



Guerrilla marketing as a survival strategy for small and medium enterprises amidst fuel subsidies removal

Friday Alapa Inalegwu¹, Anthonia Uloko & Johnson Monday Awulu³

¹*Department of Management, Nigerian Army University Bui, Borno State.*

²*Department of Business Management, Benue State University, Makurdi.*

³*Department of Marketing, Federal Polytechnic Idah, Kogi State.*

Corresponding Email: fridayinalegwu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined the contribution of guerrilla marketing strategies to enhancing the survival of SMEs in north-central Nigeria during the fuel subsidy removal regime. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed. The sample involved 397 respondents drawn from a population of 48,440 registered SMEs in two states of north-central Nigeria (Benue and Nasarawa) and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Meanwhile, Bowley's proportional allocation technique formula was used to arrive at the sample size of each state and the FCT. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was used as the data collection instrument. Descriptive analysis and inferential statistics using multiple linear regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Findings revealed that viral marketing, ambient marketing, and ambush marketing positively and significantly influence the survival of SMEs in north-central Nigeria. On this note, it was recommended, among others that for SMEs to further enhance visibility, reach, and ultimately survive during turbulent times; they should focus on creating content that is likely to go viral.

Keywords: Fuel subsidy removal, guerilla marketing, viral marketing, ambient market, ambush marketing and SMEs survival.

1. Introduction

In Nigeria, crude oil was first discovered in Bayelsa State, in the Niger Delta region, around 1956. Since then, Nigeria has been ranked among the world's largest producers and crude oil reserves. The Organization of the Petroleum Export Countries (OPEC) currently ranks Nigeria as the world's thirteenth-largest producer of crude oil (United Nation Environmental Programme [UNEP], 2024). Notwithstanding this notable recognition, the country has been experiencing difficulty in refining crude oil locally in recent times. Several factors such as corruption, poor maintenance culture, among others are responsible for this state

of affairs (Adeola et al., 2022). Therefore, the increase in the overall cost of fuel in the country is as a result of the challenges resulting from crude oil refining (Ogbuigwe, 2018). For her citizens and corporate bodies to buy fuel at reasonable prices, the government of Nigeria decided to subsidize the cost of fuel by paying some part of the money to fuel producers while the citizens and organizations pay the other part each time they purchased fuel at the fuel stations (Soremekun, 2023).

However, over the years, fuel subsidies became a burden on the Nigerian economy



as the government was spending a substantial portion of its budgetary allocation on subsidizing fuel leading to fiscal challenges (Ilodigwe, 2023). The fuel subsidy regime in Nigeria was overwhelmed by corruption and fuel smuggling (McCulloch et al., 2021).

To stem this tide, several administrations in Nigeria came up with reforms to reduce the burden on the government and increase transparency. For instance, in 2012, the government made an abrupt decision to remove fuel subsidies. This decision led to widespread protests, with demonstrators demanding the reinstatement of the removed fuel subsidy. In reaction to the public outcry, the government eventually reinstated the fuel subsidy in 2012, and since then, the payments for fuel subsidies in Nigeria have grown significantly. In 2022 alone, the cost of fuel subsidy amounted to a staggering N4 trillion, which is about US\$6.088 billion. This accounted for 23 percent of the total national budget, which was ₦17.126 trillion (US\$25.87 billion) in 2022 (Oyasipe & Olukoya, 2024).

Consequently, the economic strain caused by sustaining fuel subsidies became unsustainable, prompting the Nigerian government to announce the removal of fuel subsidies in June 2023. The removal came with several negative concerns for both the citizens and businesses. Some of the consequences were inflation, increased poverty level, reduced standard of living, widened income inequality and economic uncertainties. Since they rely on fuel for transportation, utilities and power, small businesses are mostly vulnerable to the removal of fuel subsidies. An increase in the cost of pump price could lead to higher operating costs, making it more difficult for small businesses to survive or remain profitable. This could as well have a negative impact on job creation and economic growth (Gana & Bashar, 2024).

