



Journal of Global Economics & Sustainable Development (JGESD)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 (2025)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Unethical Marketing Practices by Petroleum Black Marketers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Article Information

Received: March 24, 2025

Accepted: May 31, 2025

Published: September 27, 2025

Keywords

Black Marketers, Exploitative Pricing, Petrol Adulteration, Unethical Marketing Practices

ABSTRACT

This study delves into investigating the unethical behaviour of petroleum black marketers operating in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The researchers observed that black marketers intentionally engage in petrol adulteration and exploitative pricing during fuel scarcity to maximise profit. To this end, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. This design enabled the collection of primary data from 357 motorists in Akwa Ibom State using a structured questionnaire. The data obtained were descriptively analysed, while the hypotheses of the study were tested using a multiple regression approach. Findings confirm that unethical marketing practices (petrol adulteration and an increase in petrol price per litre) negatively affect motorists in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. On the basis of this finding, we recommended that, in order to prevent marketers from unnecessarily raising petrol prices and constantly adulterating petroleum products, the Nigerian government must do all in its power to alleviate its nationwide fuel scarcity. In light of the constraints identified within the current investigation, we have proposed several recommendations to inform and direct subsequent research endeavours.

INTRODUCTION

The intensification of fuel scarcity has hampered commuters and individuals' day-to-day business activities in Nigeria, leading to the resurgence of motorists queuing, congested bus stops, traffic delays, and an increase in transportation prices. (Esifho, 2024). These circumstances have progressively deteriorated further, resulting in an increase in black marketers emerging from various locations in Akwa Ibom State, exploiting the situation and exacerbating the ongoing petrol scarcity affecting the entire nation (Oyedokun, 2024). Black marketers are now essential to Nigeria's survival. Black marketers are illegal hawkers and retailers of fuel, kerosene, gas, and other petroleum products in Nigeria. These marketers sell gasoline products in jerry cans, drums, and tanks without licenses from regulatory authorities in the oil and gas sector (Esifho, 2024). Because of this, Nigerian oil regulatory bodies and other independent sources have produced real-world evidence that shows a lot of unethical marketing practices by oil "black marketers" in the country (DPP, 2019; and Basil, 2016). Both homes and cars widely use products like Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), commonly known as petrol, and Automobile Gas Oil (AGO), or diesel. Basil (2016) acknowledged that the adulteration of these products often results in explosions that cause societal and economic disasters. Researchers also maintained that these marketers' and their process of storing, distributing, and selling petroleum products leads to numerous unfair marketing practices, raising concerns about their ethics and the methods they employ to secure and convince a growing number of customers. Many scholars view these black marketers' "unorthodox" approaches to selling as

unethical (Ewa, 2018; Smith & Brown, 2020).

Unethical marketing is a growing problem in academia and the legal system; it is generally defined by manipulative, deceitful, and exploitative practices (Maksuti, 2023). This concept delineates any behaviour that is not ethically appropriate for an individual, profession, or organisation (Ewah, 2018). Some instances of unethical marketing practices include making misleading or fraudulent promises, using predatory or exorbitant pricing, invasions of privacy, fuel adulteration, adjustment in meters by filling stations, spamming, green washing, exploitation of children or vulnerable groups, and plagiarism (Goo *et al.*, 2021).

Unethical practice has been observed by many dishonest "black marketers" who are fun of mixing kerosene with petrol, leading to kerosene explosions occurring in many parts of the state, as witnessed in Abak Local Government on September 1st, 2024, and the Nasarawa community of Itu local government areas, respectively. This resulted in the tragic loss of a significant number of Nigerian lives, as well as the unforgettably severe injuries of hundreds more (Basil, 2016). A similar unethical practice created an incident in Kano State in 2009, when contaminated paraffin caused an explosion that sent six members of a family to the hospital. Also, in 2011, in Nigeria's south-south zone, the states of Rivers and Edo experienced nearly simultaneous kerosene explosions. The explosions caused the deaths of numerous people and left others severely deformed (Basil, 2016; Ogun, 2010).

