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**RURAL MARKETS' DAYS AND MERCHANDISING
STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA.
A FOCUS IN AKPOR AND EMOHUA COMMUNITIES**

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ABSTRACT

The study is anchored on rural market days and merchandising strategies. The aim of the study is to ascertain the relationship between rural marketing days and merchandizing strategies. The study employed a quasi-experimental research design and the population of the study comprises 5 selected markets in Akpor and Emohua communities. Person moment correlation was used in testing the null hypothesis and our findings shows a significant cause-effect relationship existing between rural market days and merchandising strategy. The study recommends that product knowledge should be communicated to rural and urban consumers effectively through the local and modern recognized channels of communication.

KEYWORDS: *rural market days, merchandising, product placement, consumer education.*

INTRODUCTION

In time past, the Market place is usually a meeting avenue for the display of varieties of stock for transactional exchange both for agricultural and textile products and services particularly in agricultural societies like ours (Singh, 1980). To achieve sustained growth and revolution of rural sectors, the market should be capable of handling increased production of commodities. It is also essential to take into cognizance some of the unproductive markets to achieve the goal of transforming the rural economies (Gana, 1979). In the view of Eighmy (1972), with the growing size of the market, it becomes more complex and

differentiated by increasingly multifunctional process. These markets are accountable for establishing the links between its surrounding areas and covered the way for establishing the grass root level networking of trade systems throughout the developing world.

The rural markets deliver an engagement to the workers of dis-organized sector and source of livelihood for traveling traders who purchase the agricultural commodities from different places to sell in periodic markets (Gana, 1979). In the chain of production, processing and distribution of goods and services, the market center has definite role to play. According to Singh, (1980), customers in a rural areas

are knowledgeable about numerous products that are on offer in the market place, thanks to television.

Despite plethora of studies in the nexus between rural market days and merchandising strategies none have been directed to Akpor and Emuoha communities. For instance, Stine (2000), examined market place and customer patronage in manufacturing industry. Wilson and Till, (2011), studied the strategies of merchandizing in developing the rural area. Consumers are very skeptical on how, where and what they spend their resources on. During the medieval era, consumers conveniently purchased products without the challenges of substitute product. Now firms are facing the challenges of meeting the needs and wants of consumers because there are too many products to select from. Thus, the study is to ascertain the relationship between rural marketing days and merchandizing strategies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is anchored on social exchange theory. According to Homans(1961), social exchange is the exchange of tangible and intangible activities which are more or less costly or rewarding between two or more persons. Its root can be traced to the 1920s with the works of Mauss (1925), Malinowski(1922), and a host of others. This theory is of the opinion that when there is an interaction between two or more people, there is always a give and take activity going on and these activities can be seen with the physical eyes in for of trade and monetary transactions. The interactions that ignited rural marketing began from contact between two or more persons who understand the needs and wants of the society.

Rural Market Days

Rural marketing encompasses the process of developing, pricing, promoting, distributing rural specific product and a service leading to exchange between rural and urban market which satisfies consumer demand and achieves organizational objectives (Webber, 2003). The rural markets have been playing a dominant role in the improvement of the economy, living standard and livelihood of the rural people. It is the basic channel for the rural people in marketing their own products and the rural markets are the only source of income for the rural farmers.

Stine (2000) stated that it is essential to understand the rural mindset, social norms and culture specifics associated with the origin and emergence of this market. Though to some extent the exhibitions organized by different government and semi government departments have a role in marketing the small scale industrial products but the role and importance of rural market in this case cannot be minimized. The agricultural products and the industrial

products which come to the urban markets come through the rural markets.

MERCHANDIZING STRATEGY

Merchandising strategy is any practice which contributes to the sale of products to a retail consumer (Lehu, 2007). At a retail in-store level, merchandising refers to the variety of products available for sale and the display of those products in such a way that it stimulates interest and entices customers to make a purchase. For example; Market Square Shopping Mall their variety of goods displayed that can stimulate purchase interest. For consumers that window-shop, they will be propelled to purchase from whatthe mall offers. It also means the sales using product design, selection, packaging, pricing, and display that stimulate consumers to spend more. This includes disciplines and discounting, physical presentation of products and displays, and the decisions about which products should be presented to which customers at what time.

