

A Qualitative Analysis of the Influence of the 2020 Economic Recession on Marketing Decisions: A Cross-Organizational Study

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Abstract:

The study examined the impact of the 2020 economic recession on the marketing strategies of several firms in Nigeria. A qualitative research approach was employed, and data was collected from twenty (20) individuals across four sectors: telecommunications, real estate, media and entertainment, and banking. Data was collected utilising a semi-structured interview framework. A majority of the responders, 13 (65%), were females, with a mean age of roughly 33 years. Findings indicated that businesses had justifications for making a variety of marketing decisions. In addition to a substantial decrease in budgetary allocation, organisations implemented modifications in transitioning to digital advertising platforms, enhancing digital business operations, aligning organisational processes with technology, and embracing a customer-centric advertising approach. The findings suggest that while digital advertising offers cost efficiencies, companies should anticipate rising platform costs and algorithm changes by diversifying their marketing strategy.

Keywords:

Economic recession, marketing decisions, advertisement, digital technology

I. Introduction

The 2020 economic crisis, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, represented one of the most sudden and intense worldwide economic downturns in contemporary history. The 2020 recession was distinct from prior downturns, which typically resulted from financial market failures or speculative bubbles, as it originated from a public health crisis that required extensive lockdowns, disrupted supply chains, and unprecedented reductions in consumer demand (Yu et al., 2021; Aday & Aday, 2020; Ahmed & Aondover, 2022). Businesses in several sectors encountered existential challenges, necessitating a reevaluation and significant adaptation of their marketing strategies to endure in a climate of increased uncertainty. The recession not only changed consumer behaviour but also expedited current trends in digital transformation, compelling organisations to reevaluate budget allocations, communications strategies, and long-term brand positioning (Aliyu et al., 2023). This study analyses the impact of the 2020 recession on marketing decisions, emphasising significant changes in company tactics, customer interaction, and the overall marketing landscape.

The recession's immediate effect was a significant reduction in discretionary spending due to rising unemployment rates and decreasing household incomes. Research conducted by Shenge et al. (2021) revealed that consumer expenditure in Nigeria decreased by around 30% during the initial months of the epidemic, with the travel, hotel, and luxury retail sectors facing the most significant downturns. Organisations shifted from growth-focused marketing efforts to strategies prioritising cost-efficiency, value preservation, and client loyalty. Discounting,

bundling, and subscription models became prevalent as businesses aimed to retain financially constrained consumers (Sheth, 2020). Moreover, firms with robust digital infrastructure were more adept at navigating challenges, but those dependent on physical retail had difficulties in adaptation (Aondover et al., 2024). This gap highlighted the increasing necessity for digital transformation—a trend that had been steadily developing but was significantly expedited by the crisis.

One of the most notable transformations during the crisis was the swift rise of digital marketing as conventional methods became outdated or ineffective. Due to lockdowns limiting mobility, enterprises adopted e-commerce, social media, and data-driven advertising to sustain client engagement (Vitalis et al., 2023; Vitalis et al., 2025). A report by McKinsey and Company (2020) indicates that e-commerce penetration saw a decade's increase within three months, with online retail constituting over 30% of total sales in numerous areas. Companies that had previously underinvested in digital capabilities were compelled to swiftly implement omnichannel strategies, incorporating online markets, smartphone applications, and contactless delivery choices. In 2020, Amazon experienced a 40% surge in net sales, but conventional shops like J.C. Penney declared bankruptcy, highlighting the pronounced disparity between digitally adept companies and those sluggish to adapt (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Saint et al., (2024) observed that social media platforms have become as essential marketing instruments, with firms utilising influencer collaborations and interactive content to maintain engagement. TikTok, for instance, witnessed remarkable expansion as companies utilised its short-form video format to engage younger audiences at a period of diminished effectiveness in traditional advertising (Kemp, 2021).