To this end, black marketers have failed to protect society's interests and have failed to provide consumers with quality petroleum products that maximised their satisfaction. Ewah (2018) asserts that the excessive desire to make abnormally large profits drives unethical

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marketing practices like product adulteration, predatory pricing, false and deceptive advertising, and hoarding petroleum products even though these practices harm consumers. They are clearly not acting in accordance with the principles of marketing, which centre on meeting the needs and wants of consumers in order to maximise profit, all the while promoting what is best for society in the long run (Ebitu, 2015). Lack of display of ethical principles is leading to the Nigerian oil sector's failure and collapse.

Previous studies have shown numerous instances of unethical marketing practices in marketing research, sales, advertising, products, and promotions (Kotler and Keller, 2009). As a result, there is an immediate need to address the pervasiveness of unethical procedures used by these black marketers to achieve unreasonable sales and profit in order to survive in the challenging commercial realm (Ewah, 2018). Despite the limited research conducted on unethical marketing practices in the petroleum sector in Nigeria (Ewah, 2018; Sylvanus *et al.* 2017; Basil, 2016), none of these studies revealed unethical practices by black marketers; therefore, the main focus of this research has not attracted sufficient scrutiny from Nigerian researchers. As such, an evidence gap in the literature has been observed. Hence, this study aims to address the scarcity of research on the unethical practices of black marketers and their impact on consumers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Additionally, this study will identify fuel adulteration by black marketers and exploitative pricing of petro as determinants of unethical practices. To achieve these objectives, the following research hypothesis was taken into consideration:

H01: Fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing by black marketers do not have any negative significant joint effect on motorists in Akwa Ibom State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unethical Marketing Practice in Petroleum Context

Companies that engage in unethical marketing frequently use misleading promotional tactics to make their items seem more desirable than they actually are. This could involve presenting unfounded assertions, utilising deceptive visuals, or inflating product attributes. Such actions undermine the trustworthiness of the brand and deceive customers (Matsuti, 2023). In this context, petroleum black marketers engage in unethical marketing practices that are deceptive, exploitative, and potentially dangerous to human life, leading to unfavourable effects on consumer happiness and the overall economy. These actions do not align with the country's accepted standards for petroleum marketing. As per Ayuba (2019), engaging in unethical business practices has the potential to damage a company's reputation and perhaps land it in legal difficulties. The moment has come to reject immoral marketing practices in our societies.

Recognising Unethical Marketing Practices

Having a firm grasp on what exactly constitutes unethical

conduct in the marketing context is crucial for developing successful strategies to tackle and fight against unethical marketing activities. While this section does touch on other areas of the Nigerian economy, it mostly focusses on the widespread unethical behaviour among black marketers of petroleum products.

Adulteration of Petroleum Products

In Nigeria, it is common practice to sell adulterated petroleum products, notably petrol. According to Osueke and Ofondu (2013), black marketers engage in this practice to maximise profits, regardless of the negative impact on motor vehicles and human lives. Fonseca *et al.* (2007) define adulteration as the illegal addition of substances to fuel, which results in the product not meeting its standards. As defined by the DPR (Directorate of Petroleum Resources) (2014), adulteration is the process of diminishing or tainting a product by incorporating another material of inferior quality. The adulteration of petroleum products often entails the infusion of inferior ingredients into superior petroleum products to diminish their potency, augment their volume, and eventually enhance profit margins (Udeagbara *et al.*, 2014).

Chikwe and Onojake (2020) indicated that the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) executed a nationwide sample of petroleum products over a six-month duration in Nigeria. The findings indicated significant degrees of adulteration across various distribution tiers in the downstream industry. The costs associated with contaminated PMS, diesel, and kerosene produced by avaricious intermediaries are a significant concern. Numerous accounts indicate explosions, damage to engines, facilities, and machinery, as well as income loss for unsuspecting retailers. Further evidence of worsening air quality has emerged from studies documenting higher levels of hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, and particulate matter in vehicle exhaust (Oluwasanmi & Ogunro, 2021).

