
ASSESSMENT OF CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR AT TRADE FAIRS: A CASE STUDY OF LAGOS INTERNATIONAL TRADE EVENTS.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines consumer purchasing behaviour at Lagos international trade fairs, focusing on the factors influencing purchase decisions and the relationship between trade fair experiences and buying outcomes. A qualitative research approach was adopted, employing semi-structured interviews with attendees and exhibitors, alongside observational analysis of exhibitor activities. The findings indicate that consumer purchasing behaviour at trade fairs is predominantly experience-driven and shaped by price incentives, product demonstrations, brand familiarity, and exhibitor–consumer interactions. Positive trade fair experiences were found to significantly enhance purchase intention, impulse buying tendencies, and post-event purchasing likelihood. The study further validates the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Stimulus–Organism– Response (S–O–R) model, and Experiential Consumption Theory in explaining consumer behaviour within trade fair environments. Based on these findings, strategic recommendations are proposed regarding experiential marketing practices, booth design, promotional strategies, and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) capacity development to optimise consumer engagement and trade fair performance. This research contributes to the limited empirical literature on consumer purchasing behaviour at international trade events in emerging economies, with specific emphasis on Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: *Consumer Purchasing Behaviour, Experiential Marketing, Market Visibility, Small And Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), Trade Fairs.*

INTRODUCTION

Trade fairs have long been recognised as strategic marketing platforms that facilitate direct interaction between producers, exhibitors, and consumers within highly competitive and information-rich environments. Beyond their traditional roles as promotional and networking venues, contemporary trade fairs increasingly function as temporary marketplaces where consumer purchasing decisions are initiated, influenced, and sometimes concluded (Gottlieb, 2014; Wong, 2014). Consequently, understanding consumer purchasing behaviour within trade fair contexts has become a critical concern for exhibitors, marketers, and policy stakeholders seeking to maximise engagement and sales outcomes.

Existing literature suggests that consumer behaviour at trade fairs differs markedly from conventional retail environments due to the presence of experiential marketing, face-to-face communication, product demonstrations, sales promotions, and brand interactions (Hung et al., 2016). Hung et al. (2016) demonstrate that exhibitors' brand equity significantly affects visitors' purchase intention, purchase postponement, and switching behaviour, highlighting the complex and dynamic nature of consumer decision-making at trade fairs. Similarly, Wong (2014) conceptualises trade show visitors as active consumers whose purchasing behaviour is shaped by a combination of cognitive, emotional, and situational stimuli encountered during exhibitions. Empirical evidence further indicates that visitor satisfaction, perceived trade fair effectiveness, and alignment with visitor objectives play central roles in shaping purchasing outcomes (Fryan, 2020). When trade fairs effectively address buyers' needs through quality information provision, booth staff engagement, and product relevance, visitors exhibit higher purchase intentions and increased post-event buying behaviour. In addition, sales promotions and experiential marketing strategies implemented during trade fairs have been shown to exert statistically significant influences on consumer buying intentions (AAU Study, 2019).

Within the Nigerian context, trade fairs remain a vital component of marketing and commercial activities, particularly in urban economic hubs such as Lagos State. Studies by Solomon (2017) and Egwuenu (2019) indicate that trade fairs positively influence marketing performance and sales outcomes for participating firms. However, much of the existing Nigerian literature has predominantly examined trade fairs from the perspective of exhibitors and organisational performance, with limited empirical attention given to consumer purchasing behaviour at the point of trade fair interaction. This represents a notable gap, especially considering Lagos' status as Nigeria's commercial capital and host to numerous international trade events that attract diverse consumer segments.

By addressing this gap, the study contributes to the broader literature on trade fairs and consumer behaviour from an emerging-economy perspective, while offering practical insights for event organisers, exhibitors, and policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness and economic impact of international trade fairs in Lagos and similar urban contexts.

The aim of this study is to assess consumer purchasing behaviour at international trade fairs in Lagos, focusing on the factors influencing purchase decisions. While the specific objectives of the study are;

1. Examine the purchasing behaviour patterns of consumers attending international trade fairs in Lagos, including purchase intention, actual purchase, and purchase postponement.
2. Identify the key factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions at Lagos trade fairs, such as exhibitor characteristics, product attributes, sales promotions, and experiential elements.
3. Evaluate the relationship between trade fair experiences and consumer purchase outcomes, with the aim of informing more effective trade fair marketing strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Behaviour at Trade Fairs and Exhibitions

Recent studies highlight the complexity of consumer behaviour at trade fairs, noting that visitor actions are shaped by motivations, interactions, satisfaction, and environmental cues. Perceptions of the event environment and emerging digital engagement tools significantly influence pre-, during-, and post-event behaviours, including purchase likelihood (Vitali, Conti, & Esposito, 2022) report that. Contemporary research further indicates that trade fair visitors do not behave as uniform buyers; instead, purchasing outcomes are influenced by individual intentions, deal proneness, and engagement levels. Visitor satisfaction and experiential quality consistently emerge as key predictors of purchase intention and post-event buying behaviour (Vitali et al., 2022).