The recession concurrently altered consumer preferences, resulting in a marketplace that is increasingly value-conscious and morally motivated. Accenture's 2020 studies indicated that 60% of consumers were increasingly making intentional purchase choices, emphasising affordability, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility. This transition necessitated brands to adjust their messaging, shifting from aspirational marketing to campaigns that highlighted trust, openness, and community support. Corporations such as Unilever and Procter & Gamble reallocated advertising expenditures to emphasise product durability, hygiene, and social impact instead of solely lifestyle branding (Chang, 2025). Moreover, purpose-driven marketing became prominent as customers increasingly preferred products that resonated with their ethical principles. Patagonia's dedication to environmental sustainability and Nike's endorsement of social justice initiatives significantly appealed to recession-era consumers who valued authenticity in corporate conduct (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021).

An essential modification was the heightened dependence on data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance marketing efficiency (Thilagavathy & Venkatasamy, 2023). Due to constrained finances, corporations could no longer sustain expansive, indiscriminate advertising. They opted for predictive analytics, customer segmentation, and programmatic advertising to optimise return on investment (ROI). AI-driven tools facilitated hyper-personalization, permitting marketers to customise promotions and recommendations according to real-time consumer behaviour. Netflix and Spotify utilised machine learning algorithms to improve user engagement via personalised content recommendations, a tactic that was crucial for customer retention during economic instability (Davenport et al., 2020). Programmatic advertising had heightened popularity, as automated bidding systems enabled marketers to dynamically modify ad placements in response to varying demand and customer sentiment (Gunduzeli, 2025).

The recession necessitated a reassessment of marketing budget distributions, leading numerous organisations to reduce traditional advertising spending in favour of performance-driven and digital-centric initiatives. A 2020 poll conducted by the World Federation of Advertisers revealed that 73% of corporations curtailed their advertising expenditures in the second quarter of 2020, with television and print media experiencing the most significant reductions. Conversely, investments in search engine marketing (SEM), content marketing, and email campaigns increased as organisations pursued quantifiable, high-return on investment channels. This transition indicated a wider movement towards responsibility in marketing, necessitating that each dollar expended must exhibit a direct effect on sales or client retention (Morrison, 2022). Small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) particularly profited from economical digital tools like Google Ads and Facebook Business Manager, enabling them to compete with larger entities despite limited resources (Bradac-Hojnik & Hudek, 2023).

The recession highlighted the significance of organisational agility and crisis-responsive marketing strategies. Successful companies were those adept at swift experimentation, incremental campaign modifications, and the incorporation of real-time consumer input. Domino's Pizza leveraged the rise in food delivery demand by improving its digital ordering system and introducing contactless delivery discounts, leading to a 16% increase in quarterly sales (WSJ, 2020). In contrast, brands that followed inflexible, pre-recession marketing strategies frequently faced challenges in maintaining relevance (Mosopefoluwa et al., 2024). The crisis consequently strengthened the idea that adaptability facilitated by digital tools, interdisciplinary teamwork, and consumer insights is a vital factor in achieving marketing success during unstable economic conditions (Belyi, 2020).

Although several organisations substantially reduce expenditures due to urgent financial constraints, much data indicates that sustaining or even augmenting marketing investments during an economic downturn can produce enduring advantages (Bernanke, 2018; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Research conducted by McGraw-Hill during the 1980s recession revealed that businesses who sustained or augmented their advertising expenditures achieved markedly greater sales growth both during and subsequent to the recession (Tellis & Tellis, 2009; Akyuz & Ercilasun, 2014). Findings by Bevanda et al. (2021) substantiate this, revealing that firms who invested in growth during the Global Financial Crisis attained a 17% compound growth rate. This counterintuitive strategy is predicated on the less "noise" in the advertising landscape as competitors retract, resulting in enhanced market share and brand awareness for those who endure (Bevanda et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, the decision to sustain or augment expenditure was not consistent across all sectors. CBRE's examination of marketing department expenditures in the hotel sector identified subtle changes, with notable reductions in public relations and non-management labour expenses, although advertising and website maintenance experienced minimal decreases (CBRE, 2021). This indicates an intentional reallocation of resources to digital channels, highlighting the growing significance of online presence due to changes in customer behaviour (Sharabati et al., 2024). The transition to digital marketing and e-commerce was expedited by the recession, necessitating businesses to implement digital-first strategies to accommodate evolving customer preferences (Purcarea et al., 2022; Sadiku et al., 2022).

