

# THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 AND SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING OF FAST FOOD INDUSTRIES IN RIVERS STATE, SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The highly infectious COVID-19 pandemic has affected many economies and has thrown many firms out of business even in Nigeria. This study examined the effect that COVID-19 had on sustainability marketing of fast food businesses in Rivers State. Research design used was the survey method. The population comprised of Fifty-Two (52) registered and functional fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt, staff number being 122. Considering the size of the population, census was employed. The questionnaire was validated by some marketing professionals, test-retest was done, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the internal reliability. Data obtained were analysed according to the stated objectives and hypotheses of the study. All analyses were done electronically with simple regression model using the SPSS software version 20.0. Findings showed that COVID-19 lockdown resulted to a decrease in strategic integration of fast food businesses in Rivers State. COVID-19 social distancing resulted to a decrease in social engagement of fast food businesses in Rivers State Nigeria. The study recommended that a responsible business conduct (RBC) approach to the COVID-19 crisis response will help ensure that the environmental, social and other governance issues are central in the design and implementation of business response*

Keywords: Covid-19, lockdown, social distancing, sustainability marketing

## INTRODUCTION

Corona virus disease that is also known as COVID-19 is a new infectious disease which has not been identified previously in human body. According to Yan-Rong (2020), the disease causes acute respiratory illness such as flu; presents symptoms like a cough, fever and in more severe cases pneumonia. Corona Virus

2 is also known as SARS-COV2 (Adnan, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir & Siddique, 2020; Harapan, Itoh, Yufika, Winardi, Keam, Te, et al, 2020). The outbreak was announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) at the beginning of the year 2020 (Adhikari, Meng, Wu, Mao, Wang & Raat (2020). As reported by WHO, the disease was first noticed in Wuhan (Hubei District) of China around December 2019 (Alanagreh, Alzoughoul and Atoum, 2020).

As stated earlier, the disease broke out in China and was even called China disease, and from there, it spread all over the world including Nigeria. Nigeria recorded her first index case on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 (Ohia, Backarey & Ahmed 2020). After then, the disease has spread to all the 36 states of the country including Abuja the capital territory with confirmed cases and deaths toll increasing daily; according to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), (2020). Measures such as lockdown of some parts of the country including Rivers State was implemented. The hospitality industry, parks, restaurants, bar parlors were totally closed. More people worked from home as they must have something to eat.

For most fast food industries and their customers, there was the need for them to continue in their business relationships on another level (Digital level) during the covid-19 period. Hence, the need to seek partnership with local delivery models and channels that will ensure the availability and this necessitates the need for sustainability marketing in order to keep the business going despite the challenges presented by the covid-19 pandemic. This study therefore aimed at ascertaining the effect of covid-19 on sustainability marketing of Fast Food Businesses in Rivers State, South-South Nigeria. This is against the backdrop of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Eating out and visits to fast food businesses have become peoples' way of life in Nigeria and most other parts of the world. Lunch time is always a fun to most people because of these eateries and the business thrives well in Nigeria. The advent of COVID-19 has changed the way things are done and the measures taken have effects on both the organization and the buyers.

Against the backdrop that the lockdown of the fast-food businesses and other businesses in the hospitality industry has prevented people from eating-out or visiting the restaurants, like in the traditional way, through physical contacts and hanging-out. People work from their homes or offices after the lockdown was partially or fully relaxed and must still buy food from fast food and must eat. The use of delivery channels through bike-riders seems the only way to sustain the business. Works are scanty in the extant literature on the nexus between COVID-19 on sustainability marketing. This is because the covid-19 pandemic is novel

and researches of its impact on business sustainability are still ongoing. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to contribute to the extant literature by finding the effect of the COVID-19 on sustainability marketing in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of COVID-19 on sustainability marketing of fast food businesses in Rivers State, South-south Nigeria

Consequently, the specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. determine the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on strategic integration of fast food businesses in Rivers State Nigeria.
- ii. examine the effect of COVID-19 social distancing on social engagement of fast food businesses in Rivers State Nigeria.
- iii. ascertain the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food businesses in Rivers State Nigeria.

