

The COVID-19-pandemic and implications for businesses: Innovative retail marketing viewpoint

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ABSTRACT

Academic discourse has given much attention to crisis management, a logical trend given that crises have profound implications on businesses and on consumers' behaviour. A core premise that has featured prominently, and indeed remains a core research interest, is public health-related crisis. Underpinned on that business and consumers' behaviour implication foundation, this study aims to contribute to the public health crisis management literature, albeit from a retail marketing purview. Specifically, this study examines the business implications of the Corona-Virus-Pandemic that has paralysed the global economy. To do that, the authors utilise a literature review approach to understand the pandemic containment strategies and economic impacts (including implications for businesses).

The authors invoke leadership (including infrastructure) and strategic and pro-active marketing theories to propose a retail marketing approach that would enable businesses as well as customers effectively contain the movement restriction implications of such pandemic in the future. The authors contend that the leadership approach and the extent and operational modus of infrastructures significantly condition the response effectiveness, impact on business and the economic recovery timescale. To conclude, the limitations of this study are acknowledged. Also, useful directions for progressing knowledge about public health crisis management and retail marketing are flagged.

INTRODUCTION

The critical importance of crisis management has been echoed in academic discourse (e.g. Bundy, Pfarrer, Short & Coombs, 2017; Reeves, Lang & Carlsson-Szlezak, 2020; Senbeto & Hon, 2020). This criticality is justified given that crises have profound implications on businesses and on consumers' behaviour (e.g. Senbeto & Hon, 2020; Lado-Sestayo, Vivel-Búa, & Otero-González, 2016). Within the discourse, a central premise that has received prominent attention recently, and remains a core research interest is public health related crisis (e.g. Senbeto & Hon, 2020; Reeves et al, 2020). Concurring to aforementioned business and consumers' behaviour implication foundation, this study seeks to contribute to crisis management literature from a marketing perspective.

Without doubt, the Corona-Virus-Pandemic exerted paralytic implications on the global business community,

leading to huge economic downturn and unprecedented levels of unemployment (see Section 2.1 and sub-sections). For businesses, the Corona-Pandemic induced challenges have reminded of the pertinence for businesses to endorse pro-active and innovative marketing strategies. Embracing such marketing orientation would enable businesses to not only access larger market segments including also breaking into new markets (Opote, 2020a) but also offset natural disaster related crisis and challenges that may cripple mobility. For the consumers, such marketing strategies offer benefits, as their ability to obtain needed supplies is enhanced despite mobility restrictions. Premised in this pro-active and innovative marketing strategies thinking, this paper proposes a retail marketing approach towards addressing natural and health-related crises that impair mobility and place distribution.

Specifically, this study examines the business implications of the Corona-Virus-Pandemic that has paralysed the global economy. To do that, the authors analyse literature to understand the economic impacts (including implications for businesses) of the pandemic and the economic recovery patterns. In understanding the Corona Pandemic impact on businesses, the authors underline the importance of effective and pro-active leadership. The authors contend that the leadership approach and the extent and operational modus of infrastructures significantly condition the response effectiveness, impact on business and the economic recovery timescale. Taking a retail marketing approach in this paper, the authors illuminate the retail marketing implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. Human nature has witnessed different forms of health crises, and to believe that Covid-19 may be the last of such health crises would be unimaginable. That in mind, the authors propose a retail marketing model that would enable a sustained effective response to health crisis induced economic shocks in the future. Towards achieving the required sustainability impact, the authors underline the importance for a strong and effective leadership. Within the leadership perspective for this study, the authors also recognise the criticality for facilitating infrastructures. Thus, the authors recognise that consumers engage in decision making in their preference formation and emphasise the importance of a marketing and brand strategy.

This paper is progressed thus: First, the authors explain the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting some facts about selected countries. Following that, the authors highlight the implications on economies and business segments. To conclude that section, the implications for retail marketing are flagged. Thereafter, retail marketing, and leadership theories are introduced. In the concluding section of this paper, the authors propose a leadership and infrastructure (marketing and brand strategy) model for achieving a sustained effective retail marketing response and recovery from such health crisis induced challenges in the future. Finally, the limitations of this study are acknowledged, and future research directions flagged.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMING

Natural disaster crises (including health disaster crises, which is the underlying scenario for this study) have been a constituent part of human nature. Unlike past health crisis episodes, for example, Ebola virus, Middle East respiratory syndrome - MERS, HIV, to mention a few, Corona Virus (Covid-19) exerted immense global economic damage. More precisely analysed, the Corona pandemic has massively disrupted the financial markets globally, paralysed global economies and caused unprecedented levels of unemployment globally. Globally, businesses are still struggling to find ways of containing the Covid-19 implications and getting back to full economic activity. Building on leadership theory, this paper proposes innovative retail marketing strategy that would enable organisations thrive and effectively meet the needs of customers even in highly challenging health crises where mobility may be restricted. The theoretical framing of this paper covers four themes: (1) Covid-19 and implications on businesses; (2) leadership theory; (3) retail marketing; and (4) strategic marketing and innovation.