Exploitative Pricing and Hoarding of Petroleum Products

Fuel prices have skyrocketed due to the extreme scarcity of petroleum products, which has caused widespread panic buying. Excessive prices do not reflect the true market worth of the goods or services offered (Giosa, 2020). Customers are primarily affected negatively by prices that are too expensive. It is arguable whether or not price manipulation in whatever form is inherently immoral. A study of product prices from an ethical standpoint is only reasonable, given that ethics is concerned with human behaviour in general (Lasisi, 2023). Petrol prices can be set by unscrupulous merchants at will, and they can be quite expensive at times. Philosophers have argued about exploitative pricing when businesses take advantage of desperate customers during economic downturns. When consumers have few options for purchasing an essential commodity, retailers may resort to price gouging as a short-term strategy to charge exorbitant rates.

Black marketers, on the other hand, frequently engage in hoarding behaviour. Customers typically feel this way when they anticipate a shortage, particularly in the gasoline product market, where demand exceeds supply. With the hope of profiting from a price spike, black market marketers buy up the petroleum products and store them in big drums and jerry cans. The inevitable consequence of this is a surge in prices due to panic buying, which in turn causes inflation (Lasisi, 2023).

Fake and Deceptive Advertising

This is the practice of giving customers inaccurate or incomplete information about a product in order to trick them. This kind of marketing includes making unfounded claims about a product's qualities or ingredients, using misleading pictures or testimonials, or inflating the product's benefits or effectiveness. In order to dishonestly influence customers' choices, deceptive advertising deliberately uses inaccurate or misleading information to market goods and services. A lot of study, investigation, and regulation have gone into this immoral behaviour.

Manipulative Strategy

The ethical implications of employing behavioural science in both public and private sectors have recently sparked vigorous debate. Critics assert that these tactics may be duplicitous and deceptive as they use human prejudices and capitalise on behavioural patterns without individuals' consent. Unethical marketers frequently utilise manipulative strategies to exploit consumers' emotions and vulnerabilities. This may be leveraging fear, guilt, or shame to market a product, utilising misleading pricing tactics like bait-and-switch or concealed fees, or adopting pushy and invasive sales methods. Subtle manipulation of others' opinions can have far-reaching effects. People who are being manipulated may not even realise how much they are being manipulated until it's too late (Jones & Ryan, 2018). Feelings of betrayal, low self-esteem, and distrust in people and organisations can result from this.

Unfair Competition

The impact of unfair competition from black marketers in Nigeria is significant and cannot be overlooked. Unethical marketers may participate in unfair competitive practices, including disseminating misleading information about rivals, engaging in price fixing or collusion, and employing predatory pricing tactics to eliminate smaller competitors from the market. As stated by Chaman Law Firm (2024), unfair competition in marketing pertains to practices that contravene ethical or legal norms in order to secure an improper advantage over rivals. Black marketers that participate in unfair competition frequently employ misrepresentation of products and other deceptive tactics. These encompass deceptive or misleading campaigns, plagiarism, and the employment of unethical trade methods. Unjust competition in advertising suppresses innovation and restricts competition (Taofeek, 2022).

When enterprises engage in unethical methods, they may eliminate their competitors from the market, resulting in a monopoly.

Targeting Vulnerable Customers

Black marketers may deliberately target vulnerable customers, such as keke drivers, minibus drivers, and small business owners with limited knowledge or understanding of their marketing tactics. This can include marketing adulterated petroleum products that may be harmful or unnecessary to these groups, or using manipulative techniques to persuade them to make a purchase. Suffice to say that "the law has enshrined the protection of consumers against hazardous products, fraudulent deceitful attitudes, grossly misleading information, and other practices. It also ensures that consumers have access to a variety of products of satisfactory quality and that their interests will receive full and sympathetic consideration in policy formulation" (Ewah, 2018). It is puzzling that marketers so joyfully violate regulations that prohibit the illicit storage of petroleum products intended for circulation without facing an appropriate penalty.

Concept of Black Marketing

The word "black marketing" is vague and difficult to pin down. However, there have been periodic efforts by jurists, sociologists, and criminologists to decipher its actual meaning. It is unclear where the phrase "black marketing" came from, but it likely meant the same thing as "black" to denote "illegal activities" that were taking place in an extremely covert manner. Buyers in black markets face a number of dangers, such as being the target of fraud or physical aggression, receiving substandard or fake items (particularly hazardous petroleum products), and having no legal protections against these issues (Kaur, 2017). According to Hashem (2023), "black marketing" occurs when businesses decide to put their financial interests ahead of society's overall welfare and use marketing strategies in unethical or illegal ways.