In line with these objectives, the following research questions were asked in the cause of the study:

- i. To what extent does COVID-19 lockdown affect social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria?
- ii. How does the COVID-19 social distancing affect strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria?
- iii. What is the extent of effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria?

Drawing from the research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated in the study:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant effect of COVID-19 lockdown on social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant effect of COVID-19 social distancing on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria.

The relationships examined in this study are illustrated in the conceptual framework in figure 1.

Conceptual framework

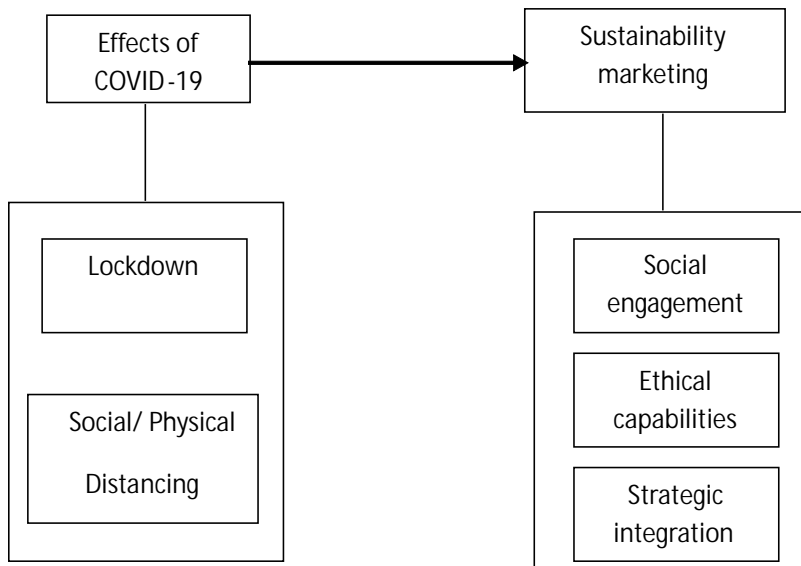


Figure 1: Conceptual frame work for the effect of COVID-19 on sustainability marketing

Source: Researcher's Desk, 2020.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Foundation

Resource Based Theory (Jay, B. Barney; 1991)

Within the theory, it suggests that sustainability oriented companies or organizations have comparative advantage that lies in the resources and the way the firm structures and manages them. The theory debates that firms create exceptional, no imitable and valuable capabilities that leads to the creation of unique competitive advantage on the market.

### Conceptual Review

#### The COVID-19 Pandemic

The world was shocked by the outbreak of a new virus called Corona virus also known as COVID-19 pandemic. (Otache, 2020). The outbreak was announced in the year 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Adhikan et. al. 2020; Adnan et. al. 2020). The disease is declared to have affected about 214

countries and territories around the world (Worldometer, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges that have affected the way of lives of many people. Demand for many goods and services have fallen drastically, while some industries have closed completely (Air-line, hospitality and churches). In Nigeria and around the world, borders have been closed and societies are having to change the way they do their things. As the entire country came under quarantine order, people work from their homes, consumers around the world try to reduce human contact. The fast food services providers must know that their response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on their business. Those that respond by rising up to the challenges would innovate the way of dealing with situation at hand, while those who react may struggle with adapting to changes in order to sustain their markets' physical/social distancing and lockdown would be used as our measures of the effect of COVID-19 in this study.

#### Social/Physical Distancing

Social/physical distancing measures have limited the ability to engage customers with their service providers like that of the fast food on a one-on-one basis as before the outbreak of the COVID-19. This one-on-one relationship which was through physical contact is almost absent in fast food business as people no longer eat-outside their homes.

This has called for a new delivery system (bike-man) and increase in the utilization of digital and on-line platforms for customer engagement and information dissemination and this trend is expected to continue progressively into the future.