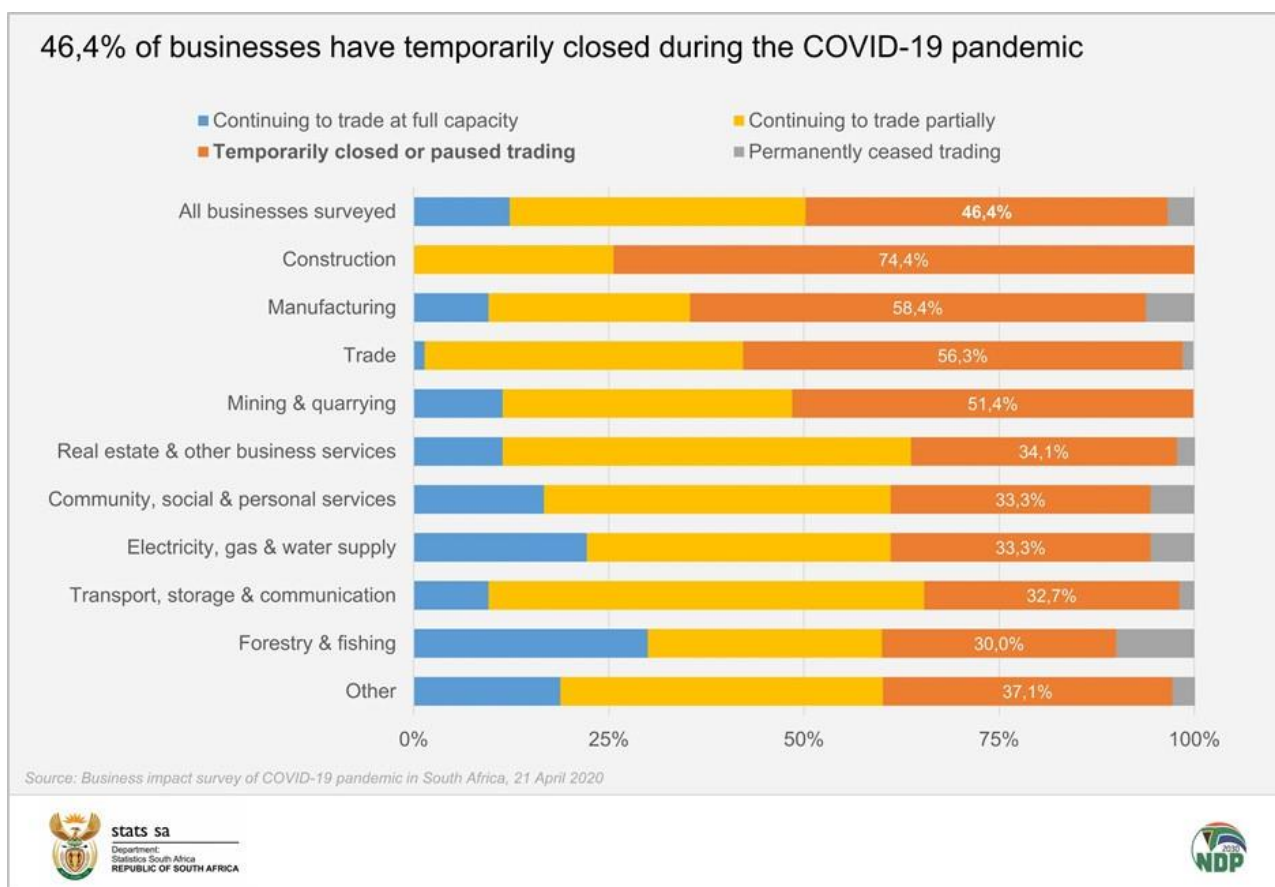
The Consequences of COVID-19 on Economies and Businesses

Based on facts from two countries - South Africa and Nigeria (convenience sampling induced), the authors highlight some of the economic and business settings implications of Covid-19.

Covid-19 Pandemic and the South African Economy and Businesses

Coronavirus pandemic has become the biggest threat to the global economy and if effective containment is not achieved soon may have a recessionary outcome for economies. The economic, financial, and social systems of most countries have witnessed major paralytic consequences. South Africa for example had a fair share of the effect of changes in the economic and business landscape, and the first containment response to the Covid-19 pandemic was the imposition of a lockdown from midnight 26 March 2020 (www.gov.za). A direct consequence of the lockdown strategy is a shutdown of businesses except for essential services, leading to an unprecedented disruption of commerce in most sectors. Most businesses had to close operations with only a few operating at a bare minimum. Figure 2.1 shows the operational impact of the lockdown strategy on businesses.

**FIGURE 1
TRADING STATUS OF BUSINESSES**



Source: Statistics South Africa (2020)

Mining and agriculture - primary sectors of the South African economy (Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Al-Jabir, Iosifidis, Agha & Agha., 2020), suffered major impairment as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with mining operations either halted completely or reduced to very low production and distribution processes with the majority of the employees forced to stay at home. As at the time this study was conducted, companies such as Sibanye-Stillwater’s and Impala Platinum reported a 60% loss in share price respectively, and Anglo American 40% (African Mining, 2020). Similarly, the resilience of the agricultural sector has been tested by the pandemic. The sector is vast in its products for both local consumption and exportation. The mobility restrictions affected businesses such as restaurants as they could not operate at full capacity, leading to a significant drop in the domestic market demand of the agricultural products (theafricareport, 2020).

