

TITLE: Sales Opportunities Inherent in Road Traffic: Evidence from the Third Mainland Bridge, Lagos.

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ABSTRACT: Road traffic is a common phenomenon in urban areas. Majority of urban dwellers hate to experience it because it makes them to spend productive hours sitting idly in their respective vehicles. However, road traffic possesses great opportunities for brisk businesses especially the sales of consumable goods. This study adopted the use of observation as its research method to accomplish its aim. The observation period afforded the researcher the opportunity of observing the behavior of hawkers. The study outcomes constitute a guide that new and old firms can use to explore road traffic anywhere it is experienced in the world.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Road traffic, according to Bhargab et al. (1999 p.508) is a “midblock congestion and congestion at or near the intersection”. It stems out of, as opined by Wright and Roberg 1998 (as cited in Hong-sheng et al. 2013), “a temporary obstruction, stochastic fluctuation in demand, and permanent capacity bottleneck”. It is, in other words, a temporary delay and slow movements of

vehicles on the highways. In many occasions, road traffic is difficult to prevent. In the literature, road traffic has been established as a normal occurrence in large and cosmopolitan cities (Lindsey 2012). It is, in most major cities, being caused by or related to a growing population (Bhargab et al. 1999; Brockmann et al. 2006 as cited in Wang et al. 2015; Tao et al. 2010; Topolšek, et al. 2014); poor and insufficient road infrastructure (Tao et al 2010); the road layout and the number of vehicles on the road at a given time (Hong-sheng et al. 2013); high number of vehicles on the roads (Hong-sheng et al. 2013; Kala & Warwick 2015), occurrence of vehicular faults on the major roads, accidents (Wang, et al. 2009), lack of detailed information on the busyness of roads (Khattak, 1991 as cited in Tao et al. 2010; Yang 1999), lack of alternative routes to major destinations (Boyle 2016), impatient attitude of drivers (Hayes, B 2015; Wang et al. 2015; Quddus et al 2010), to mention but a few.

Currently, road traffic is a major concern to urban planners and dwellers and requires serious attention from the government (Sharma & Swami 2012). Commuters – both in developing and developed countries – experience it at different periods of the day. But its intensity varies from one period of the day to another and from one area to another. It gets worse during bad climatic conditions such as heavy and protracted rainfalls, floods and snowy periods. However, as unpleasant as traffic can be, it is a great source of money making for hawkers and petty retailers (Viton 2010). This is confirmed by chains of petty business transactions that take place on the Lagos Third Mainland Bridge on daily basis. It is a norm for hawkers and petty retailers to display their goods both in the morning and in the evening, taking advantages of intense traffic experienced by commuters. While commuters groan for the loss of their precious time in traffic, hawkers and petty retailers make brisk businesses, earn incomes that enhance their standards of living and create transitory jobs for themselves. By extension, it is a stable market for the sales of selected products

of extant manufacturing firms. It contributes to the revenues of manufacturing firms whose products are mostly sold in traffic and it is a vital market for start-up companies who have limited resources to promote their products in cities.

From close and firsthand observations, it is cleared that many retailers, product distributors and manufacturing firms, especially FMCG¹ have not really considered hawking or marketing in traffic as a reliable and consistent point of sales. To reasons best known to them, they have not considered traffic as a credible means of sales and generating revenues. The interest of this paper is to examine possible sales opportunities hidden in road traffic by using an unconventional but popular means which is observation to execute the objectives of this study. This study aims at enlightening retailers and distributors of major goods about the economic viability of traffic on major roads in cosmopolitan cities with a special focus on the third mainland bridge in Lagos. It further aims to identify critical success factors required for hawking or marketing in traffic. Upon the completion of this study, its outcomes could serve as a guide to any salesman or sales representative interested in exploring the opportunities in traffic.

