

COVID-19 EFFECTS ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF DEPARTMENTAL STORES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined COVID-19 effects on consumer buying behaviour of departmental stores in Rivers State, Nigeria. The quantitative study adopted the correlational research design. A sample of 240 staff of departmental stores (comprising 100 customer attendants, 80 product delivers, and 60 management) was selected from 20 departmental stores in the study area. A 38-item 2 marketing professionals or experts validated 4-point scale instrument titled "Covid-19 Effects on Consumer Buying Behaviour of Departmental Stores Inventory" (CECBBDISI) with a reliability coefficient of 0.813 was used to elicit data analyzed using regression analysis. The study revealed that: market shutdown and border closure relatively, statistically and significantly contributed 44.8%, and 51.6% respectively, to the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State, Nigeria. While the use of consumption pattern statistically and significantly contributed 57.8% in the interaction between the variables of COVID-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. The study recommended among others that: Departmental stores should revitalize and strengthen their online retail stores wherein customers can shop, purchase and get delivery of products even while they are isolated at home. Alongside, improving their marketing research that will help them understand the essential products and needs of consumers even during crisis period like COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, consumer buying behaviour, departmental stores, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Businesses are established by investors to mainly undertake or handle certain services and products upon which they are expected to overtime build their brand in a particular market and environment. This makes the activities, crisis and events or happenings in such market and environment could to an extent influence the sales, patronage, and profit of that business (like departmental stores). Averting this scenario amidst a crisis like COVID-19, as a coronary disease and fast spreading global pandemic that has unprecedentedly ignited the transformation and shuttering of economic activities including aiding consumers evolving or shifting and changing

their brands and needs, is extremely important. In view of this Motti (2020) stated that COVID-19 has not only impacted consumer shopping and habits but has inevitably compelled operators of departmental stores to responsively make changes in stocking the products and delivering services that is essential and trending among customers if they are to retain their brand loyalty.

This is what Adach (2020) regard as the COVID-19 business world that marketers must strategically plan to effectively respond to by deliberately rising to occasion and intense pressure of swiftly providing and delivering the products, brands, goods and services (like household staples and health-related goods, such as groceries, bottled water, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, face masks, etc.) that consumers desire or crave for in these times of the COVID-19 outbreak, using technology as a strategy to increase retailing without physical contact in this period of isolation (Meyer, 2020). In other words, the adoption of agile marketing which Kalsi (2020) says has soar from 32% globally, would help businesses meet up with changing their short, medium and long-term marketing plan and marketing campaigns in line with current realities like flexible payments, remote work and shifting priorities expected to change consumer buying pattern and behaviour, task marketers ingenuity, as well as dip business output (i.e. performance, profit and patronage).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has tested departmental stores abilities to pivot swift response to unprecedented changes that has compulsorily obliged them to protect frontline workers or staff with personal protective equipment (PPE) as safeguards for the at-risk customers who on and offline access, buy and receive goods and services from these retailers. Kahle and Close (2011) stated that understanding purchasing and consumption behaviour is a key challenge for marketers. As this begets consumers knowing the products and services to purchase and consume at any particular point in time (Minton & Khale, 2014). Also, Team (2020) reiterate that consumer buying behaviour entails the series of on and offline actions (via technology and physical presence respectively) taken prior to consumers' changing their preferences or leanings for the demand and purchase of certain staple products (like groceries, diapers, cosmetics, detergents, etc.) or services.

Incidentally, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the adoption of stringent measures like shutdown of especially conventional markets including closure of local and international borders. This prompted the drastic reduction or decline in the consumer's discretionary and impulsive buying or spending in terms of clothing, footwear, fittings, travel, showbiz, furniture, automobiles, and hardware (Bhakat & Muruganatham, 2013), for the more purposeful and imperative needs or wants with which they have now streamlined their finances and reprioritize their shopping or

spending, and changed their purchasing or buying behaviours (Team, 2020). Additionally, Helm (2020) states that the COVID-19 crisis has led to many consumers attempting online grocery ordering or procurement through platforms provided by departmental stores. Chand (2018) see departmental store as a large local and international retailing organizations (like Spar, MacDonalds, Chanrais, Timeless, Everyday Mart, Market Square, Kingsway, Domino, etc.) which handles extensive variety of shopping and specialty goods from different departments in same building that are centrally controlled by the one purpose, promotion, service, and ordering.