#### The Lockdown

The partial/couplet lockdown restriction of the country has impacted on the way of doing things. Given the restriction, it has been challenging for fast food industries who are still open to move their goods through their customers. Also the retail route is challenged due to transportation constraints which are now been replace by bike-riders. People now eat at home or in their offices due to the lockdown.

The most significant changes during and after the Covid-19 crisis will be the surge in e-commerce. Consequently, there will be need for fast food industries to maximize e-commerce potentials and logistics. Customers will mostly place their orders through phones and other tele-communication means. The ability to leverage the integration of delivery services and finch providers within the retail

sector will be a game changer.

### Sustainability Marketing

The term sustainability stands for the “development that meets of current generations need without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs, this was stated in the United Nations (UN) Brundtland Report UNWCD of 1987. In the opinion of Elkington and Forks (1998), sustainable marketing is a three-dimensional construct consisting of environmental responsibility social engagement and economic success. Chabowski, Mena, and Gonzalez-pardon (2011) stated that companies create unique capabilities through these three pillars that lead to increase in profitability due to unique competitive advantage as in the case of fast food industries organizations are keen in introducing sustainable strategy.

Sustainability is also the key driver of innovation (Andries & Stepha, 2019). Here, marketing sustainability will be measure with strategic integration; social engagement and ethical capabilities.

### Strategic Integration

The key elements of sustainability integration into an organization's operation like the fast food industry should be done through the development of triple responsibility – economic, environmental and social, thereby shifting away from the conservative theory of sole profitability (Dyllick, Harmon, Russell, and Fairfield; 2007).

According to Schrettle; Hinz, Scherrer-Rathje and Friedli (2014) strategic integration embodies true incorporation of sustainability values and ethics into the firm's strategy. Crittenden; Crittenden; Ferrell; and Pinney (2011) opine that this consists of a mission and shared values as well as norms. This is a kind of approach of internally building sustainability culture and having sustainability-embedded strategy, rather than just selling sustainable products or using such activities as image-building tool.

### Societal Engagement

Societal engagement or climate stands for the proactive development of strategies that benefit stakeholders and the organizations (Crittenden et al, 2011). It is developed around the societal challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and prospects that could be used as generators of organizations resources. Practical application of marketing orientation towards stakeholders is necessary for the establishment and progress of ethical decision-making in all

marketing activities (Laczniak & Murphy, 2006). According to Hult, (2011) proactive fast food industries in terms of strategy in implementation of expectations of primary stakeholders.

Moreover, the co-operation between the company and its suppliers is identified as a systemic resource that could be used to reach comparative advantage through the selection and effort coordination.

### Ethical Capabilities

Competitive advantage of organization is seen through her resources that are unique in skills or knowledge, material assets, human resources, organizational assets that ensure the creation of comparative advantage on the market ethically (Thompson, Strikland, & Gamble, 2008). Marketing resources refer to all types of resources expanded by an organization toward the creation, communication and delivery of products that offer value to relational changes with the organization.

### COVID-19 and Sustainable Marketing

Corona Virus disease also known as Covid-19 is an infectious disease that caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2; which is also known as SARS-COV2 (Adnan et al, 2020; Ohia et al. 2020). In the opinion of Adnan et al, (2020). It is a highly communicable diseases and presents symptoms like; fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, sneezing and pneumonia in more severe cases. Transmission occurs at close contacts through respiratory droplets. (Horapan et al, 2020). Measures such as lockdown, physical distancing; self-isolation or self-quarantine and observation of simple hygiene through regular washing of hands under a running water for about 30 seconds with soap is recommended. Wearing of face masks and covering the mouth with handkerchief when coughing or sneezing among the people. (Ohia et al, 2020). In the opinion of Adnan et al, (2020), there is no known cure or vaccine for COVID-19 pandemic as at the present, **THOUGH** many countries and international bodies are making efforts to develop vaccines or drugs for COVID-19 diseases.