2.0 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ROAD TRAFFIC AND ITS IMPACTS IN LAGOS

One of the unique characteristics of a cosmopolitan city like Lagos, aside from its mixed cultures and vibrant youth population (Waldron 2000; Rohlen 2002), is its growing population and attendant consequences of the growing population (Rohlen 2002). One of the attendant consequences of a growing population, especially where the level of infrastructure does not

¹ FMCG means Fast-moving Consumer Goods.

measure up to the population size, is road traffic or congestion (Rohlen 2002). Lagos is a typical example of a cosmopolitan city known for different social vices and varying degrees of road traffic experienced virtually in all minor and major roads of the city (Ugboajah 2008). It could be heavy or mild depending on the road infrastructure (Choudhury & Gupta 2015), the layout of the area (Quddus et al 2010), the number of ventures and business organizations, the population size (Hong-sheng et al. 2013), passage of heavy trucks, the personality of the road users or drivers (Wang et al. 2015; Quddus et al 2010), proximity to markets, malls or any highly patronized venture, festivity, police checkpoints, fuel scarcity (of recent), activities of hoodlums and so on. In other words, these factors are responsible, not only for the road traffic but also the intensity of the road traffic.

Regarding the timing of the road traffic, it is difficult to track it because it starts at anytime and anywhere in the city. However, the timing can still be relatively measured in some areas such as the third mainland bridge, Iyana Ipaja, Badagry expressway, Sabo, Ikorodu and Oshodi axis. In the aforementioned areas, road traffic is always heavy and disturbing between the hours of 6am and 8.30am and between 5pm and 8pm. It could extend late into the evening in some occasions. The fact is that road traffic makes various ends of Lagos to be far from each other. For instance, the distance between the mainland and the island should be covered within an hour but road traffic could make it 3 hours and above. In other words, commuters lose substantial amounts of their productive time staying in road traffic in Lagos. Consequently, the urban dwellers have learnt to factor road traffic into their daily schedules.

The impacts of road traffics on commuters are visibly evident. Road traffics make a short journey to be protracted and frustrating, thereby losing productive time meant for important activities in road traffic (Bhargab et al. 1999; Choudhury & Gupta 2015). It weakens mental

strength and cause commuters to lose their abilities to work effectively (Grant-Muller & Meng 2014). Traffic is partly responsible for some airborne diseases that are aided by vehicular exhaust (Grant-Muller & Meng 2014; Fan et al 2015; Grote et al 2016). Some employees get late to their duty posts because of unprecedented traffics (Bhargab et al. 1999; Grant-Muller & Meng 2014). From a regular occurrence in Lagos, road traffic slows and, at times, prevents medical helps and firefighters' response in the case of a medical emergency and fire outbreak. Sometimes, it creates opportunities for thefts and nefarious activities, especially during the early morning and late night hours. For instance, there have been gory tales of robbery attacks on innocent and vulnerable commuters in their vehicles. From personal experience, road traffic is capable of making the morning period of employees' workdays horrible and distasteful, dampening their morale to work far before resuming for the day's work. Similarly, it adds to the pressure of workdays and makes the entire day to end in an uneventful manner. The fact is that the impact of traffic seems to be endless and problematic (Bhargab et al. 1999; Rosenlund 2008 as cited in Wang et al. 2015; Hongsheng et al. 2013; Topolšek, et al. 2014).

3.0 THE STUDY AREA

The study area is strictly the third mainland bridge in Lagos. The bridge was constructed by Julius Berger, a German company in 1990 with revenues sourced partly from the tax payments and partly from other viable sources such as crude oil, royalties and so on (Julius Berger Nigeria, 2010). As a matter of fact, the construction of this bridge was one of the monumental achievements of the then military regime of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (Julius Berger Nigeria, 2010). Characteristically, it accommodates about 6 lanes at once and a countless number of vehicles run

on it on daily basis. Notwithstanding the fleet of cars that ply it, it is toll free. There are LASTMA² officials that mount different vantage points on the bridge to enforce road traffic laws and smooth movements of vehicles. Mobile Police Officers armed with guns and power bikes to forestall robbery and ensure safety of human lives are stationed at different strategic locations on the bridge. In the event of an accident, there is a standby ambulance that moves accident victims to the nearest hospital where they can be given adequate treatments. In terms of the road traffic on the bridge, it is intense within the hours of 6.10am to 8.45am and 4pm to 7pm on weekdays. This bridge experiences substantially less road traffic on weekends. According to an online report³, the bridge is about 11.8km long and a minimum span of 6m (Akiije & Omotoso 2012); it also links the mainland with the island of Lagos. It is partially parallel to Eko and Charter Bridge that connect mainland with the island in their respective capacities. Notable entry and exit points from the bridge include, among others, Adeniji Adele, Iyana Sura, Iyana Oworonsoki and Obalende. In terms of ranking, the bridge was once adjudged as the longest bridge in Africa prior to the construction of 6th Oct⁴ bridge in Cairo, Egypt. Currently, it is the 2nd longest bridge in Africa⁵.