AbdulFattah (2018) asserts that black marketing emerged as a reaction to the regulations implemented during World War II. Although illegal, it has become a significant influence on the home front, particularly in urban areas and among those who can afford the inflated costs. Black marketing is similar to conventional marketing in that it makes use of the same elements—product, promotion, locations, and price—but it operates under the radar due to secrecy laws and the difficulty of detecting and preventing it (Feige, 2016). Nigeria is one of the countries where black marketing has become an issue. As a result, nearly every state in the country is experiencing some discomfort due to their unethical dealings, particularly in the sales of premium motors, also known as fuel.

Theoretical Framework

The underpinning theory for this study is equity theory, which was introduced by John Stacey Adams in 1963 (Adams, 1963). Adams (1963) noted that there

was a gap in the literature regarding the psychological underpinnings of injustice perception, which led to the development of this hypothesis. The theory posits that when one party considers another as deriving unjust advantage, the disadvantaged party regards the situation as inequitable and endeavours to restore equilibrium. Actions may include unfavourable word-of-mouth to acquaintances, grievances directed at the firm or external organisations, or a cessation of future purchases from the company (Ayuba, 2019). Ethical judgements, customer happiness, and behavioural intentions are all influenced by the relationships that businesses cultivate with their customers. This model argues that the perception of the situation's fairness is affected by both the extent of the harm and the level of consumer loyalty.

Empirical Literature

Petroleum marketers in Nigeria were the subjects of Basil (2016) investigation into unethical marketing practices. The major objective of the research was to look at how unethical pricing practices by petroleum marketers affected Nigerian drivers and to find out if there was a connection between marketers' practice of selling adulterated fuel and the frequency of engine damage in Nigerian cars and other vehicles. Primary data was collected from 333 motorists in Calabar using a standardised questionnaire, and secondary data was also used in the study. Using the Chi-square and correlation methods the data obtained were analysed. According to the research, marketers' unethical pricing of petroleum has a major detrimental impact on Nigerian drivers, and marketers' gasoline adulteration considerably impacts the rate of engine damage in the country's cars and other vehicles.

The impact of unethical marketing strategies on consumer purchasing was investigated by Ewah (2018). The research's purpose was to determine whether actual marketers engaged in dishonest marketing strategies that caused or exacerbated consumer displeasure. Primary data for the study came from 246 respondents who filled out a study instrument at several petrol stations in Ogoja. The chi-square analytical approach was used to test the study's hypotheses, while descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data. The study's results showed that gasoline pump attendants were complicit in substantially distorting the amount of fuel sold to consumers, lying to them, and even pumping air to clients who weren't paying attention.

Ayuba (2019) conducted a similar study on unethical marketing practices in the Nigerian economy and the quest for national development. The research used both secondary sources and primary information collected from a survey of 145 participants. To evaluate the study's hypotheses and collect the data, a combination of descriptive statistics, chi-square, and regression analysis was used. According to the study's results, unethical marketing practices have a negative impact on a country's economy in many ways. These include a drop in GDP, higher inflation, and lower consumer spending, which

means fewer factories and plants will remain open, resulting in more job losses. Bribery and corruption also play a role, as do poor infrastructure and an absence of creative entrepreneurship.

Ayuba and Aliyu (2018) examine the causes, consequences and control strategies of unethical business practices in Nigeria. The main objective was to investigate unethical business practices and its implications on the Nigerian society. The researchers utilised both primary and secondary data, which were examined by descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and t-tests to evaluate the proposed hypotheses. A total of 1,124 respondents were utilised for the analysis. Research indicated that the majority of customer grievances regarding ethical violations were prevalent in the mobile telecommunications, healthcare, manufacturing, and automotive sectors. These unethical business practices stemmed from a confluence of three overarching factors: external influences, individual traits, and inadequate oversight, which encompassed greed, insufficient adherence to legal business standards in Nigeria, fierce competition, weak legislative enforcement, and a deficiency in effective supervision by regulatory authorities. The study identified detrimental practices including the proliferation of counterfeit and inferior materials, deceptive advertising, price collusion, discriminatory pricing, hoarding, diversion, overbilling, black market activities involving petroleum products, and inadequate service to marginalised consumers as significant factors with serious repercussions.