Thus, satisfying the changing consumer behaviour in intensively stockpiling variety of products requires departmental stores to discern, catalogue and display inventory of fairly priced product brands that are essentially needed and accepted by customers at any given time. Mahjoub, Kordnaej and Moayad (2015) states that continuously meeting consumers need is a function of market research which is a set of proactive demand assessment strategies adopted to help departmental stores ascertain and predict the threshold of wants (like groceries, food items, sanitizers, face mask, soaps, medicines, etc.) by consumers at any given time. Hence, the prevailing social, economic, and health conditions (like COVID-19) which induces, constrains or restricts people to certain palatable or unpalatable actions, orders or guidelines (like stay-at-home) within the community, state, country or global. Also, the constrains on the ensuing emergency disease combating orders on its own inadvertently triggers changes in the modalities for meeting individual consumption pattern changing due to micro and macro reasons (Vijayalakshmi & Milcah, 2017).

Similarly, globalization amid the scourging COVID-19 brings almost unified changes, innovations, and styles (devoid of racial, religious, and ethnic boundaries) in the global, national, communal and household consumption patterns for products and services both now and in the future (Mishra, 2015). Although, Cohen and Murphy (2001) had stated that consumption pattern begets unsustainable expenditure pattern because it is only concerned with today's use up of resources and products for individuals' sustenance. However, Ibbih and Siyan (2018) argued that the decision on using services and products is influenced by certain factors (like cultural, social, personal, and psychological) and values guiding producers delve into new, quality and profitable products and resources that could help meet the ever-changing and immediate needs needed for the survival, comfort, enjoyment and satisfaction of consumers. Hence, the crux of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Businesses are consistently or continuously exploring strategies like market research, product brand and friendly pricing regimes in order to advantageously position or situate them designing effective systems and practices which they could leverage to edge-out or outshine their fellow competitors and enhance consumer loyalty, patronage, and buying behaviour in favour of their brand, store or outlet's increased profit or business even during crisis period. In specificity, a crisis like the novel COVID-19 pandemic which has necessitated remote, restricted and closed work rules or guidelines alongside businesses (like departmental stores) shifting priorities towards adopting ecommerce and total retail industry M&A deals that increased in February 2020 to a net worth of over \$2.05bn globally (Kalsi, 2020). Also, conceiving ecommerce is said to enable departmental stores to stay afloat without experiencing the business acquisitions and mergers which has already commenced with the recent acquisition of AR technology startup, NextVR for a \$100 million by Apple, which is a contemplated post-COVID-19 economic fallout that may well be worse than the Great Depression (Motti, 2020).

Despite, the novel or unique nature of the origin, spread, threat, and modus of the COVID-19 pandemic or epidemic which has dropped retail sales at 8.7% in the month of March, 2020 due to stringent actions like market shutdown and border closure (Helm, 2020). Businesses continue to innovate or update steps, techniques, systems and strategies to maximally swell up their reach, patronage and profits by identifying the essential needs (like food, groceries, medicines, sanitizers, face masks, etc.) required to benefit their customers. Thus, the innovations designed to promote product and brand loyalty is considered a modern business development strategy that could enhance business profits amidst emergency policies or programmes like market shutdown and border closure which seems plausible to truncate or slow down businesses, reduce production and economic activities, yet businesses or firms like departmental stores have devised means and integrated activities that could maximize investment profits in the midst of this global pandemic.

Furthermore, there abound to be uncertainties surrounding the influence these specific emergency policies would still edge them among competitors, enhance brand loyalty, customer patronage, sales, and profits beyond the pandemic wherein such measures of stimulating consumer buying behaviour was instituted. And at the same time ensuring that strategic planning guides the emerging consumption pattern in order not to encourage wastage thereby, jeopardizing the future and viable use of resources for a sustainable post-COVID-19 economic development of the state and country (Ibbih & Siyan, 2018). Previous studies focused on students consumption pattern and

financial management (Vijayalakshmi & Milcah, 2017), that by Kalsi (2020) examined the effect of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour of Apple products. Not much study was directed towards departmental stores or retailers. It is based on this premise that this study attempts to examine covid-19 effects on consumer buying behaviour of departmental stores in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the purposes of this study were to determine:

1. the influence of market shutdown on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores.
2. the contribution of border closure on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores.
3. the influence of consumer consumption pattern on the variables of COVID-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the influence of market shutdown on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores?
2. What is the influence of border closure on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores?
3. What is the influence of consumer consumption pattern on the variables of COVID-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores?

Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework

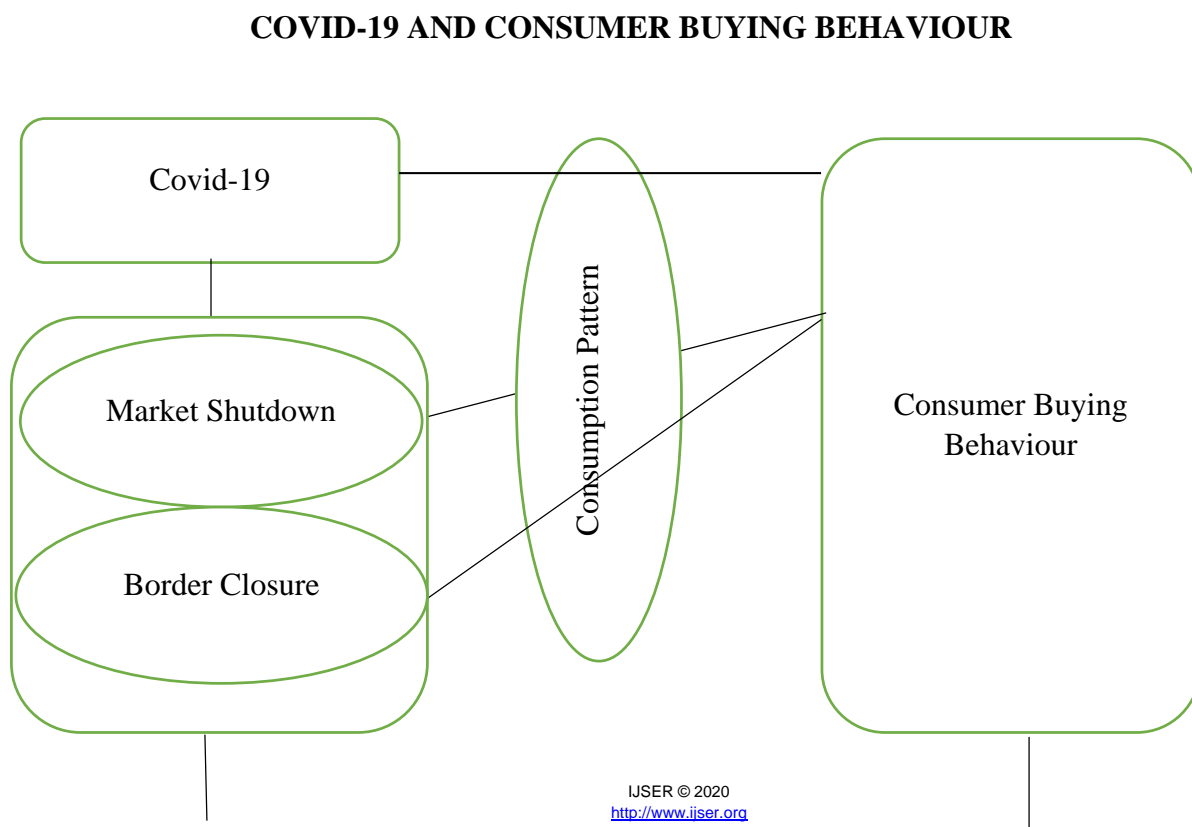


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Model of Covid-19 and Consumer Buying Behaviour
Source: Researcher's Review of Related Literature (2020)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study was a quantitative research that adopted the correlational research design. The correlational research establishes the relationship between two or more variables in order to find out the effect of the independent variable (i.e. COVID-19) on the dependent variable (i.e. consumer buying behaviour) including the effect of the moderating variable in the interaction or association (Nwankwo, 2013). In this study the independent variable with dimensions (like market shutdown and border closure) was examined with the dependent variable (i.e. consumer buying behaviour) in an interaction that is moderated by consumption pattern.

Study Area: This study was specifically carried out in mainly in Port Harcourt Rivers State (South-South Nigeria) where all the twenty (20) departmental stores operating in Rivers State are located.