4.0 RESEARCH METHOD: OBSERVATION

Observation is a research method that allows the direct participation of the researcher in a given study, that is, it allows the researcher to obtain firsthand information about a given study (Fox 1998; Chatman 1984 as cited in Baker 2006) without necessarily depending on the opinions of other people (Fox 1998). It is otherwise known as ethnographic method of research (Fox 1998;

² LASTMA means Lagos State Transport Management Authority. The organization helps in the maintenance of traffic laws and orders.

³ The report is found here: <http://www.smashinglists.com/longest-bridges-around-the-world/>

⁴ <http://nigerianfinder.com/about-the-longest-bridge-in-nigeria-third-mainland-bridge/>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Mainland_Bridge

Baker 2006). The method allows the researcher to observe the behavior of hawkers on the third mainland bridge and record their activities appropriately (Fox 1998). The researcher adopts the use of observation as a research method because the study is closed to being a behavioural study and can be manipulated if the objects of study – hawkers on the third mainland bridge – are intimidated with the aims of the study (Fox 1998). This method allows the participants to express themselves without being conscious of being noticed and giving the real picture of hawkers' activities in road traffic on the bridge. As regards the reliability of its findings, these findings were drawn from a long period of observing sales activities on the bridge. The researcher observed the hawkers closely on the bridge for about a period of a year and three months, starting from December 1st, 2014 to March 30th, 2016. These observations were done both in the morning and in the evening time. The long duration allows the researcher to identify some notable trends, patterns and practices in the hawking of products on the third mainland bridge and be accustomed to the challenges of hawking on the bridge.

5.0 OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using the above method over an extended period of 15 months, the researcher made the following findings from the hawking activities of the hawkers during road traffic.

First and foremost, road traffic does not occur at all times on the third mainland bridge. It is restricted to specific periods of the day and night, mostly during the rush hours when people are going to and coming back from their respective work places or when a religious programme is being held not far from the third mainland bridge. It is important that would – be hawkers should keep themselves abreast of the rush hours or imminent religious programmes around the area of study. The information helps to know when to expect road traffic and explore the opportunities, especially high sales with little or no cost that is inherent in it.

Secondly, some factors are critical to the success of retailing in road traffic on the third mainland bridge. It is important for companies to know that the success of hawking or retailing of goods in road traffic depends largely on the following factors:

- I. **Availability of lower denominations of currency:** hawkers or representatives of companies in road traffic sales need to arm themselves with lower denominations of local currency. This is premised on the facts that commuters do not always have the actual denominations required for the exchange of goods and hawkers enjoy high patronage when they can give commuters lower denominations of local currency when it is necessary.
- II. **Identification of commuters' needs:** the needs of commuters determine the amount of sales hawkers enjoy on daily basis. In most cases, commuters look forward to buying consumable and edible items while in the road traffic to quench their thirst and hunger. The more protracted and thicker the road traffic is, the higher the possibility of commuters demanding for edible items. So, it is imperative for hawkers to offer items that satisfy the needs of the commuters during the hours of road traffic.
- III. **Protracted traffic period:** A protracted and thick road traffic provides the hawkers the opportunity of selling their products. As the road traffic builds up and becomes thicker, the commuters develop the need to buy one or more items to make themselves comfortable in the road traffic. In other words, the longer and thicker the road traffic becomes, the more the tendency for commuters to buy edible products. Mild road traffic does not offer favourable opportunities for hawkers to showcase and sell their items.
- IV. **Selling of edible products:** the periods of observation reveal that hawkers with edible products such as gala, soft drinks, confectionaries such as biscuits, short cake and chewing gums, table water, fruit items and other products in this category make more sales than

hawkers selling any other category of products. These products help commuters to obtain the needed energy to execute the tasks of the day, in the case of morning road traffic and temporarily refresh themselves and regain the lost energy, in the case of the evening road traffic.

