THE EFFECT OF GROWTH STRATEGIES ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF TOUR OPERATOR FIRMS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Despite developing countries having the potential for e-commerce development, they are still lagging behind the developed countries. Kenya is ranked the third country in Africa with the highest internet penetration rate. However, slow consumer uptake has rendered to the closure of a number of online retailing services. In addition, according to a consumer report by the US. Commercial Service for Export, out of the estimated 40.5 million internet users, only about 5% of Kenyan consumers make online purchases. This study therefore sought to establish the influence of customer preferences on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County. Specifically, the study sought to establish the effect of product preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya, assess the effect of Brand preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City Count, Kenya, determine the effect of price preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya and to establish the effect of quality preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This study used a descriptive research design. The unit of observation was 234 respondents comprising of senior employees working in -commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County and the consumers depending on online products. The study used stratified random sampling to select 107 respondents from the target population. This study used both primary and secondary data. To collect primary data, this study used semi-structured questionnaires. Pilot test was also conducted to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The study used descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis. This was done with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program version 22. The study results were presented through use of tables and figures. The study found that product preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. In addition, the study found that brand preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Further, the study found that price preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study found that quality preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This study therefore recommends that the management of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County should put in consideration the aspects of content, designation and packaging when coming up with their products. In addition, the management of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County should effective promotional Scheme practices as well as product advertisement.

Key Words: Growth Strategies, Competitiveness, Tour Operator Firms

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancement and internet development have significantly contributed to more comfortable and innovative services. The e-commerce industry has become tough and full of competition. Technologies and the internet reduce barriers of penetration into new markets. Social media, which is a vivid example of internet development, has already penetrated the e-commerce industry. However, the business environment is rapidly changing and requires constant analysis to anticipate prospective threats or opportunities (Tchelidze,2019). Evolution of the internet facilitated the development of various business platforms. Shopping has always been one of the mainstream activities and one of the most profitable businesses. Digitalization has contributed to more flexible and comfortable ways of shopping. Moreover, globalization reduced obstacles related to trade and shipment (Akman, & Rehan, 2015).

The UK is the county of origin for e-commerce, where the expansion allowed for dynamic development. In the United Kingdom, e-commerce sales started growing in 2004, and in comparison to other sectors, e-commerce reached growth six times faster. As claimed, the growth of the market is closely related to the broadband connection, and it is considered to be one of the main reasons for its attractiveness. (Combe, 2012) Global share of Electronic Commerce is estimated to grow from 7.4% to 15.5%, which means that by 2021 global share of the industry will be doubled. Around 1.66 billion people from different countries shopped from online stores in 2017. Moreover, e-retail sales reached 2.3 trillion U.S. dollars in the same year globally. As expected, the growth of the sales will continue, and it is anticipated that the number by 2021 will be 4.48 trillion U.S. dollars. (Statista, 2018)

Amazon has become the leading online retailer company in the United States. The company received almost 232.89 billion U.S. dollars in 2018 in net profit. Revenues were mostly generated from e-retail sales of different products, included third-party seller revenues and subscription services. Amazon's Net Sales Revenue increased by 55.02 billion dollars in one year. In comparison, in 2004, the company's profit was just 6.92 billion US dollar. As can be seen, e-commerce is becoming more and more attractive to customers, and the industry profit is increasing substantially. (Statista, 2019)

Despite many advantages of e-commerce and online retailing, online business is challenging and has its disadvantages. According to Parolini, (1999), the success of e-commerce is concerned with appropriate objective and strategy. Online shopping poses several challenges for online shoppers and retailers. It is extremely important to consider hidden costs while shopping online. Hidden costs may refer to shipping costs, restocking fees and warranties. Besides, the estimation of the appropriate delivery time is often challenging for companies and freight forwarders. Sometimes, delivery of the item comes with extra charges which cause customer dissatisfaction. This study therefore seeks to establish the influence of customer preferences on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County.

Statement of the Problem
E-commerce readiness differs between countries thus its benefits are not equally distributed. For example, the USA followed by Europe have the largest share with about 79% global e-commerce revenue while Africa and Middle Eastern region, have the smallest share with about 3% global e-commerce revenue (Alqahtani et al., 2012). Despite developing countries having the potential for e-commerce development, they are still lagging behind the developed countries. Kenya is ranked the third country in Africa with the highest internet penetration rate (after Mauritius and Nigeria) and with a vibrant ICT sector. Kenya boasts of 40.5 million internet users and a penetration rate

of 89.4% (CAK, 2017). Fiber optic networks also continue to grow with increased network subscriptions. Despite Kenya being the third leading country in Africa in terms of ICT and internet users, it was ranked 114th place in the UNCTAD's B2C E-commerce index globally (UNCTAD, 2015). It was ranked after Mauritius (54th place), South Africa at (67th place), Egypt (68th), Tunisia (74th) and Morocco at (75th place). According to UNCTAD (2015) countries with higher internet penetration thresholds are expected to have higher ecommerce adoption rates. However, in cases where the anticipated does not occur, UNCTAD suggests that other inhibiting factors should be identified when developing e-commerce.

Highly internet connected countries are expected to have higher percentages of online shoppers. However, this is not the case in Kenya, there are concerns that e-commerce is being deterred by relatively slow uptake by the consumers. Businesses in Kenya have made efforts towards adopting online trading with an adoption rate of 39% by firms (Alghamdi, & Jones, 2018). However, slow consumer uptake has rendered to the closure of a number of online retailing services (Akman, & Rehan, 2015). In addition, according to a consumer report by the US. Commercial Service for Export (2016) out of the estimated 40.5 million internet users, only about 5% of Kenyan consumers make online purchases. Little has been done to investigate the influence of customer preferences on performance of e-commerce retail firms. To fill the highlighted gaps the current study seeks to establish the influence of customer preferences on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County.

Objectives of the Study

i. To establish the effect of product preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya
ii. To assess the effect of Brand preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City Count, Kenya
iii. To determine the effect of price preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya
iv. To establish the effect of quality preference on performance of e-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Modern Portfolio Theory was developed by Harry Markowitz in 1952 (Markowitz, 1952).The theory explains how investors who are disinclined to risk can come up with portfolios that maximize profit with a given level of market risk and stressing that risk is an essential part of a bigger profit. The theory is of the opinion that it is possible to attain a maximum amount of portfolio profit, for a given level of risk. An important knowledge provided by the theory is that the returns of an investment and risks should not be viewed alone, but should be evaluated based on how the investments affects the overall portfolio risk and return.

The new approach presented in this article included portfolio formation by considering the expected rate of return and risk of individual stocks and, crucially, their interrelationship as measured by correlation. Prior to this investors would examine investments individually, build up portfolios of attractive stocks, and not consider how they related to each other. Markowitz showed how it might be possible to better of these simplistic portfolios by taking into account the correlation between the returns on these stocks
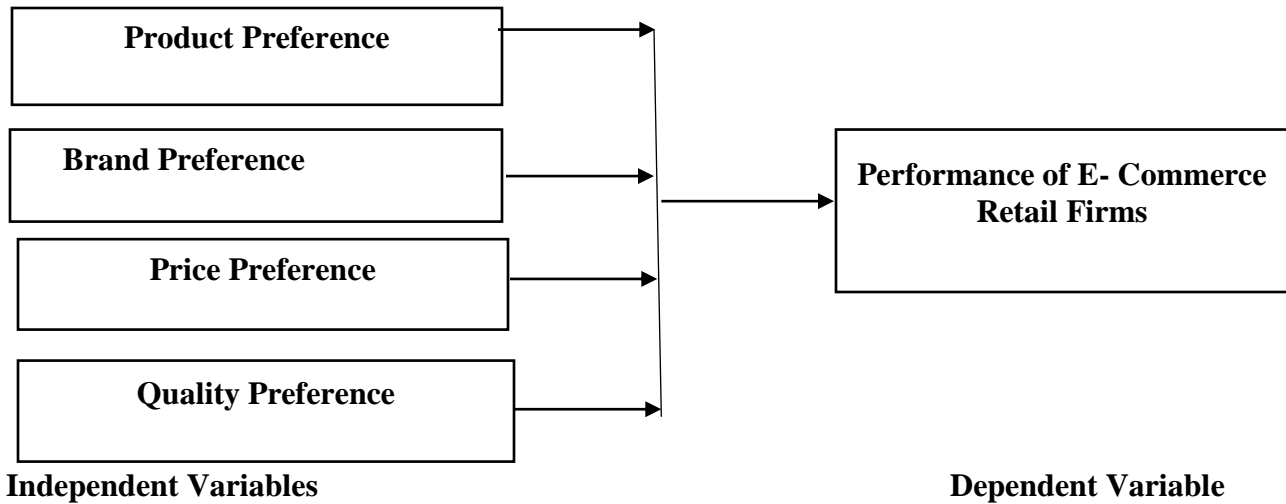
Social exchange theory was developed by George Homans, a sociologist. It first appeared in his essay "Social Behavior as Exchange," in 1958. Social exchange theory is used to reproduce the results of procedural and distributive justice in supply chain relationships. This study will use Social Exchange Theory to determine the influence of customer relationship on performance of supply chain management in seed manufacturing companies in Kenya.. Social exchange theory is based on the concept of individuals or groups interacting due to the expectation of rewards and the avoidance of penalties or punishment (Emerson, 1987; Bandura, 1986). Increased competition has focused attention on the development of policies to build effective on-going relationships with customers and managing those alliances (Hult, 1998). A basic tenet of supply chain management is that on-going relationships among supply chain members and especially with customers increases efficiency and effectiveness (Choi and Hartley, 1996; Shin et al., 2000).

The advantage of taking a social exchange perspective is due to the fact that customer relationship management has a strong impact on supply chain processes, alliances and firm performance (Srinivasan *et al.,* 2017). Social Exchange Theory is composed of a series of propositions outlining the system of social exchange. A fundamental proposition of this theory is that for all actions taken, if an action is rewarded, more likely a member to an exchange is to perform that action again (Wu *et al.,* 2018). Social exchange theory argues that individuals or groups adepts to form contact with others for the expectation of a reward (Yang et al., 2018). Based on the social exchange theory a business network may be seen as a type of exchange network (Blakenburg & Johanson, 1992), and can be defined as a set of interconnected exchange relationships (Prenkert & Hallen, 2006).

Venkatesh, *et al* (2003), developed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) Theory by putting together eight technology acceptance models which include Theory of Planned Behavior, Socio-Cognitive Theory Diffusion of Innovations, Theory of Reasoned Action, Motivation Model, Technology Acceptance Model and Model of Personal Computer (PC). This theory tries to explain user objectives in terms of technology and their behavior. Baihaqi (2016) adopted this theory in a research he carried out on adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) in supply chain firms in Kenya. Chen *et al.* (2016) also adopted this theory in a study on Influence of information sharing system on employee retention in multinational corporations in Nairobi County.

The Diffusion of Innovation theory was developed by Rodgers in 1962. The theory offers an explanation as to how, why and at what rate innovations and technologies spread in a social system (Rodgers, 1962). The theory is concerned with new products and ideas or perceived new ideas and their rate of adoption. Rodgers (1983) identifies an innovation-decision process through which individuals pass through in adopting an innovation: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. In the knowledge stage, an individual realizes and acknowledges the existence of an innovation. Persuasion stage takes place when an individual develops a positive or negative attitude towards and innovation. In this stage, an individual's perception is influenced by the characteristics associated with the new product.

Conceptual Framework

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Product Preference     │──────────────┐
└─────────────────────────┘              │
                                          ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Brand Preference      │─────▶│  Performance of E- Commerce │
└─────────────────────────┘      │      Retail Firms          │
┌─────────────────────────┐      └─────────────────────────┘
│     Price Preference     │─────▶
└─────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Quality Preference    │──────────────┘
└─────────────────────────┘
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Independent Variables   **Dependent Variable**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive research design. Descriptive research involves obtaining information about a current status of a phenomenon in order to describe 'what exists' in relation to conditions and variables in a situation (Bhattacherjee, 2012). According to Creswell (2014), descriptive design is a method of collecting information by administering questionnaires and interviews, it is focused on the respondent's views. This design is ideal as it provides room for feasible evaluation of the results

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The sample size for this study was 107 and it comprised of employees of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The researcher distributed 107 questionnaires to the respondents by the researcher during data collection process and 101 were fully filled and returned toithe researcher. Thus, the response rate of was 94.7%. Kothari (2012) argues that a response rate which is more than 50% is considered adequate while excellent response rate is usually above 70%. This implies that the response rate in this research is good for making conclusions as well as recommendations.

Descriptive Analysis of the Variables of the Study

Product Preference

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the effect of product preference on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to rate various statements on product preference and performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. A 5 point Likert scale was used where 1 symbolized no extent, 2 symbolized little extent, 3 symbolized moderate extent, 4 symbolized great extent and 5 symbolized very great extent. The results were as presented in Table 1.

From the results, the respondents agreed that E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This is shown by a mean of 4.284 (std. dv = 0.072). In addition, with a mean of 4.218 (std. dv = 0.182). The respondents agreed that the Product preference assist in improving the market share of the firms. Further, the respondents agreed that Packaging increases the market share of the E-commerce retail firms. This is shown by a mean of 3.999 (std. dv = 0.234). The

respondents also agreed that Designation enables the organization to improve on customer satisfaction. This is shown by a mean of 3.928 (std. dv = 0.237).

Table 1: Product Preference and Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Content affects the profitability of E-commerce retail firms	3.565	0.083
Designation enables the organization to improve on customer satisfaction	3.928	0.234
Packaging increases the market share of the E-commerce retail firms	3.999	0.234
Product preference is key in enhancing performance of firms	4.284	0.072
Product preference assist in improving the market share of the firms	4.218	0.182
Aggregate	**3.809**	**0.210**

Brand Preference

The second specific objective of the study was to establish the influence of brand preference on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to rate various statements on brand preference and performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. A 5 point Likert scale was used where 1 symbolized no extent, 2 symbolized little extent, 3 symbolized moderate extent, 4 symbolized great extent and 5 symbolized very great extent. The results were as presented in Table 2.

From the results, the respondents agreed that Advertisement of products promotes the market share of the organization. This is shown by a mean of 3.928 (std. dv = 0.237). In addition, with a mean of 3.905 (std. dv = 0.22). The respondents agreed that Availability of product enhances the profitability of E-commerce retail firms. Further, the respondents agreed that Effective promotional scheme enhances the performance of organization. This is shown by a mean of 3.886 (std. dv = 1.063). The respondents also agreed that Brand preferences enhances profitability of the firm. This is shown by a mean of 3.905 (std. dv = 0.022).

Table 2: Brand Preference

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Availability of product enhances the profitability of E-commerce retail firms	3.905	0.022
Effective promotional scheme enhances the performance of organization	3.886	1.063
Advertisement of products promotes the market share of the organization.	3.928	0.237
Brand preferences enhances profitability of the firm	3.811	0.220
Brand preference facilitates the satisfaction the product	3.763	0.180
Aggregate	**3.881**	**0.171**

Price Preference

The third specific objective of the study was to determine the effect of price preference on of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to rate various statements on price preference and performance in of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi

City County, Kenya. A 5-point Likert scale was used where 1 symbolized no extent, 2 symbolized little extent, 3 symbolized moderate extent, 4 symbolized great extent and 5 symbolized very great extent. The results were as presented in Table 3.

From the results, the respondents agreed that Affordability of products is critical in enhancing customer satisfaction. This is shown by a mean of 4.218 (std. dv = 0.182). In addition, with a mean of 3.818 (std. dv = 0.333). The respondents agreed that Consumer budget is key in improving the performance of the firm. Further, the respondents agreed that Social class affects the customer satisfaction. This is shown by a mean of 3.683 (std. dv = 0.381). The respondents also agreed that Price preference affects market share of the organization. This is shown by a mean of 3.824 (std. dv = 0.103). With a mean of 3.912 (std. dv = 0.338). The respondents agreed that Price preference enhances performance of E-retail firms in Nairobi City County.

Table 3 Price Preference

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affordability of products is critical in enhancing customer satisfaction	4.12	0.182
Consumer budget is key in improving the performance of the firm	3.818	0.338
Social class affects the customer satisfaction	3.683	0.208
Price preference affects market share of the organization	3.824	0.103
Price preference enhances performance of E-retail firms in Nairobi City County	3.912	0.381
Aggregate	**3.897**	**0.612**

Quality Preference

The fourth specific objective of the study was to determine the effect of quality preference on E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to rate various statements on quality preference and performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. A 5 point Likert scale was used where 1 symbolized no extent, 2 symbolized little extent, 3 symbolized moderate extent, 4 symbolized great extent and 5 symbolized very great extent. The results were as presented in Table 4.

From the results, the respondents agreed that Durability enhances the of customer satisfaction. This is shown by a mean of 4.027 (std. dv = 0.255). In addition, with a mean of 3.855 (std. dv = 0.072). The respondents agreed that Design affects the performance of E-commerce retails firms in Nairobi City County. Further, the respondents agreed that Quality Preference affects the performance of organizations. This is shown by a mean of 3.912 (std. dv = 0.381). The respondents also agreed that Design affects the performance of E-commerce retails firms in Nairobi City County. This is shown by a mean of 3.855 (std. dv = 0.066). With a mean of 3.813 (std. dv = 0.075). The respondents agreed that Conformance enhances market share of the organization

Table 4 Quality Preference

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Design affects the performance of E-commerce retails firms in Nairobi City County	3.855	0.066
Durability enhances the of customer satisfaction	4.027	0.255
Conformance enhances market share of the organization	3.813	0.075
Quality Preference is enhancing the profitability of the firm	3.691	0.079
Quality Preference affects the performance of organizations	3.912	0.381
Aggregate	**3.897**	**0.256**

Correlation Analysis

This research adopted Pearson correlation analysis determine how the dependent variable (performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya) relates with the independent variables (product preference, brand preference, price preference and quality preference). The results were as depicted in Table 5.

As illustrated in table 4.6, product preference has a positive and significant association with performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County (r=0.884, p value =0.000). The p-value (0.000) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the association significant. The results are in agreement with Agarwal and Narayana (2020) findings that product affects performance.

Further, the results show that brand preference has a positive and significant influence on performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County (r=0.843, p value=0.000). The p-value (0.000) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the association significant. The results are in agreement with the findings of Msemwa, Ruoja and Kazungu (2017) that brand preference has a positive and significant influence on performance

The results further revealed that price preference has a positive and significant influence on performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County (r=0.843, p value=0.000). The p-value (0.000) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the association significant. The findings are in line with those of Wachiuri, Waiganjo and Oballah (2015) who revealed that e-price has positive and significant influence on performance.

Furthermore, the results revealed that quality preference has a positive and significant association with performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County (r=0.773, p value=0.0000). The p-value (0.000) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the association significant. The findings concur with those of Dalvi and Kant (2018) who found that quality assurance has a positive and significant influence on performance

Correlation Coefficients

		Performance	Product preference	Brand preference	Price preference	Quality preference
Performance	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	101				
Product preference	Pearson Correlation	.884	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002				
	N	101	101			
Brand preference	Pearson Correlation	.773	.097	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.187			
	N	101	101	101		
Price preference	Pearson Correlation	.843	.274	108	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.071	.171		
	N	101	101	101	101	
Quality preference	Pearson Correlation	.843	.167	.274	108	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.087	.071	.171	
	N	101	101	101	101	101

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

Regression Analysis

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.931[a]	.868	.869	.16355

Table 5 Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	75.222	4	18.806	78.36	.001[b]
	Residual	6.875	96	.24		
	Total	310.097	100			

Table 6 Regression of Beta Coefficient and Significance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.779	0.119		6.546	0.002
	Product preference	0.314	0.071	0.304	4.423	0.004
	Brand preference	0.176	0.072	0.171	2.444	0.001
	Price preference	0.261	0.070	0.257	3.729	0.003
	Quality preference	0.245	0.079	0.243	3.101	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: performance

The research used analysis of variance to determine if the model was good fit for the data. As depicted in table 4, the F calculated was 78.36 which is higher than the F critical value which was 2.404. Besides, the p value was 0.001 which is less than the significant level of 0.05. This implies that the model was a good fit for the data hence can be used to show the impact of independent variables (product preference, brand preference, price preference and quality preference) on the dependent variable (performance).

The results revealed that product preference has a positive and significant effect on performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya (β_1=0.771, p value= 0.004). The p-value (0.004) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the relationship significant. The results are in agreement with Agarwal and Narayana (2020) findings that product preference affects performance.

In addition, the results revealed that brand preference positively and significantly influence performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya (β_2= 0.176, p value= 0.001). The p-value (0.001) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the relationship significant. The results are in agreement with the findings of Msemwa, Ruoja and Kazungu (2017) that brand preference has a positive and significant influence on performance.

Furthermore, the results revealed that price preference has positive and significant influence on performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya (β_3=0.261, p value=0.003). The p-value (0.003) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the relationship significant. The findings are in line with those of Wachiuri, Waiganjo and Oballah (2015) who revealed that price preference has positive and significant influence on performance.

The results revealed that quality preference has a positive and significant influence on in performance in E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya (β_3=0.245, p value= 0.001). The p-value (0.001) was less than the significant level 0.05 hence making the relationship significant. The findings concur with those of Dalvi and Kant (2018) who found that quality preference has a positive and significant influence on performance.

Conclusion

The study concludes that product preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings revealed that content, designation and packaging influences performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

In addition, the study concludes that brand preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings revealed that availability, promotional Scheme and advertisement influences performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Further, the study concludes that price preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings revealed that affordability, consumer budget and social Class influences performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

The study also concludes that quality preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Findings revealed that design, durability and conformance influences performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya

Recommendations of the Study

The study found that product preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This study therefore recommends that the management of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County should put in consideration the aspects of content, designation and packaging when coming up with their products.

In addition, the study found that brand preference has a positive and significant influence on performance of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This study therefore recommends that the management of E-commerce retail firms in Nairobi City County should effective promotional Scheme practices as well as product advertisement

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