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Emergent marketing strategies and their influence on the Customer Value Proposition of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) businesses during Covid 19 Pandemic in Botswana



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ABSTRACT

This research explores how marketing strategies have been changed to adapt to the impactful challenges of the pandemic and economic recession in Botswana's Consumer Goods (FMCG) business landscape. The research adopted an interpretivism philosophical model, an inductive research approach, mono-method wherein qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The findings provided substantive evidence that there has been a transition in strategic marketing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Botswana retail landscape and the transition in strategies did have an influence on the customer value proposition (CVP) output of retail businesses.

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020 due to surging cases in China and other countries (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Since the novel virus came into the picture it affected not only the health status of the human population, but of different economic activities as well (Deloitte, 2022b). This has been dubbed as one of the most difficult period for the marketing function as businesses had to rethink their marketing strategies (Kamel, 2021) and the application of marketing elements to a changing business environment (Altay et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic as both an economic and health crisis has burdened businesses, consumers, economies, and different industries across the globe (Eriksson & Stenius, 2020). All of these aforementioned entities had to act different than normal in response to the threat posed by COVID-19 (Zuokas et al., 2022). This has been true for the retail sector (Heins, 2022).

Deloitte (2022a) reported that "since the pandemic came into the picture the predictions about the outlook of the retail business have been a little ominous". It had been difficult to navigate a business that had been hampered by supply chain disruptions, constrained revenue earnings, unprecedented demand patterns, pressures to stock up to optimal levels, keeping shareholders satisfied, and a challenge to be more innovative with market offerings (EY Americas, 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2021). The aforementioned factors resulted in aggregated changes of consumer behaviour leading businesses to question whether the changes are permanent (Sheth, 2020) and necessitating the formulation and implementation of unconventional marketing strategies to adapt to the pandemic challenges (Nikbin et al., 2021).

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Kotler et al. (2018) defined marketing as the engagement of customers and the management of profitable customer relationships. Marketing is a function of the business concerned with capturing market insights, connecting with target customers, building lasting brands that resonate well with customers, creating value, delivering value created, and customer value proposition (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Such has been a mammoth challenge for businesses as the COVID-19 induced marketing landscape went through significant changes (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė et al., 2021). The COVID-19 marketing landscape resulted in changes to the metrics of consumer demand (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Hoekstra & Leeflang (2020) postulates that the prevalence of COVID led to the disruption of marketing strategies and policies. Studies have revealed that the retail operations have been disrupted by the pandemic (Delasay et al., 2022; Lopes & Reis, 2021). It is perhaps worth noting to highlight that this has been a difficult time of dealing with customers whose preferences changed a lot (Sheth, 2020) hence it became imperative that businesses adapt to best serve the evolving customer needs during pandemic and recession time (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

The FMCG business is hit with insurmountable challenges in the areas of reliable supply chains, constrained revenue earnings, unpredictable demand patterns (McKinsey & Company, 2021), an uncertain economic outlook (Deloitte, 2022a), massive changes in consumer behaviour (Chiguvu, 2020), and pandemic-induced recession leading to reduction in consumer purchasing power (Accenture, 2020). As such the business environment has become more uncertain and volatile (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

Traditional marketing strategies might have succeeded pre-pandemic period (Chari et al., 2014) but the unprecedented pandemic challenges necessitate the need for more adaptive marketing strategies to capture the interest of the target market (Alflayyeh et al., 2020). There is no substantive evidence of studies within the context of Botswana that investigates relevant retail marketing strategies in the FMCG business during pandemic time.

Given the dearth of research on the COVID-19 pandemic induced marketing strategies in Botswana, this research aims to explore the manner in which marketing strategies have been changed to adapt to the impactful challenges of the pandemic and economic recession time in the Consumer Goods (FMCG) business landscape of Botswana. To the best knowledge of the researchers much of the studies have been conducted pre-pandemic on the metrics of sound management and customer service (Chiguvu, 2016), challenges of modern retailing (Phambuka-Nsimbi et al., 2015), and the studies done during pandemic time touched on customer satisfaction and related matters (Chiguvu, 2020; Sephetsolo, 2022). This creates an impetus to fill this literature gap and motivate future studies explore marketing contingencies that can be put in place during uncertain economic times and not just the pandemic period.

This paper, therefore, aims at exploring the manner in which marketing strategies have been changed to adapt to the impactful challenges of the pandemic and economic recession time in the Consumer Goods (FMCG) business landscape of Botswana.

Literature Review

The literature review explained the theoretical foundation and the empirical literature that were used to support the study.

