

Assessment of Female Workers' Reactions to WhatsApp Bulk Buying Messages in the Era of Food Scarcity and Inflation

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Abstract

The era of food scarcity and high inflation has created significant challenges for households, especially for female workers who are often responsible and saddled with household shopping and food provisioning. In this context the widespread use of messaging apps like WhatsApp has facilitated the rapid spread of information including calls for bulk buying of essential food items. This study, therefore investigates the reactions of female workers to WhatsApp messages promoting bulk buying as a strategy to cope with food scarcity and inflation. A mixed methods approach was employed, combining surveys and focus groups of female workers in Federal Polytechnic Nekede. The study explores the different factors influencing their decision-making process. Results show that while majority (80%) of the participants received WhatsApp messages on bulk buying, only (40%) considered them influential in their purchasing decisions. Thematic analysis of focus group discussions revealed concerns about financial constraints, storage limitations and skepticism about the effectiveness of bulk buying. The findings aim to provide insights that can inform more effective communication strategies and policies to support vulnerable populations during times of crises. This research contributes to the broader understanding of the inter- section between digital media, consumer behavior, and the challenges posed by food insecurity and economic instability.

Keywords: *Assessment, Female workers, Bulk buying, WhatsApp, Food scarcity*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of food scarcity and inflation has become pressing global concerns. Nigeria as a nation has been grappling with same and a myriad of other challenges ranging from insecurity, banditry, unemployment, leadership tussles and sundry others, which one can sum up as socio-political problems. According to Tunji Andrews a Nigerian economist as recorded by (Frolich, 2024) "There is the challenge of high inflation and there is also the secondary issue of devaluation of the currency" The degradation of the nation's currency and exchange rate hike has led to extreme inflation spike and general food scarcity. As noted by (Frolich, 2024); The West African nation's economic crisis has hit boiling point. Nigerians' anger over rampant inflation and

spiraling cost of food has reached fever pitch. This obviously disproportionately affects the vulnerable like female workers, who are challenged with managing the meager funds earned or allotted to them for feeding and catering for their families and the home front in general. These female workers who include; mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, maybe married, single, widowed etc., contend with the economic realities of feeding and sustaining the home with the meager funds at their disposal. This fact was reiterated by the NLC president Joe Ajaero in the report by (Charles, 2023) ...there is suffering for workers, no worker can live on 30,000 naira (\$18.40) minimum wage and over 150 million Nigerians are living below the poverty line”

In the face of rising cost of foodstuffs, wares and all, getting value for the monetary cost of most items is the goal. This is the intent of bulk buying; according to the report by (Wahab, 2018) it allows you save money over time and gives less trips to the market and stores. This however can be achieved by a number of people from remote locations, affording the female worker who is always at work the opportunity to get needed food items at lower costs and just a click of a button away.

With all of this transformation, technology has rendered our lives simpler, speedier, richer, and more enjoyable. Indeed, technological advancement has become a major changer globally in order to handle difficult development challenges on the ground, particularly during an era of food scarcity and inflation, in order for families to survive. With this enormous technological revolution; social media, is fast becoming the preferred method of creating social/professional networks among professionals/groups as well as communicating with potential audiences, particularly in this era. Internet-based, social media channels of communication such as WhatsApp are encouraging perceptions of relationships among users, drawing value primarily from user-generated material (Carr and Hayes, 2015).

Statement of the problem

In times when the challenges of food security and economic uncertainty are paramount, the reality of seeking ways of ameliorating its harsh impact especially by the female workers who often bear the brunt of providing for the family cannot be overemphasized. The paper delves into their exposure to, reaction and perceptions of the influence of bulk buying messages disseminated through the ubiquitous WhatsApp platform. In this context, the use of instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp to disseminate information about bulk buying opportunities has become a common strategy for both consumers and businesses (Statista, 2023). However, the extent to which female workers perceive and respond to such messages remains an understudied area.

Objectives

This paper therefore set out to examine the reactions of female workers to WhatsApp messages on bulk buying and factors they consider when making bulk buying decisions, such as finance, storage limitations, and food spoilage, with the following objectives:

- i) To ascertain the prevalence of WhatsApp messages promoting bulk buying among female workers in Federal polytechnic Nekede.
- ii) To determine the extent to which these WhatsApp messages can influence the purchasing decisions of female workers.
- iii) To determine the key factors that shape the reactions of female workers WhatsApp messages on bulk buying as a coping strategy for food scarcity and inflation.

Research questions

- i) What is the prevalence of WhatsApp messages promoting bulk buying among female workers in Federal Polytechnic Nekede?
- ii) To what extent do these WhatsApp messages influence the purchasing behavior and decisions of the female workers?
- iii) What are the key factors that shape the reactions of female workers to WhatsApp messages on bulk buying as a coping strategy for food scarcity and inflation?