The manufacturing sector is one of the most affected sectors in South Africa. The global disruption in the supply chain as a result of Covid-19 induced movement restrictions caused a decline in the exportation of commodities. For

example, the automobile industry which accounts for a significant portion of the manufacturing activity and a major employment source recorded a substantial decrease in production volumes and demand. As documented in the March 2020 report, the local market recorded a 30% drop in vehicle sales and a 21.5% drop in export sales compared to same period in 2019 (Engineering News, 2020).

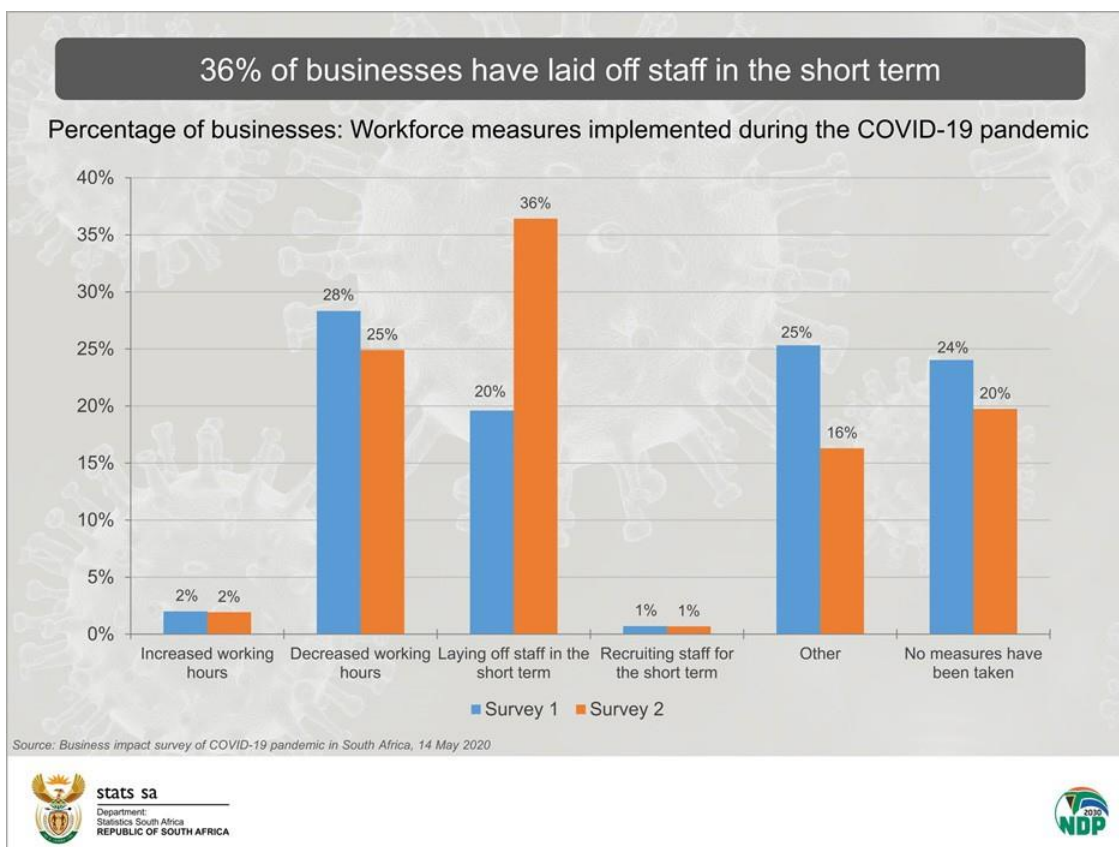
The world-wide lockdown strategy to contain the coronavirus pandemic had vast consequences for the aviation, tourism, and hospitality industries. Most airlines around the globe ceased operation, while a few maintained skeletal strategic operations related to cargoes of essential products. Fin24 (2020) reports that, with fleets of airlines grounded, and all ports of entry closed, the South African tourism industry lost billions in revenue, a consequence of which is 40,000 job losses. Other industries such as retail, agriculture, and transportation and logistics have been indirectly affected with loss in revenue.

Similarly, the ICT and telecommunications industry has been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The initial closure and suspension of operations by the technology companies (e.g. Amazon, Apple, Samsung, Google, etc.) in China, impacted the South African ICT and telecommunications market. With China harbouring the manufacturing hubs of these technology giants, and the associated travel restrictions, supply chain distribution of product offerings and development initiatives were massively impaired (ITWeb, 2020).

The South African financial institutions have also been affected by Covid-19 and are still struggling to find ways of absorbing the economic shock. According to CNBC Africa (2020), the imposition of national lockdown as a containment tool has caused major financial distress for many businesses. The financial distress substance has also been reinforced in a recent survey undertaken by StatsSA: 85.4% of the businesses surveyed recorded turnover below their normal range with poor trading status (Stats SA, 2020).

A direct consequence of businesses shutting down or operating at a bare minimum, owing to the mobility restriction containment strategy, is the laying off of employees (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 ON WORKFORCE



Source: Statistics South Africa (2020)

The Economic and Business Implications of COVID-19 in Nigeria

As commented by Jackson, Weiss, Schwarzenberg & Nelson (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic affected global economic growth beyond anything experienced in human history. Africa's most populated country - Nigeria has also been hard hit in several ways by the Covid-19 pandemic. The health implications were devastating with many deaths, as the medical care system, which was already broken and overstretched and lacking the capacity to meet the medical needs of the population, had a huge challenge in providing Medicare for Covid-19 infected patients let alone put appropriate containment plan in place.