Marketing

It is established in the literature that the point of establishing business ventures is to realise profitable returns. This is also seen in Kotler et al. (2018) definition that marketing is the management function responsible for the identification, anticipation, and satisfaction of customer requirements in a profitable manner. Kotler et al. (2018) corroborated that marketing is the engagement of customers and the management of profitable customer relationships. Therefore, it is remiss to think of marketing as a business function that is concerned with advertising and selling business offerings. Kotler & Keller (2016) put this in a better perspective: 'It is a function of the business concerned with capturing market insights, connecting with the target market, building lasting brands that resonate well with customers, creating value, delivering value created, and a superior customer value proposition'. It can be seen that marketing management is a business function that ensures that those responsible for the production of goods and provision of services are in a position to interpret and match customer requirements if not exceed them.

Customer Value Proposition (CVP)

When deciding between producers of goods and services, customers are more inclined to those that serve their needs best (Hooley et al., 2020). This is the essence of customer value proposition. Payne et al. (2017) submits the viewpoint that CVP is a strategic tool utilised by a business to communicate how it will best provide value to its customers'. CVP is a component of marketing communications, which is the means by which firms seek to inform, persuade, and remind customers about their offerings (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Think of CVP as the voice of a business and it is aimed at building valuable relationships with the customers. Payne et al. (2017) postulate that CVP is all about putting out a message that convinces the customers to have a preference for the offerings of a business compared to that of competition and how the customers would derive superior benefits from that. Furthermore, CVP captures the benefits of the market offering in line with the needs of the customer (Hassan, 2012; Nussipova, 2022). If done well CVP improves the conversion rates of a business and market positioning (Hooley et al., 2020; Kotler et al., 2018). In essence, CVP underlines the importance of what the customer values and what the customer will value in the future through placing customer perceptions as a strategic lens to the legitimization of the relevance of the CVP at a given point and time (Rintamäki & Saarijärvi, 2021).

Emergent Marketing Strategies

The literature on strategic management discourse makes a clear distinction between prescriptive strategies and emergent strategies (Downs et al., 2003). These models of strategic decision making are influenced by the information sourced from both internal and external environments. Atuahene-Gima & Li (2004) posit that firms are information processing entities that continuously obtain, interpret, communicate, and store data obtained in an effort to accomplish the set goals. The flow and utilisation of information then influence the direction of managerial action. This information is an important component of market intelligence that is obtained and interpreted before, during, and after the formulation of strategies (Hooley et al., 2020; Kotler et al., 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2016). The prescriptive strategies mentioned above are made up of planned objectives, and their elements have been put in place before the chief strategic intent is implemented. This is based on a deterministic process where the business environment is studied and the interpretation of the external environment is used in long-term planning (Božac et al., 2017). This model follows the intended strategic decision model, in which business strategies are defined within a detailed business plan for a specific period (David & David, 2017). The literature on this approach shows that the strategies herein are premeditated.

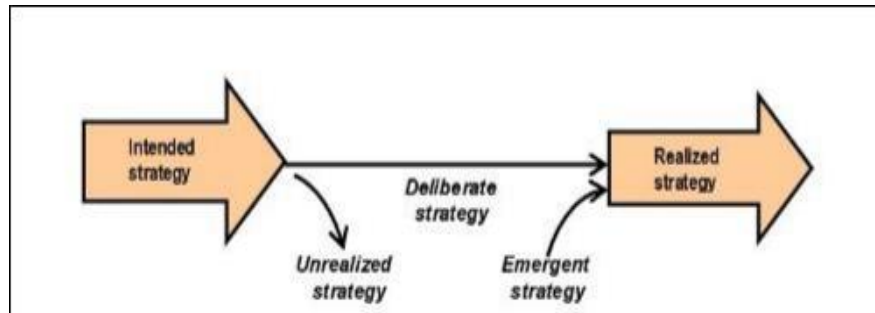


Figure 1: Models of Strategic Decision Making; *Source:* Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014.

During the process of implementing the set strategies, there comes a point where intended strategic plans collide with changing realities (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). The process of formulating business strategies is not as simple as set on paper because business environments go through significant changes all the time (Lasi et al., 2021) calling for the adaptation imperative (Božac et al., 2017). This is where emergent strategies come into the picture. Kopmann et al. (2017) posit that emergent strategies come into place when companies take a series of actions that over time turn into consistent patterns of behaviour. This means the circumstances of the outside environment prompts companies to adapt with responsive strategic goals and deviate from initial strategies. Chari et al. (2014) defines emergent marketing strategies as ‘the deviation that occurs from the intended strategies to the strategies and that the difference in performance is calculated between the two levels. The conceptualisation is testament to the aim of the research to look into deviations from initial marketing strategies in the retail business and what effect this had on their customer value proposition.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Impact on Global Retail Operations

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant repercussions on retail business (Accenture, 2020; EY Americas, 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2021). Retailing is a business that deals with the sale of goods and services directly to final consumers (Aziz, 2022). Also defined as the sale of goods and services to the ultimate consumer for personal use (Iyanda et al., 2015). The literature provides substantive evidence that the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic affected different facets of retail operations (Anik et al., 2021; Aziz, 2022; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Delasay et al., 2022; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020) hence it would be best to look at each of these based on their merits.