It is no more gain saying that organizations like the fast food industries are either closing down or struggling on how to survive in the business to sustaining their markets. A significant number of organizations in the fast food industries across the globe including Rivers State are doing some work around digital transformation and better embedding technology in their operations. The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the resultant measures put in place to limit its

spread (most especially physical distancing, varying lock-down measures) have resulted in a heightened need for new ways of working across the customers. Most significant has been the increased drive for remote working and the need to leverage digital channels for operations execution. The new situation places a strain in traditional non-digital avenues of operation in the sector and tests the depth of technology uptake in the markets. The fast food industry has taken the challenge of bridging the gap between the industry and the customers by using motor-bikes to reach them both at homes and offices.

### METHODOLOGY

The research design used for the study was the survey method. The survey method is a way of collecting data from a sample of individuals systematically. The choice of the survey method was motivated by the fact that it helped describe the factual information of respondents being considered. The population of this study comprised of all the registered fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt. According to the Association of Fast Food and Confectionary of Nigeria (AFCON) Rivers State Branch, enlisted by the Rivers State Ministry of Commerce & Industry (Yellow Pages, 2016/2017), there are Fifty-Two (52) registered and functional fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt, with their combined staff number being 122. Considering the size of the population, census was employed. Convenience sampling method was adopted in the study where respondents were approached in their work places and copies of the questionnaire administered to them with the help of research assistants. The questionnaire was validated by some marketing professionals and corrections were made where necessary, before it was used in the study. For the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest was done, after which, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the internal reliability. Gliem and Gliem (2003) suggested that a Cronbach's alpha that is greater than 0.7 is considered adequate and reliable for a given data collection instruments. The results are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis of the Variables

S/N	Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	COVID-19 lockdown	5	.848
2.	COVID-19 social distancing	5	.860
3.	Strategic integration	6	.774
4.	Social engagement	6	.681
5.	Ethical capabilities	6	.913

**Source: SPSS Result, 2020**



Data obtained from the field survey were analysed according to the stated objectives and hypotheses of the study. All analyses were done electronically with simple regression model using the SPSS software version 20.0.

## DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Questionnaire Distribution

**Table 2: Distribution and return of questionnaire**

	Copies of Questionnaire Distributed	Copies of Questionnaire Returned	Copies of Questionnaire Not Returned
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>4</b>

Source: Survey data, 2020

For this study, a total number of one hundred and twenty-two (122) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the staff the Fifty-Two (52) registered and functional fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Out of this number, one hundred and eighteen (118) were returned, while four (4) were neither filled nor incorrectly filled. Data analyses were thus made based on the correctly filled and returned copies of the distributed questionnaire.

### Test of Hypotheses

**Objective 1:** To determine the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

#### Hypothesis One

$H_{O1}$ : There is no significant effect of COVID-19 lockdown on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

**Table 3:** Regression analysis showing the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value
Constant	8.812	4.601	1.915
COVID-19 lockdown	-4.291	1.115	-3.848***
F	25.579		
R	0.678		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.621		
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	0.584		
N	118		

Source: Survey data, 2020

Note: \*\*\* = Significant at 1% level

Table 3 shows the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. From the simple regression analysis table, COVID-19 lockdown was found to be statistically significant at 1% and negatively related to strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. This indicates that an increase in COVID-19 lockdown resulted to a corresponding decrease in strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. Similarly, the R square value was 0.621, which indicates that about 62% of the variation found in strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria was accounted for by COVID-19 lockdown. Additionally, the F-ratio value of 25.579 indicates that the model specification was significantly correct at 1%. Thus, the COVID-19 lockdown impacted negatively on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

With this finding, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. It can then be concluded that COVID-19 lockdown has significant effect on strategic integration of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. This result has been found to be in agreement with the view of OECD (2020) which revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic affected business strategies of many organizations especially those in developing countries like Nigeria. Similarly, KPMP (2020) added that the pandemic altered the corporate social responsibility strategies of businesses in Nigeria.