The communications and creative tactics experienced substantial adjustments (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022). Effective marketing during the 2020 recession involved not merely replicating previous advertisements, but rather achieving the appropriate tone and addressing

contemporary customer requirements (Demsar et al., 2021; Finneman et al., 2024). Brands that conveyed empathy, utility, or optimism in their advertising cultivated enhanced loyalty (Markovic et al., 2018; Chan, 2023). This underscores the necessity of tailoring communications to align with customer beliefs and apprehensions during periods of uncertainty. Having introduced the variables and background to the study, the main objective is to examine how 2020 economic recession contributes to the marketing decisions of Organisations in Nigeria.

II. Research Methods

This study utilised a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methods are essential for comprehending intricate phenomena, as they yield rich, nuanced insights frequently overlooked by quantitative methodologies. Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observations, enable researchers to investigate the underlying meanings, motivations, and contextual elements that influence human behaviour and experiences, in contrast to numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This method is especially useful for looking at subjective judgements, cultural habits, or new trends when there may not be any set variables. The qualitative approach was expressly chosen for its significance in marketing research, since it elucidates profound consumer insights, brand perceptions, and decision-making processes that surveys alone cannot disclose (Belk et al., 2013). Researchers can change the questions during the study, look into unexpected results, and come up with ideas based on real-world observations because the method is flexible.

2.1 Population and Sample

The study population includes employees in the following departments; Marketing, sales representatives and accounting in selected organisations in Lagos and Oyo state. Organisations cuts across the following industries; Telecommunications, real estate, media and entertainment, and banking industries. A total of twenty ($n = 20$) employees were selected across the identified organisations through snowballing technique. This is because the researchers relied on the recommendation and referrals by the first identified participants in each of the industries used in the study.

2.2 Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to gather data from the selected participants. The interview guide comprised of questions that elicits responses regarding how the economic recession that happened in 2020 affected the marketing decisions within the organisation. The semi-structured guide also made it possible to probe the responses given by the participant.

2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised as the approach for examining the collected data. Thematic analysis is a method that involves examining a collection of data to identify patterns present within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach facilitates the description and interpretation of data, organised into themes and sub-themes. Although Braun and Clarke proposed the generation of initial codes, the codes were created during the process of reviewing the excerpts. The analysis of the data was conducted utilising Atlas.ti.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Role of 2020 Economic Recession in Advertising Decision of Major Advertisers

This section presents results from the gathered data through Indepth interview (IDI) from employees in the sales, marketing and accounting departments of organisations across different industries. Table 1 presents the descriptive information of the participants. More of the respondents 13 (65%) were females, mean age is approximately 33 years old, and most of the participants (75%) were in the marketing department only, 3 (15%) were in sales and marketing, while the rest were in only sales or sales and accounting department.

Table 1. *Participant's information*

SN	Gender	Age	Job position	Years of experience
1	Female	30	Marketing	3
2	Female	31	Sales & marketing	4
3	Male	28	Sales & marketing	3
4	Female	27	Marketing	2
5	Male	30	Marketing	2
6	Female	25	Sales	2
7	Female	36	Marketing	5
8	Female	29	Marketing	2
9	Male	32	Sales & marketing	6
10	Female	30	Marketing	3
11	Male	31	Sales & account	3
12	Female	38	Marketing	7
13	Female	34	Marketing	4
14	Female	35	Marketing	5
15	Male	36	Marketing	9
16	Female	33	Marketing	7
17	Female	40	Marketing	13
18	Male	29	Marketing	4
19	Male	46	Marketing	9
20	Female	39	Marketing	12
		Mean = 32.95		Mean = 5.25

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

After rigorous analysis of the gathered qualitative data, a total of five (5) themes were identified. As shown on Figure 1, they include; Transition to digital platform/advertisement, improved digital business operations, organisational adaptation, shift in advertisement platform/outlet and customer-centric advertisement.

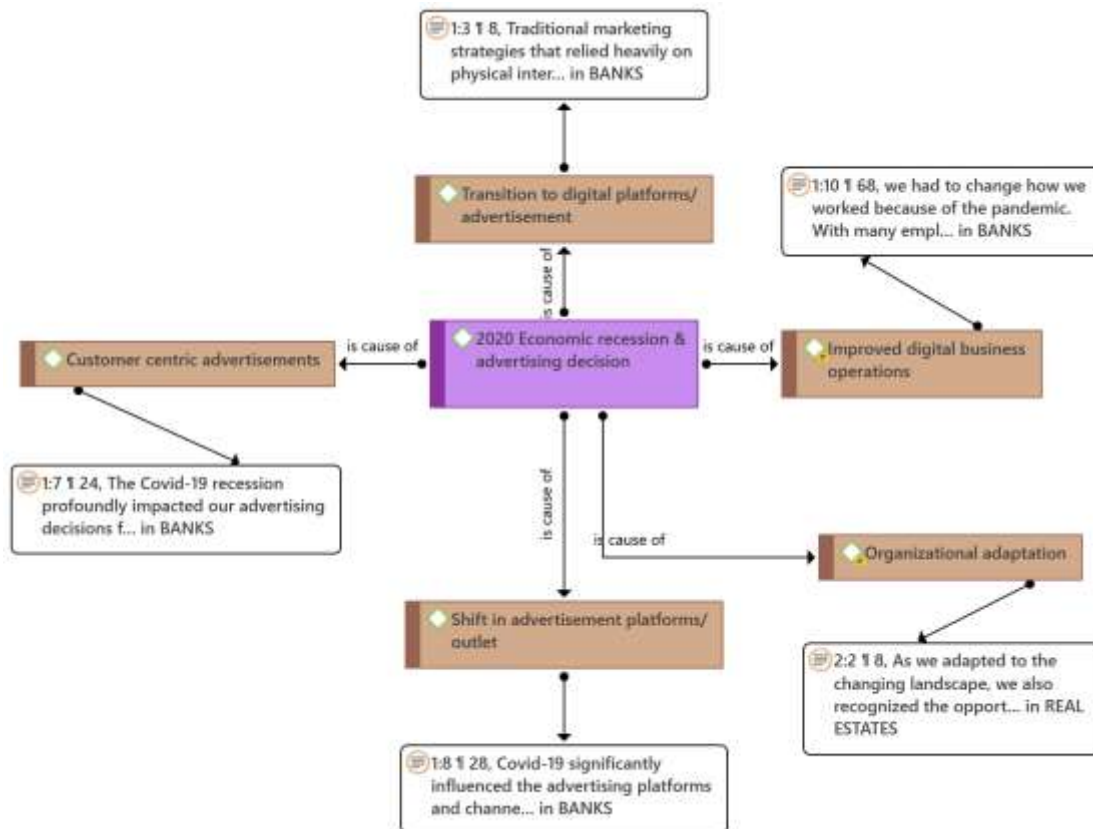


Figure 1. Economic recession and advertising decision

a. Theme 1: Transition to digital platforms/advertisement

One identified influence of the recession caused by COVID-19 on organisational advertising was the increase and shift to digital platforms and advertising. Organisations mostly recognised the necessity for increased digital engagement due to the government's social distancing mandate. This was explicitly noted in the feedback gathered from marketers inside the telecommunications sector. Below are some excerpts;

“...We ramped up our digital marketing efforts. Traditional advertising channels saw reduced effectiveness, so we invested more in online campaigns, social media engagement, and targeted email marketing to reach our audience where they were spending most of their time.” (IDI/46 years/Male/9 years/experience/Etisalat/Marketing)

“...We also saw a surge in demand for certain services, like home internet and mobile data. Our marketing teams collaborated closely with product development to promote these services effectively, ensuring our offerings met the changing needs of consumers.” (IDI/46 years/Male/9 years experience/Etisalat/Marketing)