Human Resource Constraints

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an insurmountable challenge to the personnel management of the retail business. In as much as there is competition for talent in the marketplace the retail business seems to be the one most pressed due to having to deal with work arrangements designed to meet the demands of the pandemic such as working from home and utilisation of off-site technologies to do some work (Deloitte, 2022a; Deloitte, 2022b). This a challenge for the retail business to focus on investments that matches the demands of the future workforce to be able to withstand the tug of war for talent. Businesses will be challenged to reduce barriers within and across their entities, as well as blur the boundaries between working on-site and from home (Accenture, 2020). Perhaps this would help the retail entities deal with the human resource challenge and attract talent that will drive its success during the pandemic and recession times.

Shifting Consumer Behaviour Patterns

Consumer behaviour is associated with the attitudinal and mental processes that takes place during consumer decision making (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). It reflects the need to purchase goods and services intended to satisfy customer needs and wants (Redda, 2021). During the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been significant changes to consumer behavioural patterns (Sheth,

2020). The prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to different consumer activities such as eating out, travelling, and going out (Deloitte, 2020). Consumers used online channels to make their purchases to reduce face-to-face interactions in an effort to reduce the chances of getting infected (Sayyida et al., 2021). This led to retailers scrambling for unconventional methods to best serve the consumer whose behaviour was changing so dissolutely (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Due to strict movement restrictions, cancelled social gatherings, transition to remote work, pandemic-induced panic purchasing, and preference of online purchasing to avoid overcrowded shopping places (Alshammari, 2021; Heins, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2020; Redda, 2021; Sayyida et al., 2021) retailers had to rethink their marketing strategies (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė et al., 2021). Sheth (2020) postulates that advancement in emerging technologies, changes in demographics, and consumer adaptation to learning the blurred lines between education, work, and leisure influenced changes in consumer behaviour.

Growth of E-Commerce

The traditional brick-and-mortar retail set-up has been less preferred within the consumer segment during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Customers became more comfortable with online shopping in order to avoid possible infection from overcrowded places (Anik et al., 2021). This is also tied to the aforementioned changes in consumer behaviour patterns. Wu & Chang (2016) postulates that 'social distancing policies threatens the traditional retail shopping model'. It is reported that one of the good things that came out of the pandemic for the retail business in an increase in online sales (Brewster, 2022; Retail Drive, 2020). This is a challenge for traditional retail businesses to channel funds towards investments in online shopping infrastructure. Studies (Anik et al., 2021; Delasay et al., 2022) show that online shopping remains attractive due to minimal health concerns as compared to the traditional retail setup. Consumers have more in-depth knowledge about online shopping and related technologies; hence, this is a threat to the brick-and-mortar set-up due to improved efficiencies, customer awareness, and suppleness (Neboh & Mbhele, 2020).

Strained Supply Chain Efficiencies

One of the most pressing challenges during the pandemic has been disruptions in the supply chain which caused apocalyptic store closures (Chatterjee et al., 2021). The result of this was reduced revenue earnings (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020) emanating from missed sales opportunities on out-of-stock items (Accenture, 2020). The purpose of sound supply chain is to generate optimal value so that the final product reaches the final consumer (Chopra & Meindl, 2016) but movement restrictions, lockdowns that slowed down the manufacturing process, and reduced movements of raw materials from their source (Alflayyeh et al., 2020; Aziz, 2022; Chatterjee et al., 2021; OECD, 2020) it was difficult for this to materialise during the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that the extant literature on this subject matter has not stated how the retail business positioned itself to better deal with this pandemic-induced phenomenon.

Landscape of Retail Consumer Goods Business in Botswana

The decision to investigate the changes in retail marketing strategies during COVID-19 has been influenced by changes in the business landscape due to the pandemic and the need to formulate a framework that can help the retail business adapt to volatile economic conditions. Just like in other countries the retail business in Botswana had to deal with massive changes attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted from Sephetsolo (2022), the retail business has never been more challenged to improve on its customer satisfaction metrics. The retail business has developed a lot in Botswana, as evidenced by the increase in the number of supermarkets and Wholesale entities (Emongor & Kirsten, 2009).