To tackle these difficulties, guerrilla marketing has surfaced as a cost-effective tactic for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to generate hype and enthusiasm around their brand (Ahmed et al., 2020). This type of marketing is unconventional and aims to promote products or services through creative and unexpected means (Ali, 2023). It focuses on reaching the target audience in unique ways to deliver a memorable experience (Levinson, 2007). Guerrilla marketing, known for its emphasis on creativity and unconventional methods, can provide small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) an affordable method to distinguish themselves in the market and draw in fresh customers (Ali, 2023). This approach is effective because guerrilla marketing initiatives are typically surprising and memorable, making them highly shareable and appealing. Whether executed in public parks, festivals, concerts, malls, or sports events, guerrilla marketing seeks to reach a wide audience (Davis & Davis, 2021). Some of the strategies of guerrilla marketing have similar objectives, while others are subcategories. For instance, Kaikati and Kaikati (2004) stated that stealth marketing is a component of viral marketing, while Shelton et al. (2016) observed that street and ambient marketing seek to generate experiences in the urban environment. Hence, to avoid duplication, this study considers three popular guerrilla marketing strategies (viral, ambient, and ambush) widely used to navigate through turbulent times.

Though various researchers have conducted studies on the issue of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, emphasis has been on its effect with mixed findings. While some studies highlight the benefits of fuel subsidies and advocated for increased transparency in their administration (Omosho, 2020; Umeji & Eleanya, 2021; McCulloch et al., 2021), others emphasized the negative



consequences of these subsidies and call for their removal (Asare et al., 2020; Omitogun et al., 2021; Adekunle & Oseni, 2021; Ovaga & Okechukwu, 2022). Besides, in this era of fuel subsidies removal, little to no attention has been given to the survival strategies available for SMEs in Nigeria. Survival in turbulent times demands innovative strategies, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in regions like north-central Nigeria. Guerrilla marketing, with its unconventional and low-cost tactics, can be a powerful tool for SMEs to thrive amidst challenges. This paper therefore assesses how SMEs could use guerrilla marketing as survival strategy during this turbulent time of fuel subsidies removal by using north-central Nigeria as the study area.

The specific objectives were to:

- i. Evaluate the effect of viral marketing on the survival of SMEs in north-central, Nigeria.
- ii. Ascertain the effect of ambient marketing on the survival of SMEs in north-central, Nigeria.
- iii. Investigate the effect of ambush marketing on the survival of SMEs in north-central, Nigeria.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

H₀₁: Viral marketing has no significant effect on the survival of SMEs in north-central, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Ambient marketing has no significant effect on the survival of SMEs in north-central, Nigeria.

H₀₃: Ambush marketing has no significant effect on the survival of SMEs in north-central, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Conceptualizing fuel subsidy and its removal

A fuel subsidy is any financial assistance provided by the government of a country with the aim of reducing the cost of fuel for consumers. This is usually achieved by selling the product (fuel) at a price lower

than the prevailing market rate. In doing so, the government covers the price variance through subsidies. The main goals of fuel subsidies are to make fuel more affordable (Ilodigwe, 2023), stabilize the economy and also alleviate the financial burden on citizens. Nevertheless, fuel subsidies may put a pressure on public coffers, distort markets, and discourage attempts at sustainability and energy efficiency.

Ilodigwe (2023) defines fuel subsidy removal as government's policy to eliminate or reduce subsidies on petroleum products. Usually, this entails raising the price of fuel for customers to reflect its actual market worth, free from arbitrary price manipulation by the government. The main reasons behind fuel subsidies removal regime by governments across the globe are to take care of budget constraints, reduce fiscal deficits, enhance market efficiency and encourage energy conservation. However, fuel subsidy removal can result to higher prices for consumers and organizations and equally lead to social unrest especially in countries like Nigeria where fuel subsidies are deeply entrenched and heavily relied upon by the citizens.