While the immediate health impact is still evolving, the beyond health consequences are felt heavily by the populace. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused major economic problems in Nigeria leading to loss of income and livelihood, looming debt crisis, amongst others (United Nations, 2020, p.2). Prior to the pandemic, Nigeria's economy was gradually recovering from the 2016 recession, however per capita incomes were still declining (World Bank 2020). In all, the Covid-19 pandemic exerted major effects on businesses and the economy culminating in deepened unemployment, redundancy, massive job losses and hindrances in the discharge of government activities and responsibilities. The devastating effect of Covid-19 pandemic was felt across all sectors of the economy (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
SHOWS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS IN NIGERIA

Major Economic Activity	Exposure to COVID-19	Level of employment (000's)	Share in total employment (%)	Share of male (%)	Share of female (%)	Employed workers (%)	Self employed workers (%)	Unpaid household workers (%)
Education	Low	2,523	4.3	49.3	50.7	17.1	1.0	1.4
Human Health and Social Services	Low	1,974	3.3	38.3	61.7	13.5	0.5	3.4
Administrative and Support Services	Low	434	0.7	81.6	18.4	2.4	0.3	0.3
Electricity, Gas, Steam & Air Conditioning Supply	Low	7	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Water Supply, Sewerage, Waste Management & Remediation	Low	84	0.1	80.1	19.9	0.4	0.1	0.0
Agriculture	Low - medium	32,358	54.7	74.5	25.5	20.0	61.9	79.9
Construction	Medim	1,614	2.7	98.0	2.0	6.4	1.9	0.3
Financial and Insurance	Medium	884	1.5	64.3	35.7	6.8	0.1	0.2
Mining and Quarrying	Medium	112	0.2	92.2	7.8	0.2	0.2	0.0
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	Medium - high	445	0.8	81.0	19.0	3.4	0.1	0.0
Transportation and Storage	Medium - high	2,390	4.0	99.0	1.0	7.2	3.5	0.4
Information and Communication	Medium - high	388	0.7	78.5	21.5	2.5	0.2	0.0
Accommodation and Food Services	High	935	1.6	12.3	87.7	0.2	1.9	2.3
Real Estate	High	66	0.1	96.1	3.9	0.0	0.2	0.0
Manufacturing	High	4,922	8.3	61.1	38.9	8.2	8.5	6.5
Trade	High	10,015	16.9	35.9	64.1	11.9	19.6	5.1

Source: Nigerian authorities, ILO, and World Bank estimates. Notes: (1) Economic activities excludes professional, scientific, and technical services and other services; (2) level of COVID-19 risk adapted from ILO Monitor 2nd edition: "COVID-19 and the World of Work".

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, many countries globally risk becoming economically insecure. According to Jackson et al (2020), the economic fall-out from the pandemic raises the risks of a global economic recession with levels of unemployment not experienced since the Great Depression of 1930s. The severity of the impact of Covid-19 on the Nigerian economy is further emphasised in the World Bank's (2020) estimate that the poverty rate in Nigeria would increase significantly, leading to 6million additional people joining the poverty circle by 2022.

From the above, it is evident that Covid-19 had major implications for the global economy, as lockdown was enforced leading to restriction of movement of people and goods. Due to the lockdown measures, supply networks were disrupted, and production activities were largely stopped. As a consequence, too, consumers could not source food supply for their daily upkeep, nor engage in their employment tasks - thus their means of livelihood was more or less taken from them. This study proposes that with appropriate digital retail marketing strategy, organisations would be better situated to absorb the shocks arising from such pandemic induced movement restriction and also effectively serve their market segments (customers).

Next, the underlying theories (leadership, retail marketing and strategic marketing and innovation) of the conceptual proposition of this paper are explained.

Leadership Theory

Crisis, with structural implications, can either make or mar the reputation, success, and survival of an organization (Preda & Stan, 2016). Effectively managing crisis requires that leaders respond with the right attitude and vision to navigate the organisation out of the situation. Extant studies distil various leadership forms: participative, transformative and transactional leadership styles (Alkharabsheh, Ahmad & Kharabsheh, 2013; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Zohar & Luria 2004). It is not intended in this paper to dwell on the aforementioned leadership categorisation, rather the focus is to underline the importance of a strong and committed leadership towards enabling organisation to successfully navigate through crises induced challenges. The authors forward a leadership perspective that draws on contingency lens to explain how organizations can innovatively remain competitive during a time of crisis.

Contingency Theory

Crisis comes with social, cultural and economic consequences at both micro and macro levels (Preda & Stan, 2016). Consequences such as increased poverty and inequalities are usually the outcomes of crisis such as Covid-19 (United Nations Development Programme, n.d). To effectively respond to such pandemic crisis, nations and organizations must have a good leadership drive (Preda & Stan, 2016; Nyenswah, Engineer & Peters, 2016). According to Alkharabsheh, Ahmad, & Kharabsheh (2013), the nature of crisis determines the leadership approach and rational decisions. Thus, ensuring a strategic and responsive leadership approach is a critical navigation factor in such pandemic times.