According to the extracts that were presented earlier, it is possible to draw the conclusion that organisations operating within the telecommunications business supplied a variety of contents that were more interesting and enticed individuals to take part in the epidemic. This was done in order to boost the utilisation of data and credit in order to enhance the number of sales reached. It has also been observed that the telecommunications business chose to invest in internet ads rather than traditional media in order to reach the level of efficacy that was wanted.

b. Theme 2: Improved digital business operations

It was observed from the gathered data that in order to survive the recession, there were improvements on how they reach their potential customers. One of the marketers in the real estate industry indicated that;

“...we focused on digital advertising, leveraging social media platforms and online listings to reach potential clients effectively. We also invested in creating high-quality virtual tours and engaging video content that showcased our properties, allowing prospective tenants and buyers to explore options safely from home.” (IDI/30 years/Female/3 years experience/Adron/Marketing)

Actual face-to-face encounters and one-on-one interactions are among the most successful marketing strategies utilised in the real estate industry. However, in order to survive the recession that came along with the COVID, organisations in the real estate industry created a way to continue providing contents that will give potential buyers the "feel." This was done in order to survive the COVID. Consequently, they resorted to the creation of high-quality video content, which allows prospective clients to readily view the products that they can acquire without having to leave the convenience of their own homes. Additionally, a number of digital services have been created in the banking industry in order to guarantee that they are able to communicate with their clients and continue to provide services. Below is an example of an extract;

“...This situation pushed us to focus more on digital banking, making it easier for customers to access their accounts and get support online.” (IDI/Female/33 years/7 years experience/Globus/marketing)

According to the information presented above, the digital operations made it simpler for consumers to contact the bank and gave them the ability to continue receiving support whenever it was required. This further strengthens the clients' trust in the bank as well as their loyalty to the institution.

The banks have added a number of services to the digital business activities that they have been conducting. As can be seen in the paragraph that follows, it was concluded that banks began providing digital services in order to make it simpler for clients to access the services that are offered within the bank. The bank made a concerted effort to promote these services on digital channels, which allow them to reach a greater number of people:

“... we shifted our focus to promoting these digital channels, emphasizing convenience and safety. Campaigns that once centered on in-person services pivoted to highlight contactless payments, remote account management, and financial planning tools to help customers navigate the uncertainty.” (IDI/40 years/Female/13 years experience/Sterling/marketing)

c. Theme 3: Organisational adaptation

Organisations had to implement a series of adaptations to maintain their competitiveness in the industry. The adaptations resulting from this recession presented challenges and, in some cases, compelled organisations to innovate in response to the rapid changes. Initially, based on the feedback obtained from a sales marketing representative at a commercial bank, it was noted that they faced operational challenges that hindered their ability to deliver satisfactory service to customers. The situation can be attributed, in part, to the insufficient workforce that is typically stationed at the bank to assist customers in resolving

their issues. However, the recession caused by COVID created operational challenges that subsequently prompted organisations to seek means of adaptability. Below is a sample excerpt;

“...Operationally, we faced challenges in maintaining service delivery standards due to workforce limitations as a result of lockdown measures. Remote work became the norm, necessitating rapid digital transformation initiatives. These changes not only affected our internal processes but also required us to rethink our engagement strategies with customers.”
(IDI/Male/36 years/9 years experience/GTBank/Marketing)

One of the means of adaptation for most of the organisations is to create an opportunity for remote working for their employees. In other words, in some instances, employees were permitted to work from home in order to ensure that the business continues. Sample excerpt below;

“...As we adapted to the changing landscape, we also recognized the opportunity to reassess our portfolio. The pandemic accelerated trends like remote work and e-commerce, prompting us to pivot our focus towards properties that cater to these needs, such as logistics centers and flexible office spaces.”
(IDI/30 years/Female/3 years experience/Adron/Marketing)

From the excerpts therefore, it could be deduced that organisation strive to adjust to the change in business in order to cope with the recession due to the pandemic. Advertisement were created and shared via digital media platform in order to further promote the products and services offered by organisations.

