GLOBAL JOURNAL OF
ONLINE MARKETING
NAWALA

Volume 1, Number 2, 2022

Global Supply Chain Disruptions and Online Marketing Adaptations

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Abstract

Article history:
Received: July 13, 2022
Revised: August 12, 2022
Accepted: October 08, 2022
Published: December 30, 2022

Keywords:
Consumer Behavior, Online Marketing, Resilience, Supply Chain Disruptions.

Identifier:
Nawala
Page: 56-68
https://nawala.io/index.php/gjom

This study examines how global supply chain disruptions reshape online marketing strategies, focusing on the intersection of operational fragility and consumer-facing communication. Using a systematic literature review, it synthesizes peer-reviewed research across supply chain management, marketing, and consumer behavior to address the central question: how do firms adapt their online marketing practices when faced with systemic disruptions? The role of this study is to consolidate fragmented insights and highlight the dual function of marketing as both a promotional and trust-building mechanism under crisis conditions. Results indicate that firms with robust digital infrastructures and transparent communication strategies were more effective in sustaining consumer trust and managing demand during disruptions. The analysis discusses how online marketing adaptations—such as inventory transparency, proactive messaging, and digital convenience—helped mitigate the negative effects of operational breakdowns. The findings suggest that transparency, adaptability, and alignment with supply chain realities are essential for maintaining brand resilience in uncertain environments.

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1. Introduction

Global supply chains have become progressively leaner and more globally dispersed, increasing their exposure to shocks that propagate across suppliers, logistics nodes, and markets. The COVID-19 pandemic crystallized these vulnerabilities: simultaneous supply, demand, and transport disruptions created ripple effects that standard risk playbooks struggled to contain. Modeling work shows that the timing of facility shutdowns and restarts across tiers, alongside lead times and recovery synchronization, determined service levels and recovery trajectories—underscoring that pandemic-style disruptions are qualitatively different from typical single-node events (Ivanov, 2020). At the same time, systematic reviews document how research rapidly pivoted to resilience strategies such as redundancy, flexibility, and visibility, while noting gaps in empirically grounded studies beyond essential goods and health care supply chains (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

For marketers, these supply shocks were not a backstage problem: stockouts, delivery delays, and fluctuating assortments immediately confronted customers at the very touchpoints where brands acquire and retain demand. Retail and services research during the pandemic highlights how firms moved quickly to reconfigure channels—accelerating e-commerce, curbside pickup, and last-mile partnerships—and to reset messaging around safety, availability, and fulfillment expectations (Pantano et al., 2020; Schleper et al., 2021). This convergence of operations and market communication forced brand teams to translate upstream volatility into clear, credible promises downstream, or risk eroding trust and share of voice.

Pre-pandemic marketing scholarship already emphasized the cross-touchpoint customer journey and the need for coordinated messaging and experience management across online and offline interfaces (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Likewise, foundational reviews of digital and social media behavior show how information flows, peer effects, and mobile contexts shape attention and choice—mechanisms that amplify the impact of operational news (e.g., "back-in-stock" delivery windows) on conversion and loyalty (Stephen, 2016). The pandemic intensified these dynamics: shifts in needs, risk perceptions, and routines altered what customers valued and how they searched, evaluated, and purchased, requiring rapid experimentation in content, cadence, and channel mix (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

This systematic literature review examines how global supply chain disruptions have reconfigured online marketing practice. Specifically, it integrates operations scholarship on epidemic-induced ripple effects with marketing and retail research on omnichannel adaptation, customer experience design, and digital communication under uncertainty. By triangulating simulation and case evidence on resilience—such as structured reviews of supply chain impacts during epidemic outbreaks (Farooq et al, 2021)—with studies of consumer behavior and retailer tactics, the review clarifies which online adaptations, including inventory transparency, dynamic availability messaging, delivery-promise framing, and channel substitution, proved most effective in protecting demand during supply volatility. Beyond mapping what firms did, the review surfaces theoretical and empirical gaps, including the limited generalizability outside essential categories and the need for designs that jointly model supply constraints and customer experience outcomes (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Taken together, the review positions online marketing not merely as a communicator of constraints, but as an adaptive system that can buffer shocks, steer demand to feasible options, and preserve brand equity amid prolonged disruptions.