Leadership scholars contend that transformational and transactional leadership styles are critical management tools in times of crisis (e.g. Alkharabsheh, Ahmad & Kharabsheh, 2013; Zohar & Luria, 2004). That contention may draw its plausibility from the way these leadership styles are enforced: transformational leadership style inspires and motivate followers, while transactional leadership focuses on organization, teamwork and supervision; leadership features that would aid effective crisis management. However, the fit of any leadership strategy would depend on the dynamics of the crisis (Vera & Crossan, 2004). That notion is supported by recent literature (Nyenswah, Engineer & Peters, 2016). Forwarding a contingency leadership approach for effectively managing in a period of crisis, Nyenswah et al (2016) examined the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Liberia. They noted that different leadership styles were adopted at each of the four situations of the crisis (crisis recognition and early mobilization, emergency phase, declining epidemic phase and lastly the long tail).

Recognising that there is no single best fit leadership strategy for effectively responding to all crisis situations, we embrace the contingency logic and suggest a leadership approach that embraces pro-active and innovative marketing foundation (e.g. Opute 2020a; Opute, Irene & Iwu, 2020) towards achieving effective retail marketing response to the

Covid-19 crisis. Taking into consideration the peculiar dynamics of Covid-19 (for example, lockdown and extended implications), the authors forward a leadership viewpoint that recognises the need for a strategic marketing orientation that would enable organisations ensure a retail marketing strategy for not only effectively absorbing the economic shocks associated with such pandemic-induced lockdown but also effectively meeting the customers' needs.

Retail Marketing

Retail Marketing during and after the COVID-19 Crisis

More than ever before, the COVID-19 pandemic which has engulfed the global economy like a wild fire will shape the nature of retail marketing. The retail industry is one of the service sectors hard hit by the pandemic (Fernandes, 2020). Current strategic plans have been rendered useless but the need for planning has become even more important as retailers across the world battle to come up with survival strategies. The closure of national borders, the restriction to the movement of people and goods, re-alignment and re-prioritisation of budgets, the isolation and quarantining of huge numbers of people and the requirements of social distancing are and will continue to have profound implications for the retail landscape. Fernandes (2020) estimates that in China retail sales fell by as much as 20% during the first three months of the pandemic, while a 20-30% reduction in consumer spending since the advent of the pandemic was reported in Italy (WRC: 2020). Looking ahead, COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on how retailers run their businesses and how they engage with customers, suppliers and other stakeholders.

By its very nature of connecting people to products and services, retailing has found itself at the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis especially considering the sudden jump in e-commerce transactions, retailers having to learn and adapt to the changing global market with incredible speed and skill in order to ensure that supermarket shelves are not empty and consumers continue to have uninterrupted access to goods and services (World Retail Congress (WRC), 2020).

Given that the effects of the pandemic will continue to be felt in the coming years, it is imperative for retailers to learn quickly to find ways to swiftly adapt and survive the challenges of the pandemic. Essentially, the pandemic brings both challenges and opportunities for retailers. Not only has it affected retail marketers, other stakeholders that retail marketers deal with, from employees and employers, to key stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, competitors and society at large have not been spared. This review will focus on how retailers could learn and adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19 crisis from a retail marketing mix perspective.

The Retail Marketing Mix

Blut, Teller & Floh (2018) elucidate that the retail marketing mix enables retailers to establish a close relationship with their customers. The retail marketing mix includes all mechanics in a retailer's process of goods and services offer to the consumers and also all the programmed efforts of the managers that adapt the store to the market environment (Lazer & Kelley, 1961). Berman & Evans (2010) add that the retail marketing mix consists of internal factors that are controlled by managers in order to establish and sustain retail patronage and influence the short- and long-term performance of retail organisations in terms of sales, profits, and return on investment.

The components of the retail marketing mix have been the subject of debate in academic literature (Hansen, 1990; Blut et al., 2018). Reference has been made to the traditional marketing mix which is composed of the 4Ps (Product, Place, Price and Promotion) (McCarthy, 1964). Further literature categorises nine (Hansen, 1990), ten (Berekoven, 1995) and six (Müller-Hagedorn, 2005) elements of the retail marketing mix. In another conceptualisation, Barth (1999) posited that the retail marketing mix consists of only three elements namely service delivery, remuneration and consumer influence. Azeem & Sharma (2015) note that retail marketing includes some additional, distinctive aspects that the traditional marketing mix does not address. In a study that seemingly supports that claim, Blut et al (2018) suggest 24 retail-related instruments and these include marketing aspects such as the product range, pricing, distribution, incentives and online retailing. Despite the aforementioned developments, it must be emphasised that the expanded marketing mix which extended the traditional marketing mix by adding people, process and physical evidence to the 4Ps remains the most documented in retail marketing literature, hence the 7Ps viewpoint is embraced in this review.

Product

The challenge of retail marketing during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond is to ensure that businesses produce the “right” products to meet customer needs. The core business of retailers is to provide the market with the right products at the right time, right price, right place, right quantity and right quality (Berman & Evans, 2010). The pandemic has hugely disrupted retailers’ ability to deliver on their core businesses. Pantanoa, Pizzib, Scarpib, & Dennis (2020) elucidate that since the advent of the pandemic, consumers have exhibited a stockpiling behaviour which is different from their usual shopping behaviour thereby leading to a huge spike in demand for some products and failure by some retailers to supply the required goods and services.