Visitor Motivation, Engagement, and Purchase Outcomes

Visitor motivations play a central role in shaping purchasing behaviour at trade fairs. While earlier studies framed attendance primarily around information search and networking, recent research emphasises strategic motivations such as access to product information, promotional deals, and experiential benefits, which directly influence purchase decisions (Thuy Anh & Tran, 2020) Event marketing and consumer engagement further strengthen these outcomes. Experiential promotions and interactive activities significantly enhance purchase intention and

brand interaction (Gbadébo, 2025). Similarly, exhibition events combined with social media engagement improve brand awareness and influence consumer purchase intentions, reinforcing the importance of experiential marketing in exhibition contexts (Akinrujomu & Adedara, 2024).

Satisfaction, Experience, and Behavioural Intentions

Visitor satisfaction and overall event experience are widely recognised as determinants of behavioural intentions. Studies show that satisfaction with booth staff, product presentation, and the exhibition environment increases purchase intention and repeat attendance. Positive experiential encounters not only encourage immediate buying but also promote post-event purchases and long-term consumer loyalty, highlighting the value of experience-driven strategies for exhibitors and organisers (Wang, Yin, Wang, Zhu, & He, 2025).

Trade Fairs in the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, trade fairs remain important marketing platforms, particularly in Lagos. Existing studies confirm that exhibitions enhance market visibility, networking, and product awareness, which indirectly influence consumer behaviour (Egwuenu, Chiyem, & Olannye, 2019). However, most Nigerian research focuses on exhibitor performance rather than consumer purchasing behaviour. Major events such as Lagos Fashion Week and other international trade fairs combine commercial and experiential elements, making them suitable contexts for examining consumer decision-making in emerging markets.

Summary and Research Gap

The literature indicates that visitor motivation, experiential engagement, and satisfaction significantly influence purchase behaviour at trade fairs. However, empirical studies in Nigeria largely emphasise organisational outcomes rather than direct consumer purchasing behaviour.

There remains limited evidence on how experiential factors translate into actual buying decisions among consumers attending international trade events in Lagos. This study addresses this gap by examining consumer purchasing behaviour and its determinants within Lagos trade fairs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model, and Experiential Consumption Theory to explain consumer

purchasing behaviour at Lagos international trade fairs.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

TPB explains behaviour as a function of purchase intention, shaped by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Recent studies confirm its relevance in event-based consumption, showing that positive product attitudes, social influence, and perceived ease of purchase significantly enhance buying behaviour (Han & Stoel, 2017; Paul et al., 2016). In trade fairs, factors such as pricing, peer presence, and promotional cues influence these components, shaping consumer purchase decisions.

Stimulus–Organism–Response Model

The S-O-R model explains how environmental stimuli (e.g., booth design, product displays, promotions, and exhibitor interaction) affect consumers' emotional and cognitive states, leading to behavioural responses such as impulse buying or purchase postponement. Empirical studies show that experiential and atmospheric cues significantly influence emotional arousal and purchase likelihood in exhibition settings (Jang et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021). This framework is particularly relevant to Lagos trade fairs, where sensory and interactive environments strongly shape consumer responses.

Experiential Consumption Theory

This theory emphasises emotional and sensory value alongside functional product attributes. Research shows that immersive experiences, interaction, and novelty increase perceived value and purchase intention at exhibitions (Schmitt, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). Trade fairs provide experiential platforms where consumers form brand perceptions and make spontaneous or deferred purchasing decisions based on overall experience.

Conceptual Integration

By integrating TPB, S-O-R, and Experiential Consumption Theory, this study captures both cognitive and experiential dimensions of purchasing behaviour. TPB explains intentional decision-making, while S-O-R and experiential theory account for environmental and emotional influences unique to trade fair contexts. Together, these frameworks provide a foundation for analysing how trade fair experiences shape consumer purchasing behaviour at Lagos international trade events.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine consumer purchasing behaviour at the Lagos International Trade Fair. The study was conducted at the Lagos International Trade Fair Complex, selected due to Lagos' role as Nigeria's commercial hub and host to major international trade events.

The study population comprised trade fair consumers and exhibitors. Consumers formed the primary unit of analysis, while exhibitors provided supplementary qualitative insights. Convenience sampling was used to select consumer respondents, while purposive sampling was employed to interview exhibitors actively engaged in product promotion and sales. Data were analysed thematically, with interview responses and observational notes coded to identify recurring patterns related to market visibility, business growth, and participation challenges. This approach enabled systematic interpretation of participants' experiences while ensuring alignment with the study objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study based on data obtained from consumer surveys administered at the Lagos International Trade Fair, supported by on-site observations and photographic documentation of exhibitor activities. The discussion is structured in line with the study's objectives and anchored on the theoretical framework.

Consumer Purchasing Behaviour at the Lagos International Trade Fair

Findings from the survey indicate that consumer purchasing behaviour at the Lagos International Trade Fair was largely situational and experience-driven. A substantial proportion of respondents reported making at least one purchase during the event, while others indicated strong purchase intentions, even if immediate purchase was postponed.



Plate 1: Oraimo at the 2025 Lagos International Trade Fair.