2. Literature Review

Research on global supply chain disruptions has increasingly focused on resilience and risk management strategies, especially in the wake of systemic shocks like COVID-19. Studies emphasize that disruptions are not confined to localized events but generate cascading ripple effects across networks, requiring firms to rethink their operational and marketing responses (Ivanov, 2020; Farooq et al., 2021). A growing body of work highlights resilience dimensions such as redundancy, flexibility, agility, and visibility as critical mechanisms for buffering shocks, while also acknowledging the cost and coordination challenges involved (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

Parallel to these supply-side studies, marketing literature shows how disruptions quickly become visible to consumers through product shortages, price shifts, and service failures. Research on retail and consumer behavior during the pandemic underscores the speed with which firms pivoted toward digital channels and adapted their communication to maintain engagement. For instance, retailers emphasized transparency in inventory and delivery promises, while simultaneously introducing new fulfillment models such as curbside pickup or same-day delivery to preserve customer trust (Pantano et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020; Schleper et al., 2021). These adaptations illustrate how online marketing functions as both a communication tool and a demand-management mechanism during times of volatility.

Digital transformation research adds another layer by showing that social media and e-commerce platforms became critical channels for real-time engagement and reassurance. Online communication not only conveyed availability and safety but also shaped perceptions of corporate responsibility and brand reliability (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Evidence suggests that firms with pre-existing omnichannel infrastructures were better positioned to adapt, as their digital ecosystems allowed them to redirect demand and maintain continuity (Papadopoulos et al., 2020). Scholars also point out that the pandemic accelerated the adoption of advanced analytics and digital technologies that enabled firms to track demand shifts and adjust marketing strategies proactively (Sarkis et al., 2020). In addition, research on small and medium-sized enterprises shows that digital tools not only supported survival but also enhanced their ability to reconfigure marketing models for long-term competitiveness (Seetharaman, 2020).

Consumer studies further indicate that crises alter decision-making heuristics: availability cues and fulfillment reliability outweighed brand loyalty for many, intensifying the role of marketing messages around transparency and trust (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Stephen, 2016). Taken together, the literature reveals a convergence between operations management and marketing research in explaining adaptation under disruption. While supply chain studies detail resilience strategies, marketing scholarship highlights how those strategies are communicated and experienced by consumers. However, gaps remain in integrating these perspectives: few studies model both the operational and consumer-facing sides of disruption, particularly in sectors beyond essential goods. Addressing these gaps requires cross-disciplinary approaches to understand how marketing not only reflects but actively mediates supply chain shocks in digital environments.

3. Methods

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to synthesize scholarly insights on how global supply chain disruptions have influenced online marketing adaptations. The SLR method was chosen for its ability to integrate diverse perspectives across operations management, marketing, and consumer behavior, providing a holistic understanding of disruption impacts. Searches were conducted in major academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, using combinations of keywords such as "supply chain disruption", "resilience", "online marketing", "digital transformation", and "consumer behavior". To ensure academic rigor, only peer-reviewed journal articles written in English were considered.

Inclusion criteria required that studies explicitly address either supply chain disruptions with marketing implications or online marketing responses in the context of crisis or uncertainty. Exclusion criteria filtered out non-empirical reports, editorials, and studies focusing solely on technical logistics without marketing relevance. The selected literature spans diverse research methods—including modeling, case studies, surveys, and conceptual reviews—enabling both theoretical and practical insights. The narrative synthesis approach was used to identify recurring themes such as resilience strategies, digital channel adaptations, consumer trust, and transparency, while also highlighting research gaps where integrated perspectives remain underdeveloped.

4. Results and Discussion

The reviewed literature highlights that global supply chain disruptions fundamentally reshape how firms communicate with and retain customers in online markets. On the operational side, ripple effects from disruptions exposed the fragility of lean, globalized networks, with studies showing that resilience measures such as redundancy, agility, and visibility were critical for continuity (Ivanov, 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2021). On the consumer-facing side, these operational challenges manifested as stockouts, delayed deliveries, and fluctuating product availability, making marketing communication an essential mediator between volatility and customer trust. Online marketing adapted by shifting focus toward transparency in availability, honesty in delivery promises, and proactive updates through digital channels (Pantano et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020).