From the earliest of stages, the retail sector in Botswana was dominated by small family owned entities with modern retail formats coming into the picture during the 1990s (Selema & Makgosa, 2018). The emergence of these modern retailing businesses resulted in the development of shopping centres (Phambuka-Nsimbi et al., 2015). The modern shopping centres composed of different entities offering diversified assortments to the market resulted in improved amenities in Botswana such as parking space, banks, and food restaurants (Iyanda et al., 2015; Selema & Makgosa, 2018). Leading retailers in Botswana include Sefalana, Choppies, Massmart Wholesale (Trident and Eureka Stores) (Chiguvi, 2016; Chiguvi, 2020; Phambuka-Nsimbi et al., 2015; Selema & Makgosa, 2018; Sephetsolo, 2022) as well as Shoprite, Spar Group, Pay-Less Supermarket and the new entrant Fours. It is believed that Botswana is one the economies in which retail investments can result in good returns (Makgetla, 2021). No research has been done in Botswana on how retail businesses adapted their marketing strategies to the COVID-19 pandemic induced challenges.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Marketing Strategic Framework: Evaluation of The 4Ps of Marketing During The COVID-19 Pandemic Time

The marketing function does not take place in a vacuum. It is a combination of different elements that determine the success of the offer to the target market (Hooley et al., 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2016) that make up the strategic marketing action plans of a business (Nikbin et al., 2021). A common classification of the strategic marketing framework started with what has been known as the 4Ps – Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (Kotler et al., 2018). As the marketing function became more sophisticated, there was an addition of other elements, People, Processes, and Physical Evidence, resulting in what is now known as the 7Ps (The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), 2015).

This section of the literature review now evaluates each of these elements with relevance to the retail business during the COVID-19 pandemic time focusing on the 4Ps.

Product

COVID-19 compelled businesses to redefine their product portfolios to meet the demands of the consumers (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020) whose purchasing behaviour changed so immensely (Sheth, 2020). This has been the most appropriate time to invest in research and development to come up with new product innovations (Nikbin et al., 2021) as research has shown that customers are more receptive to new product offerings during times of economic contraction more than during expansion (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020). Past research (Ang, 2001; Köksal & Özgül, 2007) has proved that during times of economic crisis one of the most basic of strategies is to discontinue products with a low rate of sale and weakened profitable levels. This so because during time of crisis as Nikbin et al. (2021) puts it customers emphasise durability of products hence it is important that the focus should be on that characteristic when launching new lines.

Price

Price is the articulation of the approximate worth of a product and service been offered to the market (Kotler et al., 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2016). This is relative to the nature of the offering and customers base their decision on this to realise the value for monies spent (Joha et al., 2022). Pricing is one of the leading factors in making purchase decisions during uncertain times (Nikbin et al., 2021). Therefore, during uncertain economic times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, companies gravitate toward cheaper product prices (Memery et al., 2005). Likewise, Rabadán et al., (2020) stated that pricing has a significant impact on the purchase decisions of customers than origins and qualities of a product, although such attributes are also important during uncertain times. In the same manner, Hampson & McGoldrick (2013) postulate that the default decision for customers is to purchase cheaper products as their demand increases to reduce their spending levels.

Promotion

Promotional activities as past literature have demonstrated tend to decline during uncertain economic times (Navarro, 2009) in an effort to reduce the burden of high marketing budgets as businesses seek to deal with declining rate of sales (Nikbin et al., 2021). There is a conflicting view to this from other studies (Graham & Frankenberger, 2011; Grossberg, 2009) that maintaining the initial marketing budgets and even increasing them during uncertain economic times can result in improved performance and market share. In addition to this, Nikbin et al. (2021) adds that businesses that cut their marketing spending during times of contraction tend to perform at their worst, as investing in marketing activities during recession is more beneficial in boosting the resonance of brands in the market. During the pandemic time retail businesses have been more challenged to develop innovative promotional strategies that match the needs of evolving customers such as attractive online advertising (Lasi et al., 2021) to win the customers who were sceptical of visiting brick and mortar retail set-ups.

Place

The product that is being offered to the market must be available in the right quantities, at the right time, and the means of distributing such must be convenient. It is applicable in both brick and mortar as well as e-commerce set-up (The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), 2015). This is important in boosting sales channels to the target consumer (Lasi et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic period, physical interaction with retail stores has been affected to a great deal (Altay et al., 2022) as retailers had to grapple with improvements in safety while meeting the expectations of customers (Lasi et al., 2021). Places of distribution also deal with supply chain efficiencies (Joha et al., 2022) since it is important to get products outside places of origin (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020).