Conceptualizing Guerrilla Marketing

Jay Conrad Levinson first introduced the term guerrilla marketing in 1984. This strategy involves inexpensive marketing methods primarily utilized by small businesses, as noted by Gümüştepe (2020). Guerrilla marketing is an innovative advertising approach that emphasizes using unconventional, low-cost tactics to promote a company's brand. Usually, it involves using surprise approaches to capture customers' attention in places or ways they least expected. Supporting this perspective, Gillert (2021) noted that the core concept of guerrilla marketing is to achieve goals through unconventional means. Unlike traditional marketing, guerrilla marketing emphasizes creativity and efficiency in approaches that require minimal financial



investment (Marasigan et al., 2023). As competition in the market grows fiercer and consumers become more informed and demanding, guerrilla marketing leverages the psychological aspects of both existing and potential customers. This is accomplished through word-of-mouth promotion and unexpected tactics (Gillert, 2021).

Guerrilla marketing offers flexibility surpassing traditional advertising methods, overcoming their communication limitations. Moreover, its unconventional approaches often lead to stronger brand recall and improved positioning (Rahman et al., 2020). Marasigan et al. (2023) suggest that guerrilla marketing not only allows brands to develop distinctive and compelling concepts but also provides artists a platform to express their creativity through guerrilla artist tactics. Additionally, Kiradoo (2018) highlighted its potential to amplify communication due to its creativity and distinctiveness.

Guerrilla Marketing Strategies

Different types of guerrilla marketing strategies are available for SMEs with limited financial resources to use in order to attract and keep their customers. Ramasobana (2017) identified viral marketing, buzz marketing, ambient marketing and ambush marketing as some of the guerrilla marketing strategies. Maynes (2013) included Word of Mouth (WoM) marketing as another strategy of guerrilla marketing. Similarly, Marasigan et al. (2023) added graffiti and clickbait advertising to the list. However, for this study, viral marketing, ambient marketing and ambush marketing were used as dimensions of guerrilla marketing as a result of their robust contributions to SMEs performance in various industries across the globe.

Viral Marketing

The term viral marketing derives from the word "virus" because it spreads quickly and unpredictably among people (Gillert,

2021). Viral marketing is about spreading products, services or brand information on digital domains with the help of internet mediums such as the social media (Ali & Goriparthi, 2012). Viral marketing is a strategy where a marketing campaign spreads rapidly and widely due to its popularity and the exponential sharing of ideas (Eke et al., 2022). The objective is to reach a large audience through both traditional and social media channels. This increased reach and attention are achieved through word-of-mouth and the sharing of content that captures the interest of numerous internet users. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often use viral marketing via social media platforms like Facebook, blogs, YouTube, and others to minimize business costs (Dzisi & Ofosu, 2014). Viral marketing enables SMEs to obtain more sales while minimizing costs (Lim, 2010), reach target markets, both local and international directly (Salehi et al., 2012), and equally allow managers and owners of SMEs to advertise their brands and answer customers queries in various dialects if needed (Gilmore, 2011).

Ambient Marketing

Ambient marketing, also known as ambient advertising, involves placing advertisement in unconventional and unexpected location or situations such as floors, petrol pump handles and on the back of toilet doors (Belic & Jonsson, 2012) where people are not customarily expecting to see ads. According to Gümüštepe (2020), ambient marketing aims to engage customers individually through surprise tactics. This involves strategically placing advertisements in locations where customers frequent, utilizing the surprise element typical of guerrilla marketing, which is widely adopted (Gillert, 2021). By targeting areas with high foot traffic, this approach requires minimal marketing effort and therefore results in lower financial investment. Creative integration of environmental elements enhances the

impact of these advertisements. Xavier and Jayan (2021) emphasize that the goal is to attract consumers' attention by placing messages in unconventional yet highly visible ways.

Ambush Marketing

Ambush marketing is a strategy where a business establishment takes advantage of a major event, such as a sports competition or a concert, without officially sponsoring it. Without paying for the sponsorship rights, ambush marketing involves creating marketing campaigns that associate the brand with the event. The aim of this strategy is to benefit from the event's publicity and audience without the associated costs of official sponsorship. Companies employ ambush marketing tactics to capture a wide audience. As a result, some companies utilize these subtle approaches during prominent sports tournaments such as football, boxing, or handball. They strategically place their brands throughout stadiums to gain exposure comparable to official sponsors, often exploiting competitors' marketing efforts. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) also engage in ambush

marketing by purchasing advertising slots during broadcasts of rival-sponsored events, aiming to be perceived by consumers as primary sponsors (Soomro et al., 2021; Gillert, 2021; Dhurup, 2010a).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) survival

