics will need to conduct long-term studies to produce thorough conclusions about the connection between e-commerce adoption and performance. More so, future researchers need to consider looking at e-commerce adoption in the manufacturing industry and its influence to firm performance.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction

My name is Rofunwa Thabiso Muleya (m215793) and I am a student at the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU). In partial fulfilment of my study programme, I am required to carry out a study in a business-related field. So, I am kindly asking for your participation in my research through completing this questionnaire. The findings of this research will benefit your organization to enhance its performance through entrepreneurial marketing. My study topic is **“The influence of use of e-commerce on performance of large retail organisations: during COVID-19 pandemic: A comparative study of businesses in Harare”**

This questionnaire is divided into four sections that is Section A, Section B, Section C and Section D. On average it will take 15 to 20 minutes to answer this questionnaire. The information gathered will be used for academic purposes and also do not provide your name on this questionnaire. This is a measure to ensure that the opinions you express as part of this research are confidential.

General Instructions

1. Place ticks in the boxes or spaces provided to indicate your response. You can also write where the spaces are provided.
2. Be free to express your sincere views as this survey is for academic purposes. There are no wrong or right answers.

SECTION A

A1	Gender	Male	Female
		1	2

A2	Age	18-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	Above 60 years
		1	2	3		4

A3	Level of Education	O level	Diploma	Degree	Masters	PhD
		1	2	3	4	5

A5	Experience	Below 2 years	2-5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	20+ years
		1	2	3	4	5

SECTION B: IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FIRM PERFORMANCE

The questions below are about the extent to which your supermarket uses E-Commerce. Please indicate your response by a tick to the answer that best indicates the extent of EC usage in the supermarket: 1-Strongly disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Undecided; 4-Agre; 5-Strongly agree.

	COVID 19 and business performance	1	2	3	4	5
B1	Demand of our products was reduced					
B2	Market share was reduced					
B3	Supply chains were disrupted					
B4	Sales revenue were reduced					
B5	Gross profit was reduced					
B6	Product availability was very low					
B7	Customer traffic was reduced					

SECTION C: EXTENT OF E-COMMERCE

The questions below are about the extent to which your supermarket uses E-Commerce. Please indicate your response by a tick to the answer that best indicates the extent of EC usage in the supermarket: Never = not used at all; Rarely = use once or twice a year; Sometimes = once a month Regularly = several times a month; Always = use all the time

	Business to Customer communication	1	2	3	4	5
C1	We provide customers with information about our company through the web sites					
C2	We provide solutions to customers' problems					
C3	We provide after-sales service to our customers					
C4	When placing an order, customers can link to other places of interest e.g., Referral program					

	Business to Customer ordering and payments	1	2	3	4	5
C5	We accept bookings electronically					
C6	We allow customers to track and inquire about their bookings electronically					
C7	We accept payments electronically from customers					
C8	We allow customers to check out electronically					

	Business to Business (B2B) Inbound Communication	1	2	3	4	5
C9	We share product and inventory planning information with our suppliers through e-mail					
C10	We permit suppliers to link up to our database through Enterprise Resource Planning					

C11	We send suppliers regular updates about new developments of our company					
C12	We provide specific online information about product specifications that our suppliers must meet through e-mail					

	Business to Business (B2B) Outbound Communication	1	2	3	4	5
C13	We search and locate potential suppliers on line					
C14	We always place and track orders with suppliers electronically i.e., online order placement					
C15	We use on line market places to source suppliers					
C16	We allow suppliers to submit bids online					

SECTION D: E-COMMERCE AND FIRM PERFORMANCE

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below by ticking (√) the number corresponds to your answer. (Please note that 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral 4 = Agree; 5 = strongly agree)

	E-COMMERCE AND FIRM PERFORMANCE	1	2	3	4	5
D1	Our firm is able to meet special customer specification requirements					
D2	Our operations are characterised by a high level of integration of information systems in our firm					
D3	Our firm is able to reach wider markets					
D4	Our firm has cut down costs immensely					
D5	Our sales revenue has increased					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSES

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

My name is Rofunwa Thabiso Muleya (m215793) and I am a student at the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU). I am conducting a study on the topic **“The effect of using e-commerce on performance of large retail organisations: during COVID-19 pandemic: A comparative study of businesses in Harare”** Your responses will inform the study in developing on the use of online strategies in commercial transactions during unprecedented times in Zimbabwe. Please take note that you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the interview at any time with no negative consequence. Your answers will be treated with confidentiality. All responses will remain anonymous. May you allow me about 20-30 minutes of your time to ask you a few questions?

Questions

- How did Covid 19 affect your business?
- Did you adopt e-commerce during the COVID-19 period? If **YES**, can you identify the e-commerce approaches you were using? If **NO**, explain why?
- What are the benefits of using e-commerce in doing business?
- Do you believe that those organisations which adopt e-commerce perform better than those without online means of transacting? If yes, explain how? If no, explain why?
- What do you recommend can be done to enhance e-commerce during difficult times like those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic?

I appreciate the time you took for this interview.