Customer Value Proposition (CVP) and Retail Marketing During COVID-19 Pandemic Time

CVP has been of great importance to retailers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sayyida et al., 2021) due to massive changes in consumer behaviour patterns (Sheth, 2020). Firms have been challenged to maintain their position to manage the current set of circumstances and prepare for the post-COVID era (EY Americas, 2020). CVP is concerned with creating a brand that resonates well with the customer so that there is a better preference for offerings of the business compared to its competitors (Nussipova, 2022). Focus should therefore be on the formulation and implementation of changing customer behaviour growth strategies (EY Americas, 2020; EY Americas, 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2020). To build a lasting value proposition, retailers should focus on the four areas of customer engagement (EY Americas, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2020), bridge the gap between the physical and digital spaces (Accenture, 2020; EY Americas, 2021), use innovation to drive product growth strategies (EY Americas, 2020), and focus on improved customer experience (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Customer Engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed different customer segments in different geographic locations to unknown extremes in the socio-economic, experiential, and environmental circumstances. In this case it is best to adopt a more disciplined approach to the engagement of customers to better understand them (EY Americas, 2020). The use of online shopping has been on an upward trend during the pandemic and the use of e-Commerce platform metrics would be beneficial to track customer purchasing patterns (Accenture, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2020) and implement strategies aligned to the needs of different customer segments (Nussipova, 2022).

Reduction of Digital and Physical Gap

The extreme of nature of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reduce interaction with customers within the realm of traditional brick and mortar retail set-up (Anik et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that as time passes, it would be more advisable to invest in Omnichannel integration to better serve the needs of customers who do not want to frequent brick and mortar retail stores (Furnelli, 2021). It will therefore be more appropriate to have the offerings of the business on both digital and physical setups (EY Americas, 2020) to be in a better position to serve the preferences of different customer segments. McKinsey & Company (2020) postulates that to achieve a better customer experience during periods of reduced in-person interaction investment in e-commerce is a both a cost-reduction and business growth imperative.

Innovation Driven Product Growth Strategies

An innovative product can cut through the difficult sales period in a business and firms that implement better growth strategies through innovation will be able to survive (Cote, 2022). To do that, it is important to design an environment that encourages innovation (Accenture, 2020). Innovation in the realm of product growth means that retailers will have to come up with uncommon solutions to common customer challenges.

Improved Customer Experience

Firms have been put on transition mode since COVID-19 came into the picture as what was considered customer experience shifted alongside the expectations and behaviour of customers. Mohan (2020) defines customer experience as the connection between the efforts of a business and expectations of customers. McKinsey & Company (2020) postulates that the customer experience metrics of customer experience changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and that firms that innovate better during the crisis and anticipate the needs of customers will build solid relationships with their customer base. For improved customer experience retailers will have to align their CVP with the needs and wants of customers (Baskoro, 2021), innovate digital platforms to serve the customers at the comfort of their homes (McKinsey & Company, 2020), build agile capabilities that improve business adaptation (KPMG, 2020), and understand what customers want through sound market research.

Research and Methodology

The philosophical stance considered for the research is interpretivism as it is poised to explore an understanding of the customer perceptions of value proposition derived from FMCG business emergent marketing strategies. The research utilised the inductive research approach. It has been established that little is known about the subject in Botswana hence induction is best placed to answer the research questions and objectives as well as meet the research aim. This research follows a qualitative research method. This method has been selected as the most appropriate for the research as it will help gain more insight into detailed perceptions, responses, and behaviours of the customers during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the pandemic induced retail marketing strategies in Botswana. It is envisaged that the responses will provide a holistic point of view and allow for more exploration which satisfies the selected research design. This research is based on grounded theory research.

Population and Sampling

Target population was made up of Retail Store Managers, Senior Sales and Marketing Executives, and Sales Managers as these are best suited to give insight on marketing strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Convenience sampling was employed to select the participants of the study.

Data Collection Method

The data collection tool was issued in electronic format through the use of Microsoft Forms application. This allowed for submission not to be tracked back to the participants as it was an anonymous submission. All respondents had to do was click on the link provided and submit their confidential responses.

Data Analysis Technique

The most appropriate technique to interrogate the data collected is thematic analysis. In essence, this method uses emerging patterns, trends, and themes across different data sets. To make sense of the data sets using this method, it is important to get well familiarised with the data; perform data integration from notes and transcripts; do theme and pattern identification for further exploration; define the themes for the data sets; develop explanations based on thematic patterns; and draw conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Saunders et al., 2009). Data sets from the data collected were imported into MAXQDA and looked at in-depth to make sense out of the responses. The themes sourced from the data sets were linked to the research questions and findings then used to develop a theoretical framework as the basis of achieving rigour in the research.