- V. Maintenance of ruling market prices for products:** Commuters are like any other buyers. They demand for suitable prices for all the products they purchase in the road traffic. They are averse to products with hike prices. It is therefore imperative for hawkers or retail firms' representatives not to attempt undue exploitations of the road traffic situation to their advantage. Such attempts will only lead to poor sales.
- VI. Neat and unique packaging:** Proper packaging of items makes products to be handy and moveable for hawkers. Most items are well packaged and presented in a form easy to deliver to commuters. This is necessary because hawkers, sometimes, run after vehicles to sell their products.
- VII. Close observation:** Hawkers are business like and observe the gesture and dispositions of commuters to know who are in need of their products. At times, the positions of commuters in their respective vehicles are hidden and very difficult for hawkers to spot them. It requires hawkers to be observant and pay attention to the facial expressions of commuters to know who could be in need of their products.

Similarly, the findings of the study reveal the nature and class of commodities of products that are offered in road traffic on the third mainland bridge. It is most likely that the same products are offered in road traffic anywhere it is experienced. Generally, the products are perishable fruits, confectionary, bread, drinks, portable books – novels, academic and motivational books, toiletry, physical exercise products, games and such like. In terms of characteristics, products that are

portable, affordable, capable of meeting immediate needs and relatively durable with the approval of health ministry attract more patronage than others. Hence any start-up firm that intends to explore road traffic should take into consideration these categories of goods being sold on the third mainland bridge. It is not all goods that can be sold in road traffic.

In addition, the findings reveal some risks associated with hawking in road traffic. Just as risks are inherent in conventional marketing strategies, marketing goods during road traffic hours has its attendant risks. The understanding of risks associated with road traffic marketing helps actual and would-be road traffic marketers or salespersons to develop strategies to mitigate these risks and forestall the occurrence of road tragedies and unnecessary spending on consequent injuries. Through a closed observation of about fifteen months of plying the third mainland bridge, the under-listed risks were identified:

- I. **Possible motor accidents resulting from careless driving:** The third mainland bridge is one of the roads constructed by the federal government of Nigeria. It is a major expressway within the city of Lagos. On the third mainland bridge, vehicular movements can be very swift and drivers swerving recklessly to maneuver their ways out of road traffics. Consequently, hawkers' lives are threatened by fast moving drivers. This is premised on the fact that road traffic, at times, abruptly disappears and hawkers are caught up at the middle of the expressway. At times, unsuspected hawkers are run over and eventually killed. It is therefore pertinent to say that hawkers or salesperson needs to be extremely cautious of vehicular movements when offering their goods to commuters.
- II. **Loss of money to commuters:** In the course of road traffic marketing, some commuters take advantage of swift movements of vehicles to defraud hawkers by obtaining their goods without paying the corresponding monetary worth of those goods. Sometimes, hawkers

make efforts to catch up with vehicles but the speed of those vehicles tends to be too high for the hawkers. Hence a hawker needs to alert to cash receipts from commuters and the exchange of goods.

- III. **Loss of sales due to lack of lower denominations of local currency:** the availability of lower denominations of currency is pivotal to business success of road traffic hawking. From observations, it was deduced that availability of lower denomination is a major determinant of the sales revenue made by road traffic hawkers. Unavailability of lower denomination of local currency, most times, results to the loss of sales for the hawkers. This is hinged on the fact that commuters are reluctant to part with their money without collecting the remaining of their high denominations and it is equally difficult, if not impossible for hawkers to give out their goods on credit in road traffic marketing. Therefore, salesperson should arm himself or herself with all forms of local currency to stand the chance of making high sales in road traffic.
- IV. **Robbery Incidents:** Owing to the peculiar nature of the third mainland bridge, there are occasional incidents of robbery. The closer the nightfall, the more conducive the environment becomes for nefarious activities. Heavy road traffic makes it possible for robbers to attack commuters and forcefully snatch their personal effects and sometimes, cart away the sales of the hawkers. Incidents such as robbery and assault make the bridge unsafe for hawkers especially in the evening time. Consequently, they are prevented from making sales. It is imperative for hawkers or salespersons to know when to end their hawking activities in road traffic for the sake of the security of their goods and lives.
- V. **Products prone to being damaged:** Hawking in the road traffic on the third mainland bridge requires regular mobility and alacrity of the hawkers. It is common for commuters

to suddenly call road traffic marketers to buy their goods. In the process of satisfying these commuters, goods that are loosely carried or hawked are sometimes damaged and spilled on the road.