d. Theme 4: Shift in advertisement platforms

One of the most obvious impact of the economic recession due to COVID-19 was the rapid shift from traditional advertisement platforms to digital media. The most common traditional advertisement platforms include; newspaper, billboard advertisement, printing and distribution of handbills, amongst others. However, there was a sharp transition to digital media across the selected industries in this study for various reasons. Sample excerpt below;

“...Traditional marketing strategies that relied heavily on physical interactions became obsolete. We had to pivot towards digital marketing channels, leveraging social media, email campaigns, and online customer engagement tools. The emphasis shifted to building strong relationships with existing customers while also reaching out to potential clients through digital avenues....Covid-19 significantly influenced the advertising platforms and channels we employed in 2020 and 2021. With physical interactions limited, digital channels became our primary focus. We increased our presence on social media platforms, utilizing targeted ads to reach specific demographics effectively.” (IDI/Male/36 years/9 years experience/GTBank/Marketing)

The aforementioned extract indicates that the pandemic's nature rendered billboard advertisements for products and services ineffective, as the intended audience is now constrained by social distancing measures. To sustain client relationships, digital media was deemed to possess a broader reach, necessitating a transition in advertising platforms.

In another instance, digital media advertising was favoured due to its perceived affordability relative to traditional advertising platforms. Below is a sample extract;

“...Our marketing budget took a hit, with a significant reduction compared to pre-pandemic levels. Management prioritized operational stability, so we saw cuts in areas like above-the-line advertising—think TV, radio, and billboards—which had always been big-ticket items for us. Those flashy, high-cost campaigns were scaled back or scrapped entirely as we shifted to a leaner approach. Instead, we redirected funds to digital marketing, which was more affordable and aligned with the lockdown reality. Social media ads, targeted emails, and content creation became our go-to channels since they offered better reach for less money.” (IDI/40 years/Female/13 years experience/Sterling/marketing)

From the excerpt, there was a shift to digital marketing due to the reduced budget. In other words, the economic recession made the bank to be creative and made a change in their advertisement platform to one that works with a reduced budget (Digital marketing).

In some other instance, the shift from the traditional media to digital media was considered important in order to be able to reach their targeted audience despite the social distancing rule. For the real estate for example, they were able to create contents on the virtual tour of their listings in order to give their potential client, the feel they might have had if they were present physically. Sample excerpt below;

“...With traditional channels like print advertising and in-person events becoming less effective, we shifted our focus primarily to digital platforms. Social media became a cornerstone of our strategy, allowing us to engage with potential clients through targeted ads and interactive content. We also enhanced our website with virtual tours and online listings to provide a seamless browsing experience. (IDI/30 years/Female/3 years experience/Adron/Marketing)

“...Marketing efforts shifted to digital channels as in-person interactions declined. We focused on virtual tours and online engagement to reach potential buyers effectively.” (IDI/31 years/Female/4 years experience/Design bricks/Sales & marketing)

Same trend was observed in the telecommunications industry as one of the marketers affirmed that they transited from traditional medial platform to digital as it was it was observed that there was higher engagement on the digital channels: [*We moved away from more traditional advertising methods and leaned heavily into digital channels, where we saw increased engagement -* IDI/46 years/Male/9 years experience/Etiscalat/Marketing].

Shift in advertisement outlet was also informed by the the adjustment made to the budget. For instance, as one of the marketers mentioned, the bank, in a bid to manage their budget cut on advertisement adopted digital media platforms such as social media in advertising their products and services. It was presumed that digital advertisement presents a more economical and budget friendly compared to advertisement on bill boards or the distribution of handbills.