Price

The price represents the value that retailers attach to their products and services. From the customers’ perspective, the price denotes the value customers are willing and able to exchange for the products and services that retailers offer. The disruption of the global supply chain and subsequent unavailability of some products has had an influence on consumers’ price sensitivity with some consumers willing and able to accept price increases of even up to 300% for certain emergency products such as masks and sanitisers (Pantanoa et al, 2020). Much as some retailers have made huge losses as a result of reduced demand, others have made billions in profits as a result of a huge spike in demand of certain products, especially food items and PPE.

Promotion

The need for efficient and effective communication has been brought to the fore as a result of the pandemic. Retail marketers need to make sure that all their stakeholders are kept informed about the pandemic and how it will impact on the availability of their preferred products and services. The pandemic demands that retail marketers communicate relevant, and practical information to their audiences in real time (WRC, 2020). Retail marketers will need to share information about product availability, in-store health and safety so that they protect the well-being of their employees and their customers. This information should be shared across stores and across geographical markets. Efficient on-point communication about product availability across markets will also ameliorate the challenges caused by panic buying and stabilise the supply chain of certain products. Furthermore, there is need for retailers to share knowledge about changes in shopping behaviour during the pandemic (WRC, 2020:5).

Place

The “place” marketing mix element represents distribution and it seeks to ensure that products and services are available to customers at the point of sale, (Blut et al. 2018). The shutdown of some industries including the transport sector in some countries has led to a massive disruption of global supply chains (WRC, 2020). This has led to stock-out situations for some products and increasing demand for others. For instance, the closure of borders and restrictions on exports compel retail marketers to diversify their supplier base, find alternative suppliers and in the particular case of South Africa reduce dependence on Chinese suppliers. Ivanov (2020) notes that panic buying and stockpiling of staples such as rice, pasta and tissues in countries such as South Africa, the United Kingdom and Australia has had a negative impact on the global supply chain. The disruption to the global supply chain and the subsequent stock-outs therefore challenges retail marketers to review their supply chains in order to rationalise them so that they are shorter, agile and responsive to market shocks.

Process

The process element of the expanded marketing mix denotes the steps through which a customer goes in order to access retail goods and services. Government regulations on the movement, congregation and gathering of people has led to the emergence of queues inside and outside of stores. This has thus compelled billions of consumers

across the world to start shopping digitally (WRC, 2020) bringing into question the sustainability of brick-n-mortar retailing. Pantano et al (2020) highlight that many customers including the elderly are switching to online purchases, discovering the safety and benefits of home-deliveries, store pick-ups, and cashless payments. Retail marketers therefore need to be prepared for this new normal. WRC (2020) further argues that e-commerce sites such as Amazon and Alibaba, with their advanced logistics and fulfillment capabilities, will be the biggest beneficiaries of the COVID-19 crisis as billions of consumers shift to online shopping to overcome the restrictions brought upon by the crisis.

People

Pantano et al (2020) postulate that COVID-19 has led to a major shift in consumer behaviour with store patronage deterrents such as long waiting times and overcrowding in retail stores. Furthermore, Pantano et al. (2020) note that consumers have become “patient” and are willing to spend time waiting in queues in order to access stores. COVID-19 has also compelled some retailers to introduce innovative social responsibility services such as priority delivery slots for vulnerable or elderly customers in their dealing with special needs customers (Pantano et al., 2020). In some retail stores, the elderly and vulnerable do not stand in queues and they also have access to reserved checkout counters to ensure that they do not spend much time in queues. This also helps to reduce their exposure to multitudes of people and the resultant risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

Physical evidence

Physical evidence refers to the environment in which goods and services are provided. Restrictions on the movement of people, requirements for social distancing and the placing of people in quarantine and isolation as a result of COVID-19 has led to a situation where traffic to some retail stores has been fundamentally reduced. Ivanov (2020) notes that panic buying and stock-piling of staples such as rice, pasta and tissues in countries such as South Africa, the United Kingdom and Australia has had a negative impact on the global supply chain as some consumers prepare for the unknown future. The pandemic coupled with government regulations around it have therefore compelled retailers to invest more in infrastructure and other services that seek to ensure the health and safety for store patrons.

Strategic Marketing and Innovation

Day & Montgomery (1997) delineated four fundamental issues that underlie the marketing field, two of which fit within the conceptual motivation for this paper, namely: (1) How do markets function and evolve?, and (2) What are the contributions of marketing to organisational performance and societal welfare? Being conscious of how markets function is essential for retail businesses and the extent to which businesses maintain that consciousness would shape their marketing performance and extendedly organisational performance. From a synthesis of responses of 36 strategic marketing educators, Varadarajan (2015) categorised 8 unique (style, wording and length) yet overlapping responses. In line with the conceptual framing of this study, the authors embrace the view that the strategic marketing field is about “the study of strategies that businesses use to create value for customers” (Varadarajan, 2015, p.80).

Furthermore, based on responses from the same sample, Varadarajan (2015) underlines two fundamental issues to strategic marketing: firm behaviour and firm performance, a conclusion that resonates with the viewpoint of Day & Montgomery (1997). A firm’s behaviour is influenced by its consciousness of how markets function and evolve, and this ultimately would impact organisational performance. Conscious of constant technological evolvment and increasing marketing implications, alongside the Covid-19 pandemic and its paralytic impact on businesses, this study makes a case for business models that are founded on strong strategic marketing drive (e.g. Opute, 2008). A strategic marketing orientation is critical to effective customer orientation and enhanced organisational performance (Opute, 2020a). Bearing in mind that crises could set in, be they natural or health related, that could have paralytic consequences for businesses (such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic), the authors argue for a strategic marketing focus which is proactive and leverages technological opportunities to effectively deliver value to customers even in pandemic times.