- VI. **Unpredictable nature of sales:** hawking in the road traffic on the third mainland bridge does not guarantee regular sales. Sales are made strictly during the periods of congestion – mostly in the morning and evening time as stated earlier. It is also important to note that there are periods that the road is less congested, mostly Monday evening. During this period, sales are difficult to make. Experienced hawkers do not display their goods during this period. It is therefore clear that sales from traffic marketing fluctuate and cannot be projected because traffic congestions vary in terms of intensity and duration.

Lastly, the study found out the qualities of hawkers that could cope with the rigour of hawking in road traffic. It is not everybody that is designed for road traffic marketing. It is a form of marketing that requires little or no formal education for its success. This is because its success is not hinged on conventional factors. Whoever will participate in the road traffic marketing must possess certain qualities. These qualities are daily shown by road traffic hawkers/marketers. Under a closed observation, the researcher was able to identify the qualities required to excel in road traffic marketing. The qualities include:

- I. **Strength and Agility:** A road traffic marketer must be strong and agile to cope with the rigour and demand of road traffic marketing. It is observed that road traffic marketers on the third mainland run often and sometimes outwit their competitors to make sales. In some cases, they run after moving vehicles to offer their goods for sales and to get the payments made for their goods by commuters. Without physical strength and agility, prospective road traffic marketers will not succeed.

- II. **Smartness and Observance:** Traffic marketers need to be patient and highly observant. These qualities are essential to their success on the third mainland bridge. It is only through observation that prospective buyers are identified in moving vehicles. The positions of some commuters in vehicles are sometimes hidden. It requires that road traffic marketers watch vehicles closely to identify commuters that need their products.
- III. **Patience and Pace:** It takes time to make sales in road traffic. Hawkers need to be patient, waiting on commuters to demand for their products. And when they make demand, they need to be fast to cope with moving vehicles. Hence would-be hawkers or marketers need to have the pace to outrun their competitors and make substantial revenue in road traffics.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The outcomes of this study are vital to small and medium scale or start-up firms trying to negotiate their paths and establish themselves in large markets with existing dominant firms. In reality, start-up firms do not have the cash to advertise and expand their influences in existing markets. They have established multinational firms to compete with in the markets. In a clear term, some of the new firms collapse right before they win a fraction of the market. This study just provides a unique opportunity or market area that can be explored by start-up companies without having to compete with established firms. In cosmopolitan cities, as earlier pointed in this study, road traffic is a daily occurrence and unavoidable. Hence opportunity to introduce new products made by start-up companies is presented here.

In this study, critical success factors required for firms which intend to explore opportunities inherent road traffic have been highlighted. As much as firms are competing for the markets in the cosmopolitan cities, road traffic is a regular occurrence and a rare market any start-up firm could use to introduce its new product, amass more sales and attract more customers.

Hawking or marketing products in road traffic does not require much costs or expenses – the cost of marketing in road traffic is almost negligible. Also, the sales force requires little or no formal training to excel in hawking in road traffic and the qualities required of a successful salesman in road traffic marketing are natural endowments. Hence any start-up firm that explores this rare form of marketing opportunity will make reasonable sales revenue at little or no cost and with limited competitions.

It is imperative also that firms need to make provisions to mitigate the risks inherent in road traffic marketing. This study has itemized the notable risks in road traffic marketing and they can be mitigated adequately. So, in preparing to explore sales opportunities in road traffic, firms should make efforts to guide against the occurrence of mishaps.

Lastly, the practice of hawking in road traffic must be done within the confine of the law of the country. It is important to crosscheck with the government of the land to determine if hawking in road traffic is allowed. However, if it is forbidden by the government, it becomes impossible to explore but if it is allowed; SMEs and start-up firms should develop strategy to explore road traffic to their advantage.

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