Findings

Demographics Analysis

A total of 10 participants were sampled from the 3 leading retailers taking into consideration their influence in the retail market landscape of Botswana. It should be noted that the identities and places of work for participants has not been revealed to maintain the confidential undertaking of the research instead numbers were assigned to each participant from 1 to 10. The participants comprised of 9 males and 1 female. These were drawn from significant positions within the respective retail companies dealing with implementation of strategic marketing decisions. As the research targeted those management professionals domiciled in Botswana this has been achieved as all participants are both residents and citizens of Botswana. The table and data visualisation charts that follows summarises the demographic profiles of participants.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Profiles

Participant ID	Botswana Resident	Residence Status	Gender	Age	Retailing Experience	Location
1	Yes	Citizen	Male	26 – 35 Years	1 – 5 Years	Town
2	Yes	Citizen	Male	36 – 45 Years	16 – 20 Years	City
3	Yes	Citizen	Male	26 – 35 Years	6 – 10 Years	Town
4	Yes	Citizen	Male	36 – 45 Years	11 – 15 Years	City
5	Yes	Citizen	Male	26 – 35 Years	6 – 10 Years	Town
6	Yes	Citizen	Male	26 – 35 Years	6 – 10 Years	Town
7	Yes	Citizen	Female	36 – 45 Years	16 – 20 Years	Town
8	Yes	Citizen	Male	46 – 55 Years	21 – 25 Years	City
9	Yes	Citizen	Male	46 – 55 Years	21 – 25 Years	City
10	Yes	Citizen	Male	36 – 45 Years	11 – 15 Years	City

Source: Authors (2023).

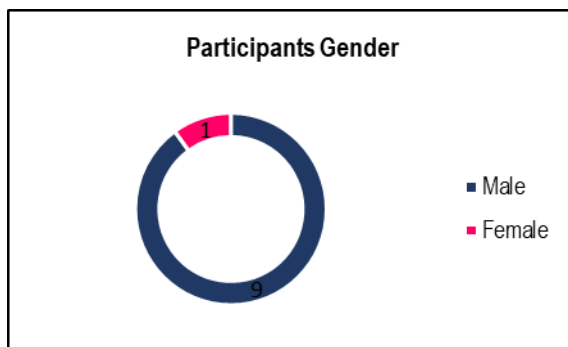


Figure 2: Participants Gender

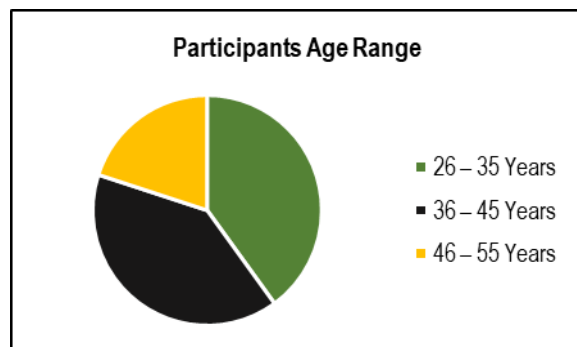


Figure 3: Participants Age Composition



Figure 4: Participants Retailing Experience



Figure 5: Participants Location Details

Movement Restrictions

The responses quoted above do serve as testament to this as well. Respondents believe that the movement restrictions affected the flow of customers to the stores hence reduction in sales output. In interrogating this further it became evident that the retail business in Botswana is far much behind in dealing with this kind of situations because of reliance in old models of retailing. The business has not embraced advances in technologies that makes it possible to serve customers at the comfort of their homes. Retailers in Botswana have not been proactive enough to address this mishap and the statement below attests to that:

“All the strategies were nowhere good enough as physical presence was entirely prohibited. Business went down and we had to adapt to use technology to reach our customers.” (RESP05)

It became more evident in the participants’ responses that going forward investments in e-Commerce would help better position retail businesses in Botswana to offset this challenge. A more elaborate response on this is as follows:

“Businesses must be ready to think out of the box and certainly utilize technology more to position themselves for unseen circumstances. We should be better poised and innovative enough to come up with innovative solutions that will make shopping an easier chore without having to necessarily visit stores.” (RESP08)

Perhaps this is testament that the COVID-19 pandemic has proved with time the brick-and-mortar retail model will become obsolete as customer need convenience more than just better price offerings.

Marketing Strategies Obsolescence

“It was difficult to use these strategies. Because of restrictions in movement most of these strategies became irrelevant and as such there was less impact for them in the market. Business performance dropped because of unforeseen costs which came about due to implementation of health restrictions and measures to curb COVID-19.” (RESP09)

The statement above is more representative of the sentiments expressed in the question of the impact of COVID-19 on the marketing strategies that were in place. Respondents had a common opinion that the then marketing strategies became redundant due to the circumstances that came with the pandemic. Perhaps this is in agreement with Hoekstra & Leeftang (2020) that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in disruption of marketing strategies and policies. The main reason for this disruption has been attributed to dependence on traditional media to get marketing messages to customers in the Botswana retail business landscape. One respondent whose opinion is more representative of this sentiment stated that:

“Our retail marketing strategies were based mostly on the usage of direct contact with clientele. Traditional marketing channels like billboards, radio, print and physical dropping of leaflets were mostly used before COVID-19.” (RESP09)

The participants opinionated that *“emphasis on social media marketing” (RESP01-10)* could have helped the situation better as *“response to marketing strategies during COVID-19 started off slow as most of the customers were used to the traditional marketing strategies” (RESP09)*. This is perhaps true as movement restrictions meant that people could not interact as used to hence spent time communicating through the use of different social media platforms. It is evident from the respondents’ opinions that in case social media marketing was well utilised pre-pandemic period the retail business would have not suffered as it did.