SMEs are businesses that have fewer than 250 employees and annual revenues of up to \$15 million (The International Finance Corporation [IFC], 2021). In the nutshell, SMEs are businesses that typically have fewer employees and lower revenue than large companies. They contribute significantly to job creation, innovation and economic growth of many nations. Odekina (2022) defines corporate survival as the state of meeting firms' immediate and strategic objectives. Hence, organizational survival is the continuous existence of firms especially in difficult situations. Small and medium enterprises survival therefore involves traversing numerous obstacles to ensure their longevity and success. This includes managing cash flow effectively, adapting to market changes, maintaining strong customer relationships and innovating to meet evolving demands.

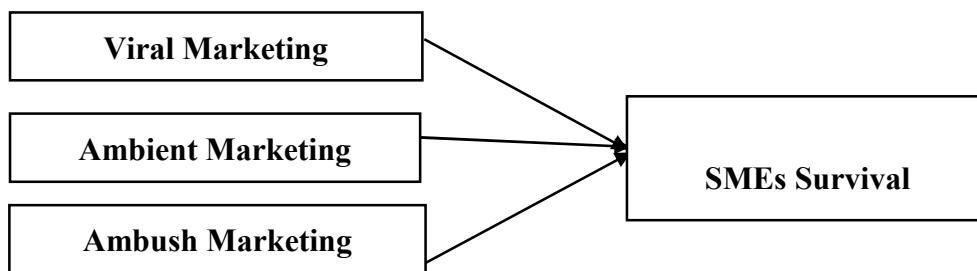


Figure 1

Conceptual framework of linkage between guerrilla marketing strategies and survival of small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

Note: All measures of guerrilla marketing strategies and SMEs survival variables were drawn from the literature and researcher's interaction with SMEs managers and owners (2024).

The conceptual framework above explains the dimensions of the predictor variable (guerrilla marketing strategies) and the criterion variable (SMEs survival). The dimensions of predictor variable are viral marketing, ambient marketing and ambush



marketing while the criterion variable is herein treated as a single construct.

Theoretical Framework

In explaining how SMEs survive using guerrilla marketing strategy in difficult times like the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria, one major theory that comes to mind is the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm. The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory was originally developed by Wernerfelt (1984) and further advanced by Barney (1991). RBV assumes that companies have a variety of resources and competencies. As a result of this variety, businesses may take advantage of their distinct resource base to gain a competitive edge. RBV highlights the importance of resources that possess specific attributes: value, rarity, inimitability, and non-substitutability (VRIN). Resources that fit these descriptions have a higher chance of producing long-term competitive advantage. VRIN resources are valuable because they help businesses take advantage of opportunities or counteract threats. They are also uncommon since few rivals have access to them, hard to copy, and non-replaceable because they lack functional alternatives.

In the context of SMEs navigating through the difficult times of fuel subsidies removal, RBV implies that those with valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resources and capabilities are more likely to survive and even thrive. SMEs often have unique resources such as specialized knowledge, unique technologies, or strong relationships with customer or suppliers that larger firms may lack. During subsidies removal, these unique resources can become even more valuable. Compared to larger organizations, SMEs are often more agile and flexible. Thus, they can quickly adapt to changes in the market, shift their strategies, and reallocate resources as needed. In the era of subsidies removal in Nigeria, this adaptability allows them to

respond swiftly. More so, in comparison with larger organizations, SMEs often have closer relationships with their customers, suppliers and other important stakeholders. These relationships built on the foundation of trust and personal connections can provide them with a competitive advantage, especially during challenging times when collaboration and support are crucial.

Empirical Review

Nugraha et al. (2023) conducted a study to evaluate the effect of Instagram advertising and viral marketing on the purchase decisions of the people of Denpasar City, with brand awareness as a mediating variable. The sample involved 140 active Instagram users who were between the ages of 25 and 34. The study utilized a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale to collect data. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was utilized to analyze the data. The results showed that Instagram advertising did not have a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions but had a significant effect through the mediation of brand awareness. However, viral marketing, directly or indirectly, has a significant effect on purchase decisions.