Scope /Area of study

The research considered female workers in Federal Polytechnic Nekede. They therefore formed the participants of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The global economy has faced significant challenges in recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical tensions leading to widespread food scarcity and record-high inflation rates (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2023). These factors have had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, including female workers in developing countries (UN Women, 2022). In this context, the use of instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp to disseminate information about bulk buying opportunities has become a common strategy for coping with the era of inflation and food scarcity (Statista, 2023). However, there is a dearth of literature on the way and extent to which female workers perceive and respond to such messages on social media platforms such as WhatsApp.

EXISTING RESEARCH

Role of WhatsApp in information dissemination during crisis

Social media offers a more potent tool for knowledge finding and delivery, even during crises and natural tragedies when other sources of information and communication are unavailable. In addition to individuals, public and private organizations are using corporate identities on social media to find and share information (Hussain and Shabir, 2020). This is the stance of (Garba & Hassan 2022) while studying the effectiveness of WhatsApp information dissemination amongst journalist during the Covid- 19 crisis.

In his study and report in 'Rest of World' an online magazine (Charles, 2023) tracked nine WhatsApp groups across six Nigerian cities, where members could save up to 22% on food items compared to market prices. He highlighted the modus operandi of some of these WhatsApp groups; photos of food items are uploaded with their prices. Interested members share a list of the things they want, make upfront payments to a designated bank account and share receipts of the money.

Assessment of Female Workers' Reactions during crisis

Food Insecurity and inflation have significant impacts on household economies, particularly for female workers who often bear the burden of managing family resources (FAO, 2022)

Several studies have explored the general experiences and coping strategies of female workers during periods of economic hardship and food insecurity (Quisumbing et al., 2020; Skoufias et al., 2021). These studies suggest that women often face additional challenges, such as increased domestic responsibilities and limited access to resources, which can affect their decision-making and purchasing behaviors.

Bulk Buying and WhatsApp Messages

The use of WhatsApp for bulk buying and distribution of goods has been documented in various contexts, particularly in low-and-middle-income countries (Arora et al., 2021; Haenssge & Ariana, 2018). These studies highlight the potential benefits of such platforms in terms of information sharing and coordinated purchasing, but also the risks of misinformation and unequal access.

Bulk buying has been proposed as a coping strategy, enabling individuals to purchase food at discounted rates (WHO, 2020). Exposure to WhatsApp messages on bulk buying have become a popular means of disseminating information on bulk buying opportunities due to their widespread reach and convenience. (Kaplan & Hanlein, 2010). However, the effectiveness of these messages in influencing purchasing decisions remains understudied.

Intersection of Food Scarcity, Inflation, and Gender

The intersections of food scarcity, inflation, and gender have been examined in the literature, with studies showing that women often bear the brunt of these challenges (Quisumbing et al., 2020; UN Women, 2022). Women's disproportionate responsibility for household food provisioning and their lower earning power can make them particularly vulnerable to the effects of food insecurity and rising prices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is guided by the framework of Social Cognitive theory and Uses and Gratification theory.

Social Cognitive theory: which posits that individuals' behaviors are shaped by their; perceived self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). In the context of bulk buying during times of food scarcity, female workers' reactions may be influenced by their perceived ability to take advantage of such opportunities, their beliefs about the potential benefits or drawbacks, and the social and economic constraints they face.

Uses and gratification theory: The Uses and Gratification theory has been used by many researchers in their observation of line of communication. They abide on the concept of UGT as an audience-centred approach to understanding Mass Communication. Hence, the audience has power over their media consumption and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Diverging from other media effect theories that question "what does the media do to people?" UGT focuses on "what do people do with media?" It postulates that media is a highly available product and the audiences are the consumers of the same product. This study too applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in seeking to understand why and how people actively pursue out specific media to satisfy specific needs. This theory guides the objectives in wanting to explore how female workers react to WhatsApp messages on bulk buying.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative focus group discussions to explore the factors influencing the decision-making process of female workers in Federal Polytechnic Nekede regarding bulk buying messages received through WhatsApp.

Quantitative Survey

The quantitative component of the study involved a survey of 60 female workers at Federal Polytechnic Nekede. The sample was selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure a diverse representation of the target population.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire which included questions on the participants' demographic characteristics, such as marital status, educational background, age, income, and household size. It also explored their access to and usage of WhatsApp, as well as their perceptions of the influence of bulk buying messages received through the platform.

Participants were asked to rate the level of influence of these messages on a scale from 1 (not at all influential) to 5 (very influential). Additionally, they were presented with a list of factors that may influence their bulk buying decisions, such as financial constraints, storage limitations, and concerns about food spoilage, and were asked to indicate the relative importance of each factor.

Qualitative Focus Groups

To provide further insights into the survey findings, the study also conducted a series of focus group discussions with a subset of the survey participants. A total of 6 focus groups, each consisting of 8-10 participants, were convened.

The focus group discussions explored the participants' experiences with bulk buying messages, their decision-making processes, and the challenges they face in responding to these messages. The discussions were audio-recorded for subsequent thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency. The qualitative focus group data was transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, where recurring themes and patterns were identified and interpreted.