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was more affordable and aligned with the lockdown reality. Social media ads, targeted emails, and content creation became our go-to channels since they offered better reach for less money” (IDI/40 years/Female/13 years experience/Sterling/marketing)

“ Pre-Covid, we leaned heavily on TV, radio, and billboards to reach customers, but with people stuck at home and budgets shrinking, those channels lost their punch. We cut spending there and shifted focus to digital advertising—social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook became our bread and butter. It wasn’t just about cost; data showed customers were spending more time online, so we met them there with targeted ads for mobile banking, contactless payments, and loan relief options.” (IDI/40 years/Female/13 years experience/Sterling/marketing)

e. Theme 5: Customer-centric advertisement

Another economic recession impact of COVID pandemic on advertisement decisions of organisations is the adoption of customer-centric advertisement. It was observed from the gathered data that in order to maintain the client/customer base during the recession, organisations made decisions to create advertisement contents that are customer focused. This ranges in series of ways. One of the customer-focused advertisement was creating contents that emphasises the importance of safety during the pandemic. Sample excerpts below;

“...The focus shifted to showcasing the safety measures we were implementing in our properties and emphasizing flexible leasing options, which became crucial selling points during uncertain times” (IDI/30 years/Female/3 years experience/Adron/Marketing)

“...We recognized that potential clients were facing unprecedented challenges, so we tailored our messages to emphasize safety, flexibility, and support. Our communications highlighted the health measures we were implementing in our properties and the flexible leasing options available to accommodate changing needs. This empathetic approach resonated with our audience, fostering trust and loyalty during uncertain times.” (IDI/30 years/Female/3 years experience/Adron/Marketing)

“...We had to ditch the big, aspirational campaigns and zero in on what mattered: safety.” (IDI/40 years/Female/13 years experience/Sterling/marketing)

The strategy of creating advertisement and contents on safety measures in avoiding contracting the COVID virus was to pass an empathetic message to the consumers/customers. This is to create an atmosphere for customers to feel been concerned for. It was also a target to the emotions of the consumers/customers. This also, subtly advertises the organisation.

Another form of customer-focused advertisements especially by banks was the emphasis on financial discipline especially during a time where there is recession. One of the marketers in the selected banks indicated that they created advertisement on how customers can save and manage their money during the difficult COVID period. This was also subtly to pass a message that the bank cares for them, which subsequently builds trust and loyalty in the brand.

“...Our messages included tips on saving money and managing finances during hard times. This change helped us connect better with our customers

and build trust.” (IDI/Female/33 years/7 years experience/Globus/marketing)

In the real estate industry as well, there were iota of customer-focused advertisement [...we were implementing in our properties and emphasizing flexible leasing options, which became crucial selling points during uncertain times - IDI/30 years/Female/3 years experience/Adron/Marketing].

IV. Conclusion

This study analyses the economic influence of the 2020 recession on organisational marketing strategies. As shown in the preceding sub-section, five themes were discerned about the recession's influence on organisational decision-making. The initial highlighted theme was the shift by organisations from conventional media to digital platforms and advertising. The literature generally substantiates the assertion that COVID-19 expedited digital adoption in marketing (McKinsey, 2020; Sheth, 2020), although the case study of the telecommunications sector uncovers significant complexities. Although digital engagement tactics, such as interactive material, effectively stimulated data and credit sales, this perspective neglects the digital gap that marginalised non-tech-savvy consumers (Lythreatis et al., 2022). The focus on online campaigns rather than traditional media corresponds with global trends, although neglects to consider how this transition adversely affects SMEs that lack digital infrastructure. Moreover, the emphasis on telecommunications—an inherently digital-ready industry—may exaggerate the simplicity of transition for other sectors, concealing the challenges faced by businesses such as manufacturing (Kumar et al., 2024).

The second identified effect of the 2020 recession was its facilitation of enhanced digital business operations, particularly within the financial sector. The recorded digital transformations in real estate (virtual tours) and banking (digital services) illustrate adaptations made throughout the pandemic (Pantano et al., 2020). The assertion that these enhancements generally bolstered client trust necessitates examination. Research indicates that although digital convenience has risen, perceived security threats associated with online transactions, particularly in real estate, have engendered new consumer fears (Larios-Hernandez, 2024). The digital development of the banking system, while lauded for its continuity, frequently revealed service deficiencies—older consumers and rural communities encountered exclusion owing to technological difficulties (Ozili, 2022). The literature however overlooks fairness concerns and the phenomenon of "digital fatigue" resulting from excessive dependence on virtual interactions (Obasi & Benson, 2025).