Saraih *et al.* (2021) carried out a study to determine the influence of unethical marketing practices on consumers' buying behaviours among tertiary students in northern Malaysia. The study tested four independent variables on consumers' buying behaviours: false advertisement, bait advertisement, spamming, and psychoactive advertisement. A total of 317 questionnaire were collected from respondents. Data collected were analysed using Pearson's correlation analysis. Findings showed that there was a moderately positive relationship between consumers' buying behaviours and all of the unethical marketing practices.

Samsudin and Yusoff (2020) investigated the influence of petroleum marketing ethics on consumer loyalty towards petrol stations in Malaysia. The objective of the study was to assess the effects of pricing stability, quality assurance, and equitable customer interactions on consumer loyalty to gasoline vendors in Malaysia. Primary data was collected from 189 consumers of government-operated petrol stations in Malaysia through a semi-structured questionnaire. The acquired data were analysed by descriptive statistics, and the hypotheses were evaluated using a simple linear regression approach. The study's findings indicated that pricing stability, quality assurance, and equitable customer relations significantly enhance customer loyalty to petrol stations in Malaysia.

Oluwasanmi and Ogunro (2021) conducted a study on unethical marketing practices and emerging consumerism in the downstream sector of the Nigerian petroleum

industry. The researchers used Bovas & Company Limited's filling stations as a case study. A survey research design was adopted. The study used a structured questionnaire and a convenient sample method to gather data from 612 motorists. Data obtained was analysed through the use of a correlation coefficient. The findings showed that an unethical marketing practice has a positive effect on emerging consumerism in the downstream sector of the petroleum industry in Nigeria.

Research Method

This study adopted a field observation and cross-sectional survey research design in order to significantly examine unethical marketing practices by black marketers and the consequent relationship on consumers. Fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing were adopted jointly as proxies for unethical marketing. This cross-sectional design allowed for the collection of primary data from a representative sample of motorists (Keke and minibus drivers) in Akwa Ibom State during a single study run, all within the allocated time limit. The targeted population consisted of motorists, chosen due to their frequent daily purchases of gasoline for their business operations. The scarcity of petroleum products exposes these keke and minibus drivers to the unethical marketing practices of black

marketers, as they regularly interact with their products. The researchers deemed the study population statistically infinite due to their inability to obtain comprehensive and accurate statistics regarding all motorists in Akwa Ibom State.

The Topman formula was thus applied to arrive at an appropriate sample size of 357 respondents for the study after a pretest pilot survey. Given the on-site nature of the research, the convenience sampling method was employed to target motorists at some selected black marketers spots in strategic junctions in Akwa Ibom State within three days of extensive field work covering 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. With the aid of a train research assistant, questionnaire were distributed to the willing 357 motorists, of which 322 copies were retrieved usable for analysis (TABLE 2). The research instrument was measured on a 5-point Likert scale consisting of twelve (12) items. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach alpha reliability test; the resulting coefficient (see Table 1) fell above the 0.5 threshold. Hence, the data collected were further analysed using the multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance to determine the extent of the relationship between the variables using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

Variables	No of Items	Coefficient
Fuel Adulteration	4	0.668
Exploitative Pricing	4	0.723
Impact on motorists	4	0.626

Source: SPSS Output (2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the analysis in Table 2 indicate that 51 (15.8%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25 years, 72 (22.4%) of the respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35 years, 59 (18.3%) of the respondents were between the age brackets of 36 and 45, and 140 (43.5%) of the respondents were between the ages of 46 and above. The table shows that 187

(51.9%) of the respondents were male, while 135 (48.1%) of the respondents were female. This implies that men were more involved in the patronage of fuel from black marketers. Regarding marital status, 170 (52.8%) of the respondents were single, while 152 (47.2%) were married. This also implies that the demographic that were more interested in filling out the research instrument were single and involved in keke and minibus driving.