Emergent Marketing Strategies During COVID-19 Pandemic

This theme is perhaps the crust of the research as it gave direction to what impact the marketing strategies that were designed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had on customer value proposition (CVP). That will be discussed in the section that follows of course. Three predominant sub-themes emerged being telesales and social media marketing, home deliveries, and investment in e-Commerce.

Telesales and Social Media Marketing

An invaluable approach during the COVID-19 pandemic was to find alternative means of interacting with the customers. One respondent stated that:

“Marketing strategies such as the use of social media platforms were used to counter COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19 most retailers did not have active social media pages or if they had they were hardly active on them. Online channels were opened and activated to ensure presence in the market.” (RESP09)

Another respondent pointed out that:

“The business started to increase the transactions count through calls and deliver(ies). More customers trusted our business” (RESP01)

The participants acknowledged that virtual modes of interaction became instrumental in customer engagement. As a result, despite the then movement restrictions customer engagement still became possible though not in the medium accustomed to.

Home Deliveries

The prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to different consumer activities such as eating out, travelling, and going out (Deloitte, 2020). As such, customers utilised online channels to make their purchases to reduce face-to-face interactions in an effort to lower chances of getting infected (Sayyida et al., 2021). It was revealed from participant response that in compensation for the lack of online purchasing channels some retailers opted to do home deliveries which ensure consumer convenience at a time where movement was restricted. Participants stated that:

*“Some of the things done included calling customers, sharing promotional material through social media channels, allowing customers to place orders through the phone and thereafter **delivering to the customers**.” (RESP02)*

*“All our stores got departmental licenses to cater for all the markets. Introduce the **home deliveries** initiative, and utilised social media as well as other digital channels to send the message through.” (RESP07)*

This thematic area also exposed some of the innate weaknesses within the Botswana retail business in that it shows how far behind the sector is in embracing the use of e-Commerce to serve the needs of those customers who prefer to place orders just at the touch of a button. But at the same time, it seems that this paid out as participants spoke of noticeable improvement in output:

“Rapid change in sales as growth became visible, customers were able to adapt to use of telephone and WhatsApp business to send out orders.” (RESP05)

Investment in e-Commerce

It has been stated in the literature (Delasay et al., 2022; Deloitte, 2020; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010; Sheth, 2020) that during the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a surge in the utilisation of e-Commerce to transact. Though the respondents' data exhibited some structural deficiencies of the initiative in the Botswana retail business there are those entities that have made a move to see this through as exemplified in the extract below:

“Sefalana has been and certainly is a Botswana Grown Brand, which has been trusted over the years. Our solid Corporate Governance has been clearly demonstrated and this gave us an edge over our competitors. Furthermore, we're the first to market with on-line shopping and this was a plus for the organization.” (RESP08)

It is perhaps one strategic imperative that the whole retail sector must look at pursuant to the COVID-19 pandemic induced changes. This became evident in some respondent comments who stated it is important that investments are made in shopping models that can survive the strain of times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

*“Our retail business in Botswana is far much behind with modern retailing developments. Investment in **e-commerce platforms** is **needed** as well as consideration of home deliveries. We cannot put our trust in the brick-and-mortar set-up for such a long time and the COVID-19 pandemic is testament to that.” (RESP03)*

Other responses revealed no plans to undertake this route which still leaves a question about the direction of the Botswana retail business with modern developments.

Emergent Marketing Strategies and Customer Value Proposition (CVP)

This was a fundamental question that sought to understand the impact of the non-traditional retail marketing strategies on customer value proposition (CVP). It was also meant to address the second research question on this metric. One sub-theme became predominant in all participant responses: improved customer value proposition (CVP).