The third recognised theme was the adaptation of organisations to technological advances. The identified adjustments (remote work, digital marketing) correspond with worldwide corporate responses (Carroll et al., 2021), although the analysis minimises the structural challenges. The banking example underscores labour disruptions while neglecting the detrimental impact of expedited digital transitions on service quality—a problem evidenced in financial services, where chatbots and automated systems have exasperated clients (Marinova, 2022). Although remote work facilitated continuity, research indicates its detrimental effect on collaborative creativity within marketing teams (Obal et al., 2024). The theme's emphasis on survival tactics neglects the enduring cultural resistance to change shown in traditional businesses, indicating that adaptation was not consistent nor effortless.

The fourth theme was the transition in advertising platforms by organisations. The economic slump influenced organisations' decisions to change the channels for advertising

their products and services. The transition from billboards to digital media is reflected in industry data, although the justification of "wider reach" warrants scrutiny. Although digital platforms broadened regional accessibility, algorithms frequently established echo chambers, constraining demographic variety in audience interaction (Kitchen et al., 2020). The argument for cost reductions is legitimate although reductive; increasing social media advertising expenses and platform instability (e.g., iOS privacy modifications) subsequently diminished these benefits (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021; Kim, 2024). Although creative, real estate virtual tours cannot entirely match physical experiences, since studies indicate diminished conversion rates for high-value houses (Ploythanachai et al., 2023). The telecommunications marketer's assertion on increased digital involvement overlooks potential sampling bias, as individuals already active online were disproportionately represented.

The fifth highlighted trend was the impact of the 2020 recession on organisations' emphasis on customer-centric advertising. The focus on safety and financial prudence corresponds with the "compassionate marketing" trend, although it risks merging authentic empathy with exploitative branding. Studies indicate that consumers have become proficient at identifying "pandemic-washing," which refers to exploitative corporate social responsibility marketing (Belanova & Sivak, 2020; Kersenhout, 2020). The bank's financial advisory campaigns, although presented as benevolent, nevertheless functioned to preserve deposits amid economic instability—a dualism not analysed in the data. Likewise, the adaptable lease arrangements in real estate sometimes included concealed clauses, a practice condemned in housing research (Furth-Matzkin, 2017). The theme's unquestioning endorsement of customer-centricity overlooks the conflict between genuine concern and profit-oriented personalisation, which post-pandemic consumers are more sceptical about.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study; Marketing budgets must prioritise flexibility to enable swift transitions between channels in response to fluctuating economic conditions and consumer behaviour. Although digital advertising provides cost efficiencies, organisations must prepare for increasing platform expenses and algorithm modifications by diversifying their marketing strategies. Performance measurements must transcend superficial measures, like as engagement rates, and concentrate on substantive objectives, including conversion rates and client lifetime value.

Organisations should implement a hybrid marketing strategy that integrates both digital and traditional media to promote diversity, especially for demographics less adept with technology. Although digital transformation is crucial, organisations should refrain from excessive dependence on algorithmic advertising, since it may foster audience echo chambers and marginalise important customer categories. Investments in intuitive digital interfaces and specialised training programs can assist in closing the gap for marginalised populations, like elderly or rural consumers.

Customer-centric initiatives must exhibit authentic empathy rather than exploitative marketing. Brands must synchronise safety-oriented ads with concrete measures, such as adaptable payment alternatives or improved service assistance, to cultivate enduring confidence. Transparency in promotional offers, particularly in areas such as real estate and banking, is essential to prevent perceptions of predatory marketing. Remote work regulations for marketing teams must be optimised to sustain innovation and collaboration. Although remote operations facilitated continuity during the pandemic, organisations must confront the

issues of team cohesion and innovation by implementing organised virtual collaboration tools and conducting occasional in-person meetings.

Organisations must perform frequent audits of their post-pandemic marketing strategy to evaluate long-term brand health. Temporary adaptations, such as crisis-induced messaging or reactive digital transformations, must develop into enduring solutions that are consistent with fundamental brand values. By harmonising agility with consistency, enterprises may adeptly manage future upheavals while preserving customer loyalty and competitive advantage.

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