According to Wilson & Till (2011), merchandising strategy helps to understand the ordinary dating notation for the terms of payment of an invoice. Categorized discounting, solves pricing problems including increase and reductions. It also benefits to find the net price of an item after single or multiple trade discounts and can calculate a single discount rate that is equivalent to a series of multiple discounts. Therefore, it helps to calculate the amount of cash discount for which a payment qualifies.

According to Russell and Belch (2005) product placement is the determined amalgamation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle and this is also the definition that Wilson and Till (2011) uses. Thus on Russell and Belch (2005) writes about that product placement is found in many different media, all from obvious as movies, TV and video games but also in novels. The impact that a product placement can have to the audience according to Lehu (2007), based on the appearance of the placement and it can be divided into four different types of appearance: classic placement, corporate placement, evocative placement and stealth placement.

CONCEPT DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Rural Market Days in Akpor

Akpor tradition provides five markets day namely,

- RIAGBO
- AHIA'KPARA-ALI
- EBERI
- NMAKARA and
- NNIM

The market place forms the foundation of Akpor communities and constitutes a vital colourful component of socio-cultural life (Nduke,1993). The market place is for commercial exchange, notably

initiated by the farmer. Hence, on Asaragbo, the day preceding Riagbo the traditional Akpor holy day, is set aside for resting day. The Nnim day is a day set aside for free palm wine drinking at the palm wine tappers place or compound hall (obiri). The concept of the Akpor market extends beyond buying and selling of services and goods. The market is the socio-cultural space that serves as the arena for transactional exchange and vital information on various aspects of life in the society. Market days provide opportunity for ancestral veneration and paying of homage to deities. Also, rural markets generate the design for political and administrative purposes in our respective community

In Akpor there are four major markets which are;

AHIA ELERINYA (Women market),

AHIA OZUOBA (Ozuoba market),

AHIA CHOBA (Choba market) and

AHIA RUMUOKPARIALI (Rumuokpariali market).

AHIA ELERINYA (Women market)

Ahia Elerinya is located at the Rumuwali in Ogbogoro town (akami) of Akpor Kingdom. Woman market was created by women and was named Ahia Elerinya by Akpor people but was later renamed as Ogbogoro market. This market is at the water front (Onu Mini) which gives access to Kalabari and other riverine people (Alerimemini) close to the market (Ikunga, 2017). In those days exchange trade by barter, the Kalabari and others riverine people came with their periwinkle (atitara) fresh fish (azubudu) oysters (ngba), crab (ochokoro) and exchanged with the Akpor women the likes of garri, yam, cocoyam, vegetable (Okwokwoweri) and plantain. The market then is not money buying market but trade by barter

Ahia Ozuoba (Ozuoba market)

Ozuoba market is the second market in Akpor kingdom; the market is located at Ozuoba town. This market is the market where women and men of Akpor kingdom gather for exchange of goods and services; these exchanges were not for money but by trade and barter. The goods found in the market were cocoyam (ede), yam (Iji), slave (Owu), three live yam (Onah), water yam (Abala) and palm oil (Monowiri) (Nduke, 1993)

AHIA CHOBA (Choba market)

Choba market is located at the Choba water front in Choba town of Akpor Kingdom. Choba market was created by men and women of Choba to enable them exchange their goods and services to the Kalabari and others riverine people and this market is every eight days. This market is at the water front (Onu Mini) which gives access to Kalabari and other riverine people close to the market (Ikunga, 2017).

AHIA Rumuokparali (Rumuokparali market)

Rumuokparali market is located at Rumuokparali water front in Rumuokparali town of Akpor Kingdom. Rumuokparali market was created by men and women of Rumuokparali to enable them to exchange their goods and services to the Kalabari and others riverine people. This market is at the water front (Onu Mini) which gives access to Kalabari and other riverine people close to the market Nduke (1993). In these days the Kalabari and other riverine people come to the market a day before the market day for the preparation of their goods. The market is usually every eight days, this market is trade by barter, the Kalabari and others riverine people come with their periwinkle (Atitara) fresh fish (Azubudu) oysters (Ngba), crab (Ochokoro) to exchange with Rumuokparali, women with garri (Nbalaka), yam (Iji), cocoyam (Ede) and plantain (Akirima). The market then is not money buying market but trade by barter. This market has section, the section for selling of crops, section for selling of slave and the section of selling cloths. In the market days the slave master brands their slave with marks for identification so that it will not mix with other slaves.

Rural Market Days in Emohua

Emohua tradition provides four market days namely

- URIE,
- AHUA
- NKWO, and
- EKE.

These four market days also represent the Major Market Days and the four cardinal points (East, West, North and South). Urie day is the first day of week and it is used for most traditional ceremonies such as coronation, traditional wedding, conferment of titles, the foundation of new buildings etc.

Furthermore, in Urie market day the family people gather themselves and go to farm for Ele-ru-rie (the head of family), Urie is also name after someone that is born at that particular day which is called "Nwo-urie" (Nduke, 1993). Nkwo day is also a traditional day in Emohua land and is a free day that someone can go to farm on any other place in the land; Nkwo is name after someone which is born at that particular day. Eke Ogboko is regarded as the Sabbath day or the day set aside for resting and holding village meetings. It is not quite as pronounced in modern days in the city as it is in the villages where people are obliged to stay at home but during Eke market days which falls on every four days. Burials and marriages are done outside of Eke days and traditional Emohua families stick rigidly to this custom. Even when it is Christian burial or Christian marriage rites, efforts are made to avoid Eke, which is similar to the Jewish observation of the

Sabbath, while Eke-Ejibara (small Eke) every eight days’ people go to their various farms and other activities. For customary burial ceremonies, annual traditional ceremonies, market days do play very significant part in their planning and ceremonials, any one fixing a ceremony outside of the favorable market days will be regarded as not only violating the tradition but taking some risks also, as each day has been set aside for specific purposes and dedicated as such.

Ahia Nkwo

Ahia Nkwo is a popular market in Rumuche Emohua land which is located at the boundary of Emohua and kalabari/Okirika. Ahia Nkwo was found by late chief Olo of Rumuche in Emohua (Nduke 1993)). The market is at water front which make it easy

for the Kalabari/Okirika to come with their canoe. Ahia Nkwo is usually held every Nkwo markets day which is every four days.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design. 20 copies of questionnaire were distributed to 5 markets within Akpor and Emouha communities. Pearson moment correlation was used in testing the hypothesis. Because the aim of this study is to ascertain the cause-effect relationship existing between rural market days and merchandising strategy.

DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

H₀ Rural market days does not influence merchandising strategy

		Rural_market_days	Merchandising_strategy
Rural_market_days	Pearson Correlation	1	.645**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Merchandising_strategy	Pearson Correlation	.645**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Our test for hypothesis shows that rural market days impact on merchandising strategy with a coefficient of 0.645 and a p-value of 0.000 which is less than alpha of 0.05. We would therefore reject the stated null hypothesis. By implication, this test result shows that the practices of the ancient days have not been totally discarded and are in use today even if some of them have been modernized to meet the changing needs of today’s consumer.

CONCLUSION

The rural markets are an assembly of buyers and sellers of commodities and services meeting at an appointed or customary location at regular intermissions. Such markets are not open every day because, the capital demand for goods sold in the market is small and the aggregate demand is therefore insufficient to support permanent shops. Therefore, it is beneficial that firms should absorb merchandising strategies to effectively and efficiently carry out their marketing activities. However, our test of hypothesis have show clearly that there is a significant cause-effect relationship between rural market days and merchandising strategy within Akpor and Emouha communities

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the following recommendations are made.

- ✓ Firms should endeavor to communicate the product attribute and quality to consumers effectively.
- ✓ Awareness should be created effectively through channels of communication within the communities.
- ✓ Community heads should ensure that the culture and traditions of their community is kept alive through orientation and re-orientation of community members. This should be done regularly
- ✓ Parents should ensure that their languages and tradition are being taught to their children regularly.

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