Table 2: Demographic Data of the Respondents

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
18-25	51	15.8
26-35	72	22.4
36-45	59	18.3
46 and above	140	43.5
Total	322	100.0
Gender		
Male	187	51.9
Female	135	48.1
Total	322	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	170	52.8

Married	152	47.2
Total	322	100.0

Source: Field survey (2024)

Field Observation Findings

During the course of the research, the researchers observed complaints from motorists and a few individuals about the unethical business practices of black marketers as fuel scarcity intensified. Our observations and comments from consumers revealed that some black marketers were involved in adulterating their gasoline and constantly increasing their litre prices, especially in the evenings. Irrespective of this unethical behaviour from these marketers, Keke and Minibus were major patrons of their offerings, not minding the harm the adulteration may cause to their engines. To this end, this study was conducted to examine the effect of unethical marketing

practices by black marketers and their consequences on consumers (motorists).

Test of Hypothesis

This section examined the null hypotheses formulated for the investigation to produce findings.

Decision Rule

Accept the alternative hypothesis if (P < 0.5) and reject the null hypothesis, if (P > 0.5).

Ho1: Fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing by black marketers do not have any negative significant joint effect on motorists in Akwa Ibom State

Table 3: Field Observation Findings

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.936 ^a	.875	.874		.79678	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Fuel adulteration, Exploitative pricing						
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1420.177	2	710.089	118.508	.000b
	Residual	202.518	319	.635		
	Total	1622.696	321			
a. Dependent Variable: Motorists (keke and minibus drivers)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Fuel adulteration, Exploitative pricing						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.483	.241		2.004	.046
	Fuel Adulteration	.276	.022	.339	12.821	.000
	Exploitative Pricing	.511	.020	.675	25.522	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Motorists (keke and minibus drivers)						

Source: Field Survey Result (2024)

Results of the multiple regression analysis shows that the independent variables; fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing jointly accounted for approximately 88% of the variation in motorists in Akwa Ibom State, with a regression coefficient of R² = 0.875. This means that fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing as predictors of unethical marketing practices were collectively accountable for 88% of the changes in negative effect on motorists, while 22% of the changes in the dependent variable could be attributed to other factors not considered in the study's model.

Results on the table also indicates that the joint relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable was strong according to the R = 0.936

and adjusted R² = 0.874, indicating that the regression model of this study is said to have a strong explanatory power of the dependent variable. In addition, the F-ratio = 118.508 and p-value < 0.000 on the ANOVA suggests that the results of the regression model could not have occurred by chance and that fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing jointly and significantly predicted the changes in the dependent variable.

To assess the relative importance and significant contribution of each independent variable on the dependent variable, the coefficients are provided on the Table. Accordingly, the unethical marketing practices indicators that were jointly measured against motorists, showed a significant positive contribution in terms of

changes in the dependent by their positive Coefficients. The multiple regression analysis result showing the multiple regression Coefficients of the two variables are as follows: fuel adulteration; $\beta_{x_1}FA = 0.511$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$) and exploitative pricing ($\beta_{x_2}EP = 0.276$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). This results as presented on the Coefficient table, can be interpreted that every unit change in any of the independent variables will lead to an increase change in the dependent variable, holding all others factors constant. As represented in the resulting multiple regression model. The proposed multiple regression equation is:

$$Y = a_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + e$$

$$M = a_0 + \beta_1 FA + \beta_2 EP + \dots + e$$

Thus, the resulting multiple regression model is presented as:

$$Im = 0.483 + 0.511 Fa + 0.276Ep$$

Considering the result of significant P-value = 0.000 in the ANOVA and coefficient, It is concluded that fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing does have a joint significant negative effect on motorist operating in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

According to the hypothesis result, it was revealed that unethical marketing practices (fuel adulteration and exploitative pricing) by black marketers in Akwa Ibom State have significant negative effects on motorists. The results validate the researchers' observation that black marketers exploit the scarcity to arbitrarily set fuel prices above the government-approved rate and purposefully contaminate their gasoline with adulterants such as kerosene and diesel. Basil (2016), Ewah (2018), