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## REDEFINING THE CONSTRUCT OF RETAILING IN THE WEST AFRICAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

Retailing in the West African context is a dominant practice within the distribution channel of the overall business system, nowadays. This research aims to redefine the construct of retailing in the West African context. The approach is based on some observations and a documentary analysis. The results show that retailing in marketing perspectives, is always opposed to the construct of wholesaling and it can be well-defined as the art of selling goods and services in small quantities directly to the final customers.

**Keywords:** Retailing, Wholesaling, Marketing, West Africa.

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### INTRODUCTION

Retailing remains one of the most important element of the distribution channel, in the context of West Africa. In the Western context, researchers have given an attentive appreciation of the concept of retailing (Zikmund, & D'Amico, 1996; Johnson, 2004; Barry & Evans, 2004) whereas in Africa, less is known about retailing and the marketing practices its entails. Grewal (2018) has recognised the complexity of finding an appropriate characterisation of the construct of retailing. In addition, Prashant (2019) has put emphasis on retailing as a marketing technique

or strategy for a business success in the modern-day. However, until now there is no a significant conceptual research that puts an emphasis on the construct of retailing in the specific African marketing framework. The overall objective of this paper is to examine the retailing construct and the management practices that are in line with its application in West Africa.

### **THE CONSTRUCT OF RETAILING**

Many scholars and researchers in the world have defined the construct of retailing in different perspectives. An author such as Johson (2004) has recognised the complexity in defining the construct of retailing. According to Johnson (2004) retailing puts more emphasis on consumers and it refers to a set of activities that are directed to the final consumers. For Zikmund and D' Amico (1996) retailing refers to all business activities that imply the sale of products to the ultimate consumers of those products.

In marketing perspectives, the construct of *retailing* is always opposed to the construct of *wholesaling*. While *wholesaling* encompasses the action of purchasing products in bulk from a manufacturing company or a producer at a given reduced price, and to sell them to a retailer for a higher price, retailing consists in breaking down these products in smaller quantities in order to resell them at a higher price to the final customers or often to other retailers. Thus, retailing entities and wholesaling entities stand as intermediaries in the marketing distribution channel between the manufacturing entities and the final users that are consumers or customers. In addition, retailing can also be defined as the art of selling goods and services in small quantities directly to the final customers. Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary (2013) defines retailing as the in-store activity that consists of selling products to the public.

In a word, retailing refers to the set of all the marketing activities that push products and services directly to the final consumers for a personal, family and household use.

#### **Retailing in the West African Countries**

Retailing is a growing sector in West Africa. From Ghana to Nigeria and From Burkina Faso to Senegal retailing shops are the most dominant and they contribute to national economies in term of taxation. The taste of modernity and marketing awareness have brought most of retailers to give some new resplendent designs to retailing shops and retailing malls. Thus, the request for magnificent modern retailing shops and modern retailing malls is growing as compared to the old habit that consists of keeping a traditional shop or traditional mall without an attractive design. If most of retailers are operating under a registered and a formal style, some retailers operate under an unregistered and an informal style. The West African retailing is characterized by the use of both marketing practices and traditional selling practices.

#### **Marketing Practices and Non-Marketing Practices in the West African Retailing Sector**

##### **▪ Modern Business Oriented Retailers**

Retailers with a business education or a business training practice the marketing concept by doing their best to answer to their customers' needs and expectations. These retailing firms do have strong business ethics, a sense of corporate social responsibility, and a modern accounting system. They are interested in a very short-term profit, mid-term profit and long-term profit with practices that perceive cheating, malpractices, and unfair practices as non-standard in the relationship entertained with customers. Thus, these retailers' management methods strive to reduce unfair practices in order to meet customers' core needs and to position themselves in the market with a good image.

Finally, the management methods are hybrid with combination of Western management methods and African management methods (Nassè, 2019; Shamba & Livian, 2014).

▪ **Traditional Business Oriented Retailers**

In the opposite, it is noticed that retailers without any business education or a business practice do not care if their selling practices meet their customers' needs and expectations. The marketing myopia of such retailers is because they do not have the chance to get a business education. Thus, they inherited a family business that is well-established since some decades with indigenous and traditional practices. These retailing firms do not have strong business ethics, a sense of corporate social responsibility, and a modern accounting system. They are interested in a very short-term profit, with practices that perceive cheating, malpractices, and unfair practices as standard in the relationship entertain with customers. The management methods are mainly traditional.

### CONCLUSION

The construct of retailing as viewed in the West African context is a hybrid component where marketing practices are mixed with traditional selling practices. Thus, this research allows scholars to understand that retailing in the West African context is characterised by a certain marketing myopia that is due to a lack of business education, coaching and training. The implications for managers is that there should be a consideration of retailing and its revalorisation in order to meet the core needs and expectations of the final customers.

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