In addition, Eke et al. (2022) investigated how guerrilla marketing affects customer loyalty to Noodles products in Calabar. It employed a survey research design with a sample size of 200 questionnaires distributed. Simple linear regression analysis was used to assess the strength of the relationship. The findings revealed that viral and ambient marketing showed statistically significant positive effects on customer loyalty.

Similarly, Kabir and Ikwuagwu (2021) conducted a study to examine how guerrilla marketing influences the entrepreneurial performance of chosen businesses in Nigeria. They used a survey research approach and applied multiple linear regressions to analyze the data. The



findings revealed that ambient marketing (ABTM), ambush marketing (ABSM), and sensation marketing (SSNM) significantly enhance entrepreneurial performance (ENTP). However, viral marketing (VILM) was found to have a positive effect on ENTP, but it was not statistically significant.

In another development, Farooqui (2021) examines the impact of viral, street, stealth, ambient, and ambush marketing on consumer buying behavior towards the clothing industry in Karachi, Pakistan. The survey research design was used. Meanwhile purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from a sample of 247 based on the estimation of Soper (2018). The study used structural equation modeling for data analysis. The results show that street marketing, stealth marketing and ambush marketing, as components of guerilla marketing have positive and significant effect on consumers' buying behavior towards. However, viral marketing and ambient marketing were found to have a positive but insignificant effect on consumers' buying behavior.

Besides, Soomro et al. (2021) conducted a study to explore how guerrilla marketing techniques influence the perception of brand image among Generation Y (millennial) consumers. They focused on five specific guerrilla techniques used by companies: viral marketing (EWOM), stealth marketing, ambush marketing, graffiti, and clickbait ads. Employing non-probability sampling, they distributed a self-administered questionnaire to 248 millennial respondents across different university campuses. The collected data underwent structured modeling analysis using AMOS. The findings indicated that

(2021) MSME survey, the number of registered SMEs in Benue, Nasarawa, and the FCT stood at 48,440. Based on the study population, we employed the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination to arrive at a sample of approximately 397 respondents. Therefore, the minimum sample size for this study is three hundred and ninety-seven. However, Israel (2013) recommended adding 10-30% to the minimum sample size to account for non-response rates

viral marketing, stealth marketing, clickbait ads, and graffiti advertising significantly impacted both the symbolic and experiential aspects of brand image. However, ambush marketing did not show a notable influence on brand image (both symbolic and experiential). As a result, these results align with previous research and suggest that guerrilla marketing techniques serve as effective communication tools, especially for organizations with constrained marketing budgets.

Furthermore, Ozer et al. (2020) studied the impact of ambient advertising using a structural equation model and data collected from 194 consumers through a cross-sectional survey. The findings showed several significant relationships. The research concluded that perceived surprise strongly influences attention toward advertisements, and a positive attitude toward ambient advertising enhances purchase intention.

3. Methodology

The study uses a survey research design to gather data from participants. It was deemed appropriate since it enables researchers to collect data on respondents' attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other characteristics in a systematic manner that allows for quantitative analysis (Cresswell, 2014). Furthermore, this study is cross-sectional, as data were gathered from participants at a single instance.

The population of the study comprises all registered SMEs in two states of north-central Nigeria (Benue and Nasarawa) and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. These states were chosen because of the high concentration of SMEs. According to the NBS/SMEDAN



and ensure a sufficient sample size. Therefore, 20% was added to the calculated minimum sample size. This resulted in an additional seventy-nine (79) respondents, which constituted 20% of the total sample, bringing the total number of questionnaires administered to 476 across various states. Bowley's proportional allocation technique formula was used to determine the sample size for each state and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

The simple random sampling technique was thereafter adopted to select 476 SMEs to be studied, with the selected SMEs cutting across different industries (service, manufacturing, and agro allied). In each SME, the owner or manager completed the questionnaire on behalf of the organization. The questionnaire consists of two parts: Section A collects demographic information, while Section B contains questions rated on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). These questions assess guerrilla marketing strategies and their impact on the survival of SMEs in north-central Nigeria. The questionnaire was found reliable, with Cronbach alpha for each of the sub-scales ranging from 0.843 to 0.894, which were above the threshold of reliability. Descriptive analysis and inferential statistics using multiple linear regression analysis were used to test the hypothesis.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 476 questionnaires were handed out to participants, resulting in a high response rate of 84.6%. This yielded 403 responses, which is considered sufficiently ample for analysis. Results of analysis show that 270 respondents representing 67% were males, while the other 133 respondents representing 33% were female. It therefore implies that majority of the respondents were male. This further shows gender inequality in most developing countries including Nigeria. More so, with respect to age group of respondents, 20 – 29 constitute 4.2%, 30 – 39 constitute 7.9%, 40 – 49 constitute 35.5%, 50 – 59 constitute 47.4% while those above 60 years constitute 5.2%. This clearly shows that majority of the respondents were adults who can take well-informed decisions. As per the qualification of respondents, 58(14.4%) had ND/Diploma certificates, 184(45.7%) had B.Sc/HND certificates, while 130(32.3%) had master degrees. A total of 26(6.5%) has PhD degrees, while the remaining respondents, 5(1.2%) indicated that they had other qualifications. This implies that most of the respondents were literate and can provide valid responses to the questionnaire. The analysis further shows that most of the sampled SMEs were from the retail sector – 191(47.3%). This is followed by SMEs in other sectors – 91(22.6%), hospitality – 73(18.3%) and finally, manufacturing sector with 47(11.7%).

The multiple linear regression analysis examined the effect of guerilla marketing strategies on SMEs survival during turbulent times of fuel subsidies removal in Nigeria. The results are presented and interpreted as follows:

Table 1
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.641 ^a	.411	.407	.40917

a. Predictors: (Constant), ABSM, ABTM, VILM

Table 1 provides an overview of the regression model's goodness of fit. The R-

squared value (R²) indicates that approximately 41.1% of the variance in



SMEs survival (SME-S) can be explained by the predictors, ambush marketing (ABSM), ambient marketing (ABTM), and viral marketing (VILM). The adjusted R-squared adjusts for the number of predictors

in the model and is slightly lower at 40.7%. The standard error of the estimate is 0.40917, which represents the average difference between the observed and predicted values.

Table 2
ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.645	3	15.548	92.865	.000 ^b
	Residual	66.802	399	.167		
	Total	113.446	402			

a. Dependent Variable: SME-S

b. Predictors: (Constant), ABSM, ABTM, VILM

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) in table 2 assesses the overall statistical significance of the regression model. The F-statistic of 92.865 is highly significant with a p-value of .000, indicating that the

regression model as a whole is statistically significant in explaining the variance in SMEs survival (SME-S). This suggests that, ABSM, ABTM and VILM, have a significant impact on SME-S.

Table 3
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	2.763	.102		27.087	.000
	VILM	.232	.038	.375	6.116	.000
	ABTM	.067	.030	.128	2.234	.026
	ABSM	.117	.035	.202	3.293	.001

a. Dependent Variable: SME-S

The coefficients in table 3 presents the unstandardized coefficients, standardized coefficients (Beta), t-values, and associated p-values for each predictor and the constant (intercept) in the model. The constant (intercept) has a B-value of 2.763, and it is statistically significant (p = .000). Viral marketing (VILM) has a B-value of 0.232, a standardized Beta of 0.375, and is statistically significant (p = .000). This indicates that VILM positively and significantly influences SMEs survival. Additionally, ambient marketing (ABTM)

has a B-value of 0.067, a standardized Beta of 0.128, and is statistically significant (p = .026). This suggests that ABTM also has a positive and significant impact on SMEs survival. More so, ambush marketing (ABSM) has a B-value of 0.117, a standardized Beta of 0.202, and is statistically significant (p = .001). This suggests that ABSM also has a positive and significant impact on SMEs survival.

