

Understanding Consumer Engagement with Artificial Intelligence in Africa's Retail Markets

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly adopted in global retail businesses to streamline operations and enhance customer experience, yet its adoption in Africa remains limited, as most AI systems are designed for structured retail environments that do not fully align with the informal, negotiation-driven, and relationship-oriented interactions common in many African retail markets. This creates uncertainty about how African consumers perceive, understand, and engage with AI during routine shopping. This study examines consumer awareness, trust, ease of use, and expectations of AI in African retail contexts. A survey design was employed, with structured questionnaires administered to 344 respondents across multiple African countries, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings show that 70.9% of respondents have interacted with AI, mainly for product recommendations, inquiries, price comparisons, and delivery checks. While many users expressed moderate to high trust in AI, a substantial portion reported confusion or felt they did not receive enough support, highlighting a gap between AI design and user experience. Trust in sellers and product quality emerged as the strongest drivers of purchase decisions, ahead of price, convenience or delivery speed, and product recommendations. The study recommends transparent, user-friendly, human-centred AI solutions that support negotiation, foster trust, and adapt to African shopping behaviours.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Consumer Behaviour, African Retail Markets, Trust and Usability, Human-Centred Design.