Population for the Study: The population for the study comprised of all the staff in all the departmental stores operating in Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Technique: A sample of 240 respondents or staff of departmental stores participated in the study. The study adopted the multistage sampling technique in four phases. Firstly, purposive sampling was used in the selection of all the 20 departmental stores in the study area. In the second phase, 100 (i.e. 5 each) customer attendants in the departmental stores were selected using random sampling technique.

Thirdly, 80 (i.e. 4 each) marketers/product despatchers were selected using random sampling technique from the 20 departmental stores. In the fourth and final phase, purposive sampling was used in the selection of 60 management staff (i.e. 20 marketing managers, 20 production managers, and 20 marketing managers) from the 20 departmental stores in the study area. This constituted a sample of 240 respondents (via 100 customer attendants, 80 marketer/product delivers, and 60 management staff) from 20 departmental stores that was used for the study.

Instrumentation: The study sourced both primary and secondary data. The primary data was sourced from a self-structured 38-item instrument titled “Covid-19 Effects on Consumer Buying Behaviour of Departmental Stores Inventory” (CECBBDSI). The CECBBDSI instrument was patterned after a four point rating scale of “Very High Influence” (VHI, 4 Points), “High Influence” (HI, 3 Points), “Low Influence” (LI, 2 Points), and “Very Low Influence” (VLI, 1 Point). Furthermore, the CECBBDSI instrument consist of two sections. Section A elicited the demographics of the respondents (i.e. staff of departmental stores) while Section B comprised of the item variables of covid-19 (via market shutdown, border closure, and palliatives).

Furthermore, the secondary data was sourced for the measures of consumer buying behaviour including the moderating variable (i.e. consumption pattern) from text books, articles, manuals, documents, magazines, dictionaries, and other publications.

Validation of Instrument: The face and content validity of the CECBBDSI instrument was determined by two (2) experts (i.e. 1 Marketer in Rivers State University, and 1 other in University of Port Harcourt). The topic, objectives and research questions of this study was given to these validates for their comments, suggestions, and views which were integrated to improve the validity of the CECBBDSI instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument: The reliability or internal consistency of the CECBBDSI instrument was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha (r_a) method. In doing this 40 copies of the CECBBDSI instrument was administered to (20) Marketers, (10) distributors, and (10) Management staff from the 10 selected departmental stores in Owerri Imo State (which was not used for the study). Then 40 copies of the CECBBDSI instrument were administered to the respondents and upon completion was retrieved, coded and analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha (r_a) method to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.813. The obtained reliability coefficient necessitated the use of the CECBBDSI instrument for administration.

Method of Data Collection: The face-to-face direct delivery technique was adopted by the researcher (and two research assistants) for the administration of the CECBBDSI instrument to all the 240 respondents. Out of the 240 copies of the CECBBDSI instrument administered to the respondents, only 219 copies (representing approximately 91% return rate) were validly retrieved and used for the analysis.

Method of Data Analysis: The collected data was scored, tabulated, coded, and analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis to answer the research questions. All statistical computations were done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 20.0.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the influence of market shutdown on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores?

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis on the influence of market shutdown on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Df	Mean Square	F. Ratio	P-value	Remark
Regression	1709.658	1	1709.658	176.242	.000 ^b	S
Residual	2105.036	217	9.701			
Total	3814.694	218				
Multiple R (r_p) = .669 ^a R. Square (r^2) = .448 Adjusted R ² = .446 Standard Error of Estimate = 3.11458						

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Market Shutdown

Table 1 shows that the use of market shutdown to predict the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria yielded a coefficient of multiple regression R (r_p) of 0.669 and multiple regression square (R^2) of 0.448. This also shows that F is 176.242 which is significant at $P < 0.05$ because the value of P is less than 0.05.

This shows that market shutdown accounted or contributed for 44.8 percent of the variance in consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. In other words, approximately 45% of the variance in the change in consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria can be explained by pulling the different variables together. This means that 55% of the variation in the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores cannot be explained by the variables of market shutdown alone. Thus, there must be other variables.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of border closure on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores?

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis on the influence of border closure on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Df	Mean Square	F. Ratio	P-value	Remark
Regression	1966.647	1	1966.647	230.926	.000 ^b	S
Residual	1848.047	217	8.516			
Total	3814.694	218				

Multiple R (r_p) = .718^a
 R. Square (r^2) = .516
 Adjusted R² = .513
 Standard Error of Estimate = 2.91828

- a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behaviour
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Border Closure

Table 2 shows that the use of border closure to predict the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria yielded a coefficient of multiple regression R (r_p) of 0.718 and multiple regression square (R^2) of 0.516. This also shows that F is 230.926 which is significant at $P < 0.05$ because the value of P is less than 0.05.

This shows that border closure accounted or contributed for 51.6 percent of the variance in consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. In other words, approximately 52% of the variance in the change in consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria can be explained by pulling the different variables together. This means that 48% of the variation in the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores cannot be explained by the variables of border closure alone. Thus, there must be other variables.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of consumer consumption pattern on the variables of COVID-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores?

Table 3: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis on the influence of consumer consumption pattern on the variables of COVID-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	Df	Mean Square	F. Ratio	P-value	Remark
Regression	2205.883	2	1102.941	148.082	.000 ^b	S
Residual	1608.811	216	7.448			
Total	3814.694	218				

Multiple R (r_p) = .760^a
R. Square (r^2) = .578
Adjusted R² = .574
Standard Error of Estimate = 2.72914

- a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Buying Behaviour
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Covid-19, Consumption Pattern

Table 3 shows that the use of consumption pattern in the interaction between the variables of COVID-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria yielded a coefficient of multiple regression R (r_p) of 0.760 and multiple regression square (R^2) of 0.578. This also shows that F is 148.082 which is significant at $P < 0.05$ because the value of P is less than 0.05.

This shows that consumption pattern accounted or contributed for 57.8 percent of the variance in the influence of COVID-19 on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. In other words, approximately 58% of the variance in the change in the influence of COVID-19 on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria can be explained by pulling the different variables together. This means that 42% of the variation in the influence of COVID-19 on consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores cannot be explained by the consumption pattern of consumers alone. Thus, there must be other variables.

Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 1 revealed that market shutdown statistically and significantly influenced or contributed to the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the assertion of Meyer (2020) that COVID-19 is a global pandemic that is rapidly defining the year economic events (through market shutdown and border closure) including changing individuals shopping behaviours towards stocking up needs like foods, groceries, bread, medical supplies (like hand sanitizer, face masks, etc.), soap, etc. with relatively reasonable price using online platforms and technology devices.

The result in Table 2 revealed that border closure statistically and significantly influenced or contributed to the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the views of Ibbih and Siyan (2018) that the way individuals and households adapt to crisis scenario (like COVID-19) enables them to conserve resources and wealth which they utilize in sustaining their situation-induced impulsive and evolving buying behaviours, decisions and choices of essential products that they will consume presently or in future.

The result in Table 3 revealed that consumption pattern statistically and significantly influenced the interaction between the variables of covid-19 and consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State Nigeria. This finding aligns with Karwala cited in Vijayalakshmi and Milcah (2017) that the macro level change in individuals and households consumption pattern occur because of structural or physical shifts (otherwise periods) in the environment (like COVID-19) which affects the buying behaviour, lifestyle, value-system and needs of consumers which could sometimes erupt emerging cultural, racial, religious, class, and educational limitations likely to vary the consumption pattern between and within different states, regions and countries.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the global pandemic, COVID-19 dimensioned via: market shutdown and border closure relatively and jointly influenced the consumption pattern and consumer buying behaviour of specific essential products (like groceries, foods, sanitizers, face masks, soap, etc.) in

departmental stores in Rivers State, Nigeria. Therefore, covid-19 was found to facilitate the consumer buying behaviour in departmental stores in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Government should embark on the staggering of markets rather than the shutting down of conventional markets which increases the pressure on these departmental stores amidst their huge patronage and profits.
2. Departmental stores are encouraged to revitalize and strengthen their online retail stores wherein customers can shop, purchase and get delivery of products even while they are isolated at home.
3. Departmental stores should develop app where consumers can access, shop, and purchase products that would be delivered without the restriction of the present border closure.
4. Departmental stores are encouraged to improve their marketing research that will help them understand the essential array of products and needs that are required and consumed by consumers even in crisis period like COVID-19.
5. Departmental stores are encouraged to quickly acquire delivery vans and/or engage the services of delivery companies that would be used to facilitate the conveying of goods to consumers while they are on isolation in their homes.

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