According to Gartner (2015), Internet of Things (IoT), a strategic technology trend, tremendously impacts business opportunities, and firms would achieve better customer orientation and boost performance, if they utilise the impacting potentials of IoT (Opute et al, 2020). The 'place' element of the marketing mix relates to distribution and seeks to ensure that products and services are available to customers at the point of sale, (Blut et al, 2018). At the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, necessary containment measures had to be enforced, leading not only to the shutdown of some industries including the transport sector in some countries which led to massive disruption of global supply chains (WRC, 2020), as well as lockdown with restricted movement. A severe implication of the latter (lockdown) for consumers is the inability to access food supply due to movement restriction. It is pertinent that strategic marketing initiatives be enforced to secure the target of providing customers with goods and services, hence the authors argue that the point of sale with regards to 'place' feature of the marketing mix, should not only be physical but also digital. So, the authors argue that innovative retail marketing processes should be put in place to aid online shopping (e-commerce).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The conceptual premise of this paper is on the impact of crises, such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on societies (economies, businesses and consumers), and a retail model that would effectively eliminate the point of sale consequences for consumers when there is movement restriction. Therefore, this paper, which was based on review of literature, was carefully focused on capturing literature that fits within the conceptual frame. The literature presented in this paper was sourced through databases and websites. Qualitative in nature this study involved the systematic collection, organisation, description and interpretation of textual, verbal or visual data (Hammarberg, Kirkmann & de Lacey, 2016). In an attempt to ensure that appropriate materials were used, the authors made use of a mixture of review methods namely traditional literature review, and document analysis. This process was to ensure a multidimensional perspective on Covid-19-Pandemic and its implications for retail businesses. To offer a wide-ranging overview in this study, the authors gathered and synthesised substantial peer-reviewed articles about corona virus, retail business management, strategic marketing and leadership. Considering the newness of the virus and how it has impacted businesses, the authors thought it best not to narrow our search for articles but instead carry out a detailed, comprehensive search of literature by making use of the traditional literature review method (Jesson, Matheson & Lacey, 2011; Li & Wang, 2018).

For a study of this nature, the authors felt that organisational and institutional documents would be useful. Owing to this, we applied document analysis as part of our review method. Therefore, we consulted institutional websites such as the World Bank, the United Nations, World Health Organisations and several other government agencies' reports. The authors basically adopted the counsel of Dey (2005) who argues that "... in documentary analysis, the criteria for selecting documents, or for focusing on particular extracts, should reflect the issues on which the researcher is seeking evidence." With regards to Covid-19 and its impact on the businesses, literature search was specifically limited to publications on South Africa and Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS: LEADERSHIP AND MARKETING STRATEGY MODEL FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINED EFFECTIVE RETAIL MARKETING RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The central focus of this study is to forward a retail marketing strategy for effectively responding to crisis situations such as Covid-19 where containment measures such as restriction of movement may be enforced. In line with that focus, the impact of Covid-19 on retail marketing was underlined, as well as the retail marketing mix and Covid-19 implications highlighted in the literature review. Within that focus too, the importance of appropriate leadership strategy that drives a pro-active and innovative strategic marketing orientation that is not only performance enhancement enabling but also enabling customers to conveniently access their needs despite movement restriction was also underlined in the literature review. In this section, the authors offer retail marketing enabling recommendations, pinpointing clearly the leadership, strategic marketing and retail marketing mix tenets, towards mitigating the lockdown implications for businesses as well as customers.

During times of crisis of immense daunting challenges with significant implications for businesses as well as customers, businesses must embrace agile response strategies. This is the underlying rationality for the conceptual premise of this paper. Combining leadership and marketing strategy foundations, this study forwards recommendations for effective retail marketing response and recovery. Taking the Covid-19 pandemic as a focal point, this study forwards a retail marketing strategy that would enable organisations effectively meet the needs of their customers even in health crisis situations where countries and cities are put under strict lockdown. The authors argue that achieving such retail marketing strategy for effectively containing the implications of such health crisis requires a strong leadership that is not only pro-actively driven both also embraces innovative retail marketing strategies. The authors argue that a careful fit-for-purpose strategy is essential towards ensuring effective response. While the proactive measures that lend utility in responding to crisis situations could take different forms, the measure and timeliness of response effectiveness hinge significantly on two major factors: a steady and measured leadership; and a clearly functioning retail infrastructure.

The marketplace is becoming increasingly dynamic and the plausibility of the customers being the king is gaining increasing validity. To compete effectively in such dynamic market landscape, organisations require a suitable retail marketing strategy. In this study, the authors extend that pertinence and argue that organisations aiming to effectively absorb and contain the implications of natural disaster induced crises require a retail marketing strategy that contains initiatives for enabling organisations to effectively absorb and respond to the unfolding challenges. One critical lesson that has been learned through the Covid-19 pandemic is the pertinence for retail marketers to embrace digitalised marketing. Digitalised technologies based marketing, also called e-commerce, which has been defined as “the process of buying, selling, transferring, or exchanging products, services and/or information via computer networks, mostly internet and intranet” (Turban, King, Liang & Turban, 2010:48), has enabled economies like Germany cope more effectively with the movement restriction implications as they had already existing marketing processes that allow customers to place their orders online and their orders are delivered to their door steps. The ‘place’ marketing mix component is no longer physical space specific but could be virtual space based.