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing female workers' reactions to bulk buying messages in the context of food scarcity and inflation.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the institution, and all participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

FINDINGS/ RESULTS

The survey results reveal a multifaceted picture of female workers' reactions to WhatsApp bulk buying messages. Key findings include:

Sample characteristics

The study included a total of 60 female workers in Federal Polytechnic Nekede. Married were most dominant in the study and represented 58.3% of study sample (n= 35) and single female represents 41.7% that is (n=25). The participants that owned a phone with WhatsApp represents 95.0% of the study sample (n=57) and without WhatsApp is 5.0%. However, 80.0% of the respondents were in affirmative that they received WhatsApp message for bulk buying while

20.0% affirmed of not receiving any message. On the other hand, 40.0% of the participants that received message for bulk buying affirmed that the message had great influence on them. The result reveals that 43.3% considered financial constraints/household budget, and storage limitation was 26.7%, food spoilage 21.7% and Skepticism about the effectiveness was 8.3%. Though from the table it can be seen that income was a factor.

S/N	Questions	Response	Number	Percentage
1	The marital status	Married	35	58.3%
		Single	25	41.7%
2	Educational background	Phd	10	16.7%
		Masters	20	33.3%
		Degree	10	16.7%
		Diploma	15	25.0%
		SSCE	5	8.3%
3	Age group	18-25	10	16.7%
		26-35	22	36.7%
		36-45	15	25.0%
		46-55	8	13.3%
		56 above	5	8.3%
4	Income range	Less than N50,000	10	16.7%
		N50,000-N100,000	20	33.3%
		N100,001-N150,000	13	21.7%
		N150,000 above	17	28.3%
5	Number of households	1-2	19	31.7%
		3-4	31	51.7%
		4-5	7	11.6%
		6 above	3	5.0%
6	Phone with WhatsApp	Yes	57	95.0%
		No	3	5.0%
7	Received bulk buying message	Yes	48	80.0%
		No	12	20.0%
8	Influence of bulk buying message	Very Influential	24	40.0%
		Not Influential	26	43.3%
		Not Sure	10	3.3%

9	Factors of consideration for bulk buying	Finance/household budget	26	43.3%
		Storage limitation	16	26.7%
		Food spoilage	13	21.7%
		Skepticism about the effectiveness	5	8.3%

FINDINGS

The survey results reveal a multifaceted picture of female workers' reactions to WhatsApp bulk buying messages. Key findings include:

Diverse Demographic Profile: The respondents represent a range of marital statuses, educational backgrounds, age groups, and income levels, suggesting the need for tailored messaging.

Widespread WhatsApp Usage and Exposure: 95% of respondents own a phone with WhatsApp, and 80% have received bulk buying messages through the platform, highlighting its prominence as a communication channel.

Mixed Reactions to Influence: While 40% of respondents that agreed to have received messages found the bulk buying messages to be very influential, 40% found them not influential, indicating the need to build trust and credibility.

Practical Considerations: The primary factors influencing bulk buying decisions are finance/household budget (43.3%), storage limitations (26.7%), and food spoilage (21.7%), underscoring the practical constraints faced by female workers.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this survey underscore the importance of addressing the practical concerns and tailoring bulk buying messages to the diverse needs of the female worker population. By integrating strategies that address finance, storage, and food spoilage, as well as adopting a holistic approach that builds trust and provides comprehensive support, bulk buying messages can become more effective in empowering female workers during times of food scarcity and economic hardship.

The survey highlights the need for continued research and a collaborative, community-driven approach to support this vulnerable demographic. By addressing the intersections of gender, food security, and economic challenges, stakeholders can develop more impactful and sustainable solutions to enhance the resilience and well-being of female workers.

Proposed Solutions

Tailored Messaging: Develop personalized bulk buying messages that cater to the diverse demographic and socioeconomic profiles of female workers, addressing their specific concerns and constraints.

Financial Assistance: Provide financial support or incentives to help female workers overcome budgetary limitations and facilitate their participation in bulk buying initiatives.

Storage Solutions: Explore partnerships with community organizations or local authorities to provide accessible and affordable storage options for female workers, addressing their storage limitations.

Awareness and Trust-Building: Implement educational campaigns and community outreach programs to raise awareness about the benefits of bulk buying and build trust in the information provided through WhatsApp messages.

Collaborative Approach: Foster a multi-stakeholder collaboration involving school authority, government agencies, civil society organizations, and community leaders to develop comprehensive and inclusive strategies to support female workers during times of crisis.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this survey highlight the complexities and challenges faced by female workers in navigating the landscape of bulk buying messages during periods of food scarcity and economic uncertainty. The use of technological approaches like WhatsApp for communication cannot be over emphasized. By addressing the practical concerns, building trust, and adopting a holistic, community-driven approach, stakeholders can empower this vulnerable population and enhance their resilience.

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