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

On-site observations revealed that consumer-oriented exhibitors, particularly those offering fast-moving consumer goods and electronic accessories, attracted high visitor traffic and sustained engagement. For instance, branded exhibition booths such as those associated with mobile accessories and food products consistently recorded crowd presence, product trials, and point-of-sale interactions. These behaviours align with prior studies suggesting that trade fairs encourage impulse buying and trial-based purchasing, especially where consumers can physically interact with products.

Factors Influencing Consumer Purchasing Decisions at Trade Fairs

Analysis of consumer responses identified several key factors influencing purchasing behaviour at the trade fair. These include price incentives, product demonstrations, brand familiarity, promotional offers, and exhibitor–consumer interaction.

Survey responses showed that consumers were more likely to purchase products that offered trade fair discounts, bundled offers, or free trials. Observational data corroborated this, as exhibitors that incorporated live demonstrations, product testing, or sampling, particularly within food, electronics, and household product categories, recorded higher levels of consumer engagement and transaction activity.



Plate 2: Marcel food at the 2025 Lagos International Trade Fair.

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

Foreign and thematic pavilions, such as the Japan Pavilion, attracted considerable consumer attention due to their novelty, cultural presentation, and perceived product quality. Consumers were observed taking photographs, asking product-related questions, and expressing curiosity, even when immediate purchase did not occur. This suggests that perceived product origin and uniqueness influence consumer evaluation and future purchase

intentions.



Plate 5: One of the Vendors of African Pavillion at the 2025 Lagos International Trade Fair.

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) also played a significant role in shaping purchasing behaviour. SMEs that adopted interactive selling approaches, personalised communication, and flexible pricing strategies appeared to stimulate consumer interest and negotiation, which often led to on-the-spot purchases. These findings highlight the importance of human interaction and experiential selling as behavioural stimuli within the trade fair environment.

Trade Fair Experience and Purchase Outcomes

The findings reveal a strong relationship between overall trade fair experience and consumer purchase outcomes, consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model and experiential consumption theory. Consumers who rated their trade fair experience positively, based on factors such as booth aesthetics, product accessibility, staff responsiveness, and event atmosphere, were more likely to report higher purchase satisfaction and intention to repurchase after the event. Exhibitors with visually appealing booths and organised product layouts were observed to retain consumer attention longer, increasing the likelihood of purchase or follow-up interest.

High-traffic booths belonging to established brands generated trust and confidence among consumers, while emerging brands leveraged experiential engagement to compensate for lower brand recognition. This behavioural pattern suggests that trade fair experiences can reduce perceived risk and enhance perceived value, thereby encouraging purchasing

decisions.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theory

The findings support the Theory of Planned Behaviour, as consumers' purchasing decisions were influenced by attitudes toward products (perceived quality and usefulness), subjective norms (crowd presence and peer influence), and perceived behavioural control (affordable pricing and ease of purchase).

Additionally, the results align strongly with the Stimulus–Organism–Response model, where trade fair stimuli, such as product demonstrations, booth design, and promotional activities, elicited emotional and cognitive responses that influenced purchasing behaviour. Experiential Consumption Theory further explains why consumers were willing to engage with unfamiliar brands, particularly SMEs and foreign exhibitors, based on the overall experience rather than purely functional considerations.

Summary of Key Findings

The study reveals that:

- Consumer purchasing behaviour at Lagos trade fairs is experience-driven and context-dependent.
- Price promotions, product demonstrations, brand familiarity, and exhibitor interaction significantly influence purchase decisions.
- Positive trade fair experiences enhance purchase intention, impulse buying, and post-event purchasing.
- Both established brands and SMEs benefit from experiential engagement strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined consumer purchasing behaviour at international trade fairs in Lagos, using the Lagos International Trade Fair as a case study. The findings show that consumer behaviour in this context is largely experience-driven and situational, confirming that trade fairs function not only as promotional platforms but also as active consumption environments.

Purchasing decisions were influenced by experiential exposure, price incentives, product demonstrations, brand familiarity, and exhibitor–consumer interaction. While established brands benefitted from trust and recognition, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) relied on personalised engagement and interactive selling to stimulate purchases. Foreign and

thematic pavilions attracted attention through novelty and perceived product quality, shaping consumer evaluation and future purchase intentions.

Overall, the results validate the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Stimulus– Organism–Response model, and Experiential Consumption Theory in explaining purchasing behaviour at Lagos trade fairs. The study contributes empirical evidence from an emerging market context and highlights the importance of experiential strategies in enhancing trade fair effectiveness

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. **Exhibitors adopt experiential marketing strategies**, including live demonstrations, product trials, and interactive engagement, to enhance emotional involvement and stimulate purchasing.
2. **Targeted pricing and promotional incentives** such as discounts and bundled offers should be used to encourage immediate buying decisions.
3. **Booth design and visual presentation** should be improved to attract attention and facilitate product interaction.
4. **SMEs should receive capacity-building support** focused on customer engagement and experiential selling to strengthen their competitiveness at trade fairs.
5. **Trade fair organisers should prioritise consumer-centred planning**, incorporating visitor feedback to improve amenities, navigation, and overall event experience.

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