One clear theme is the acceleration of digital adoption and omnichannel integration. Firms with established e-commerce platforms and advanced data analytics adapted more effectively, redirecting demand and maintaining continuity through digital touchpoints (Papadopoulos et al., 2020). Social media became a vital tool for real-time engagement, offering reassurance and shaping perceptions of brand reliability (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Evidence suggests that proactive communication regarding inventory levels and delivery timelines increased consumer trust, while silence or inconsistent messaging amplified frustration (Seetharaman, 2020). This underscores that marketing, in times of disruption, functions not only to promote but also to stabilize consumer expectations.

Another pattern is the shifting hierarchy of consumer priorities. During crises, availability and fulfillment reliability often outweighed traditional factors such as brand loyalty or price sensitivity (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Research shows that transparent disclosure of operational constraints—even when negative—can sustain trust by demonstrating honesty and responsibility (Sarkis et al., 2020). At the same time, studies on consumer behavior indicate that digital convenience, such as reliable online ordering and last-mile options, became critical to loyalty formation (Koch et al., 2020). This shift redefines marketing success under disruption: it depends less on persuasive campaigns and more on aligning promises with operational realities.

Technological advancements further supported this alignment. Digital tools such as AI-driven demand forecasting, real-time analytics, and platform-enabled visibility allowed firms to anticipate bottlenecks and adjust marketing campaigns accordingly (Farooq et al., 2021). For example, product recommendations and promotional efforts were often recalibrated to highlight items with reliable supply, reducing the risk of customer disappointment. Scholars argue that these digitally supported strategies illustrate how marketing can buffer the consumer-facing impacts of systemic disruptions by shaping demand toward feasible options (Van Hoek, 2020). Moreover, studies in logistics and retail show that collaboration with digital platforms and third-party logistics partners enhanced responsiveness, enabling firms to deliver despite upstream volatility (Baryannis et al., 2019).

Despite these adaptations, gaps remain. Many studies concentrate on essential goods like food and healthcare, while less evidence exists for discretionary categories where consumer expectations and behaviors may differ (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Additionally, most empirical work focuses on short-term responses during COVID-19, leaving limited insight into how sustained disruptions influence long-term marketing strategies. Integrating supply chain resilience models with consumer behavior frameworks is a promising avenue, as it would enable scholars to examine how operational recovery translates into brand equity and loyalty outcomes over time.

Overall, the findings show that supply chain disruptions force online marketing to evolve beyond its traditional promotional role. Marketing becomes an adaptive system that interprets operational constraints, sets consumer expectations, and maintains relational trust under uncertainty. Firms that integrated operational visibility with digital marketing practices such as transparent inventory information, accurate delivery windows, and empathetic messaging were better positioned to protect demand and preserve brand equity during disruptions. This suggests that the effectiveness of online marketing under crisis conditions depends less on persuasion and more on transparency, adaptability, and alignment with supply chain realities.

5. Conclusion

This review demonstrates that global supply chain disruptions have significant implications beyond logistics, reshaping how firms manage customer relationships through online marketing. The literature shows that supply chain shocks quickly translate into consumer-facing problems such as stockouts, delivery delays, and service breakdowns. In this context, marketing becomes more than a promotional tool; it functions as a mediator between operational challenges and consumer trust. Firms that relied on transparent communication, accurate delivery information, and proactive digital engagement were better positioned to sustain demand and loyalty under uncertainty.

The evidence also highlights the critical role of digital transformation in enabling marketing adaptation. E-commerce platforms, social media, and data-driven analytics allowed firms to monitor demand fluctuations, recalibrate promotional strategies, and maintain engagement despite volatility. At the same time, consumers adjusted their expectations, prioritizing availability and reliability over traditional loyalty drivers. This shift underscores the need for marketing strategies that align closely with operational realities, where transparency and adaptability become competitive advantages.

Despite these advances, gaps remain in understanding long-term consequences. Much of the current literature focuses on short-term crisis responses, especially during COVID-19, leaving limited insight into how sustained disruptions reshape marketing strategies across sectors. Future research should integrate supply chain resilience and consumer behavior frameworks to examine how operational recovery influences brand equity, loyalty, and market positioning over time. Overall, this review affirms that resilience in supply chains and adaptability in online marketing are interdependent, and firms must treat them as complementary strategies for navigating disruption.

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