The post-COVID-19 retail landscape demands that retail marketers find new ways of identifying and satisfying emerging customer needs (WRC, 2020:9). Retail Marketers need to start visualising and planning for the post-COVID-19 scenario. There is need for retail marketers to come up with business models that are agile and responsive to market shocks. The post-COVID-19 environment will require retailers to shift from a short-term “fire-fighting” mentality to sustainable long-term thinking structured along the need to develop business models that are robust and withstand market shocks and uncertainties.

Digital technologies are increasingly defining daily life dynamics (Opote, 2017). Consequently, for consumers as well as companies, digital technologies are significantly constituting a tool for stimuli response (for the former) (Opote et al, 2020; Belk, 2013; Opote, 2017) as well as delivery of marketing strategy and tracking consumer behaviour (for the latter) (Opote, 2020a+b; Ozuem, Howell & Lancaster, 2008). There is a growing trend of paradigm shift from the point of practice of marketing, especially in securing competitive advantage not only in local (e.g. Opote, 2020) but also in global markets (e.g. Rachinger, Rauter, Müller, Vorraber & Schirgi, 2019; Opote, 2020a; Lobo & White, 2017)

Within that focus of securing competitive advantage, companies may not only leverage the internet and emerging technologies in the products and services delivery to customers, but also in securing strategic engagement with customers (e.g. Opote, 2020b; Ozuem et al, 2008). Leveraging that foundation, this study underlines that retail marketers can, through their effective implementation of e-commerce practice, boost their digital marketing environment, and thereby effectively interact with their customers, capture their products’ or service’s emotions, towards adopting proactive marketing initiatives to meet their needs, either by ensuring timely and appropriate product (or service) delivery or filling new market needs through product or service innovation (e.g. Opote, 2020a).

Issues around business continuity and innovation will become significantly important in the post Covid-19 period. The post-COVID-19 environment will demand that retailers develop new innovative models to drive business’s capacity to keep their customers, who in the modern-day market landscape are becoming more powerful and could quit at any slight opportunity (Opote, 2017). The importance of the innovative retail marketing strategy has been demonstrated by Grant Pattison, the former boss of Massmart, in the Edcon Group marketing turnaround. Equally important in that

innovative retail marketing stride is the pertinence for a pro-active orientation towards creating strategic and creative partnership across different sectors. While the effectiveness of such innovative approach has been documented, for example, Global retailers such as Spar have embraced the concept of joint procurement as a way of overcoming the challenges they are facing in terms of the supply of products to their stores (WRC, 2020:9), this study emphasises the importance for strongly leveraging the digital technology enablement.

Retail marketers need to view the current crisis not as the beginning of the end but more as an opportunity to refocus, rebuild (through innovation) and recover from the crisis. Indeed retail marketers should not only be aiming to recover from the shocks from the Covid-19 pandemic but should be consciously aware of the glaring paradigm shift in marketing practice where the internet and digital technologies are defining the new order. Digitalised marketing will be the norm in a not too distant future. Therefore, to effectively refocus, rebuild and implement adequate strategic and innovative marketing processes that will make the cutting edge, a strong, pro-active, agile and contingency driven leadership approach would be essential. Such leadership qualities would be the key differentiators between marketers that would make the cutting edge and those that would lose out. Pantano et al (2020) note that the COVID-19 crisis will shape and re-shape the relationships that retailers have with their customers. Retail marketers aiming to survive in the new marketing order would need to effectively use digital technologies not only in enabling customers to place their orders through online media, as well as achieving effective and timely delivery to customers, but also in ensuring effective customer engagement towards identifying and meeting customers' needs. Acting swiftly would be a key leadership approach. A fit leadership strategy is required to ensure that suitable and adequate enabling infrastructure is in place, and adequately skilled personnel are positioned at the key points to ensure appropriate data management towards customers' information tracking to understand their nature and time of need, and also use relevant machine learning tools to facilitate strategic customer interaction that can impact revenue positively. Finally, the leadership should focus at orchestrating strategic interactions that facilitate meeting expectations at every stage of the buying journey.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has forwarded a pro-active and innovative retail marketing strategy that would lend its utility in effectively responding to and minimising the economic implications of the lockdown containment strategy of crisis management on businesses and customers. Beyond that, the forwarded retail marketing strategy would enable businesses to improve their operational dynamics to meet the gradually unfolding new marketing norm. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly raised the attention on crisis management, and in particular, crises of the nature that may warrant lockdown strategies. For businesses and customers, crises of such nature would have far-reaching implications. There is a huge research premise here from the point of the implications of Covid-19 on businesses and what strategies businesses as well as customers are embracing to overcome the implications. Multiple directions exist in that regard, from the point of industrial differentiators, geographical differences and government role, amongst others. Future research could be carried out to investigate the level of customer satisfaction with waiting times during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this will influence their shopping behaviour after the pandemic.

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