Improved Customer Value Proposition (CVP)

The question that gave life to this theme sought to understand the degree to which emergent marketing strategies impacted the CVP of retail businesses in Botswana during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents stated that:

“Yes, improvement did show. Managed to always be in contact at all times which has enabled us to monitor the changes that might be happening in a certain market.” (RESP05)

“Yes, it did. Customers responded positively. Customers felt valued. It also worked because it offered customers convenience and safety.” (RESP02)

CVP underlines the importance of what the customer values and what the customer will value in the future through placing customer acuties as a strategic lens to the establishment of the relevance of the business offerings at a given point and time. From the participants' responses it became evident that articulation of the CVP to the market showed traction in response to the marketing strategies that were implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also observed that communication of the CVP was not without challenges as some innate factors impeded retailers from delivering as intended. Some participants stated that:

“Our CVP was more into turnaround time after placing the order and after sales service. The response was not that good as most of the time the orders were not delivered on time the wrong pulling of the orders was also a big concern.” (RESP04)

“The response to our marketing strategies during COVID-19 started off slow as most of the customers were used to the traditional marketing strategies. As our presence improved on the online channels, we then saw a steady trickle of traffic. As things stand our value proposition is not yet solid on the online channels we are using because of less traffic into our pages.” (RESP09)

Whilst the retailers made a transition to modern marketing channels it is discernible from the above that there is an awareness problem with these which of course is a loophole that must be addressed. As the customers become more enlightened with the online communication channels retailers use it could be said that articulation of the CVP will become less strenuous.

Conclusions

There has been evidence of strategic marketing in the Botswana retail business landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic as participant responses evidenced. Participants gave evidence of transition from traditional marketing strategies to modern marketing strategies that included amongst others social media and digital marketing. Furthermore, there was concern with the e-Commerce infrastructure which is non-existent amongst most retailers in Botswana. In essence, interpretation of the data sets from participants' responses was structured into themes that were modelled towards fulfilment of the research questions, research aims, and objectives.

Studies have demonstrated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of the retail business. Some studies looked at the aspect of shifting consumer behaviour (Sheth, 2020), how the elements of the marketing framework (Hoekstra & Leeftang, 2020) discussed in the literature were adjusted to match, and general impact on global retail operations as a whole (Delasay et al., 2022). These are just some of the studies that this research used as point of reference. This research added the dimension of relationship between marketing strategic imperatives and customer value proposition (CVP) which is an area that has not been looked at in the realm of Botswana. It thus adds to the theoretical discourse on this area that can be looked into from different angles as in exploring the how CVP can be improved in the retail business through consideration of other elements other than transition in marketing strategies. The findings of the research are in agreement with other previous studies done outside Botswana (Delasay et al., 2022; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Emongor & Kirsten, 2009; Eriksson & Stenius, 2020; Neboh & Mbhele, 2020; Redda, 2021) that during uncertain economic times it is important to revisit the set strategies and make changes where relevant. The research has identified practical measures that could be applied in the management of retail businesses during uncertain economic times. It had been established that the retail business dealt with the most during the COVID-19 pandemic time. Notable challenges during this period included massive changes in consumer behaviour (Sheth, 2020), human resource constraints (Deloitte, 2022a; Deloitte, 2022b), constrained supplies (Alflayyeh et al., 2020; Aziz, 2022; Chatterjee et al., 2021), and the need for e-Commerce in response to soaring online purchases (Anik et al., 2021; Brewster, 2022; Retail Drive, 2020). All of these require those responsible for strategic imperatives in the retail business to think ahead and be more proactive to be able to deal with constraints that come with conditions which make the business environment more volatile like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for Future Research

Taking into consideration lessons sourced from the findings the following set of recommendations have been suggested:

- i. An investigation of the innovation challenge in the Botswana retail business and how this can improve Return On Investment (ROE).
 - a. The motivation behind this recommendation is the recognition that the Botswana retail business is left behind with modern retailing improvements just as participants responses suggested. This can be commenced in the area of e-Commerce amongst others.
- ii. Importance of building resilient supplies chain to deal with global shortages during uncertain economic times
 - a. The debate on COVID-19 pandemic and the retail business touched base on the impact it had on global supplies. Due to massive shutdowns retailers all around faced shortages in supplies (Alflayyeh et al., 2020; Anik et al., 2021; Chatterjee et al., 2021) which later caused soaring prices and lack of basic commodities. A look into this phenomenon can help retailers build resilient business models to deal with times like these.

Contribution of the research

From a practical point-of-view this research has identified the disparities in the marketing strategies of the Botswana retail business landscape and how these can be addressed. One of those anomalies is the unestablished e-Commerce infrastructure which must be addressed if the Botswana retailers are to have a global stand. Further to this is hoped that the research can lead to a marketing model that can be utilised during uncertain economic times within the business. The theoretical contribution of the research is that it has added to the field of knowledge on the implementation of relevant marketing strategies during volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) times in business. Moreover, the findings of the research have improved on the research gap that was identified on the relationship between change in marketing strategies and CVP during uncertain economic times in the Botswana retail landscape. Perhaps if published other Scholars can build on it and add that which the research could have left out.

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