Findings



The broad objective of the study was to assess how SMEs in north-central Nigeria can survive through the turbulent times of fuel subsidy removal using guerrilla marketing strategies. Firstly, the results of the analysis showed that viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on SMEs survival in north-central Nigeria during fuel subsidy removal. This finding has been supported by previous studies. For instance Nugraha et al. (2023) revealed that viral marketing, directly or indirectly, has a significant effect on purchase decisions. More so, Eke et al. (2022) found that viral had significant positive relationships with customer patronage. The finding equally aligns with that of Soomro et al. (2021). On the contrary, this finding is slightly at variance with those of Kabir and Ikwuagwu (2021) and Farooqui (2021), who revealed that viral marketing has a positive but insignificant effect on business performance.

Secondly, the analysis results demonstrated that ambient marketing significantly enhances the survival of SMEs in north-central Nigeria amidst fuel subsidy removal. This finding aligns with previous studies by Eke et al. (2022), Kabir and Ikwuagwu (2021), and Ozer et al. (2020), which also highlighted the positive impact of ambient marketing on various aspects of performance. Essentially, placing advertisements in unexpected places with high foot traffic requires minimal marketing effort and investment, contributing to company resilience during challenging economic periods. However, this discovery contrasts slightly with Farooqui's (2021) research, which found that ambient marketing had a positive but not statistically significant impact on consumers' purchasing behavior.

Finally, the results of the analysis also showed that ambush marketing has a positive and significant effect on SMEs survival in north-central Nigeria during the era of fuel subsidy removal. This finding is

in agreement with previous empirical findings. For example, Kabir and Ikwuagwu (2021) discovered that ambush marketing positively and significantly influenced entrepreneurial performance. Likewise, Farooqui (2021) observed that ambush marketing, a facet of guerrilla marketing, had a positive and significant impact on consumers' purchasing behavior. In contrast, Soomro et al. (2021) reported that ambush marketing did not exert a significant influence on brand image.

Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991)'s Resource-Based View (RBV) theory supports all of these findings. When subsidies are removed, SMEs may become even more valuable since they frequently possess unique resources that larger companies may not, such as specialized expertise, cutting-edge technology, or solid ties with suppliers or customers. SMEs are frequently more adaptable and agile than bigger companies. They are therefore able to swiftly adjust to changes in the market, modify their tactics, and reallocate resources as necessary.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above findings, this study concluded that SMEs can improve their chances of surviving times of economic instability by utilizing creative and adaptable marketing tactics that leverage digital platforms and emphasize innovation. Therefore, this study suggests that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can enhance their resilience during economic uncertainties by employing innovative marketing strategies tailored to digital platforms, thereby emphasizing flexibility and creativity as pivotal elements for survival.

On this note, the study recommends as follows:

- i. To further enhance visibility, reach, and ultimately survive during turbulent times, SMEs should prioritize the creation of highly



shareable content. This entails developing a range of engaging materials such as informative and entertaining videos, interactive quizzes that encourage user participation, visually compelling infographics that convey key messages succinctly, and strategic user-generated content campaigns that foster community engagement. By focusing on these initiatives, SMEs can not only amplify their online presence but also cultivate a loyal customer base and adapt swiftly to market changes, thereby fortifying their resilience in unpredictable economic environments.

- ii. To advance brand awareness and ensure survival amidst the challenges posed by the removal of fuel subsidies, SMEs should strategically develop ambient marketing campaigns tailored specifically to their local communities or target markets. This approach involves harnessing the essence of unique local landmarks, events, or cultural elements to craft compelling narratives and experiences that resonate deeply with their audience. By integrating these distinctive local flavors into their marketing strategies, SMEs can effectively foster meaningful connections, enhance brand recall, and establish a strong foothold in their respective markets, thereby navigating the complexities of economic shifts with resilience and innovation.
- iii. To safely capitalize on the potential benefits, SMEs must conscientiously address the legal complexities of ambush marketing and proactively mitigate associated risks. This entails a thorough evaluation of their marketing strategies to ensure alignment with

pertinent regulations and ethical standards. SMEs should prioritize consultation with legal experts to navigate the nuances of intellectual property laws and brand protection guidelines, thereby safeguarding against inadvertent infringements on the rights of competitors or sponsor organizations. By adopting a proactive approach and adhering to legal counsel, SMEs can confidently execute their marketing campaigns while minimizing legal liabilities and preserving their reputation within the marketplace.

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