Objective 2: To examine the effect of COVID-19 social distancing on social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

#### Hypothesis Two

HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant effect of COVID-19 social distancing on social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

Table 4: Regression analysis showing the effect of COVID-19 social distancing on social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value
Constant	6.728	2.031	3.312
COVID-19 social distancing	-5.202	2.017	-2.579**
F	22.161		
R	0.775		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.647		
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	0.404		
N	118		

Source: Survey data, 2020

Note: \*\* = Significant at 5% level

Table 4 shows the effect of COVID-19 social distancing on social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. From the simple regression analysis table, COVID-19 social distancing was found to be statistically significant at 5% and with a negative figure. This implies that the COVID-19 social distancing resulted to a decrease in social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. The R square value of 0.647 shows that 65% of the variations in social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria was accounted for by COVID-19 social distancing. Similarly, the f-ratio value of 22.161 indicates that the model specification was correct while significant at 5%.

Thus, with this result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. It can then be concluded that COVID-19 social distancing has a significant abut negative effect on social engagement of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. As with previous researches, the social distancing measure of the federal and state governments had negative effects on citizens as well as businesses in the country (Aifuwa, Musa & Aifuwa, 2020; Olapegba, *et. al.* 2020). Also, with government restrictions and need for social distancing, closures of non-essential businesses and restrictions on restaurant operations, the social involvements of these entities have drastically depleted (KPMG, 2020).

Objective 3: To ascertain the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

Hypothesis Three

HO<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

Table 5: Regression analysis showing the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value
Constant	3.213	1.011	3.178
COVID-19 lockdown	-4.319	2.121	-2.036**
F	24.307		
R	0.751		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.640		
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	0.429		
N	118		

**Source:** Survey data, 2020

**Note:** \*\* = Significant at 5% level

Table 5 shows the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. From the simple regression analysis table, COVID-19 lockdown was found to be statistically significant at 5% and with a negative figure. This implies that an increase in COVID-19 lockdown equally resulted to a decrease in ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. The R square value of 0.640 shows that 64% of the variations in ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria was accounted for by COVID-19 lockdown. Thus, when there is total economic lockdown, it results to decrease in ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria and vice versa. Similarly, the f-ratio value of 24.307 indicates that the model specification was correct while significant at 5%.

Thus, with this result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. It can then be concluded that there is significant effect of COVID-19 lockdown on ethical capabilities of fast food industries in Rivers State Nigeria. In the view of Nuno and Filipa (2020) the lockdown of the world

economy due to covid-19 has a direct impact on firms, with a severe increase of poverty levels, unemployment, health risks, business ethics and a huge uncertainty of the effects on the environmental aspects of the global goals. Also, restrictive non-pharmaceutical measures, for example lockdown, social distancing and quarantine implemented in contexts already characterized by fragility – in conflict and humanitarian situations was a key ethical challenge as the freedom to operate was limited (UNDP, 2020).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created major disruptions in the economy and the life of businesses, whether or not they are able to continue their operations. These disruptions are creating a wide range of impacts on companies and many of them are struggling financially, strategically and ethically. The challenges brought by the covid-19 pandemic may be one of the most difficult crises that organizations ever experienced before. This study therefore, examined the effect of COVID-19 on sustainability marketing of fast food industries in Rivers State. South-south Nigeria. The aim was to find out how Covid-19 measures such as lockdown and social distancing affected aspects of sustainability marketing (strategic integration, social engagement and ethical capabilities) of fast food industries in Rivers State. South-south Nigeria. Findings of the study confirmed *a priori* expectation and revealed that covid-19 measures affected sustainability marketing of the studied fast food industries in Rivers State. South-south Nigeria.

A responsible business conduct (RBC) approach to the COVID-19 crisis response will help ensure that the environmental, social and other governance issues are central in the design and implementation of business responses. The firms should complement the distribution network with direct-to-consumer strategies in order to ensure constant supply of products and enhance profitability. Effective digital delivery of service is essential while organizations deal with staff shortages, office closures.

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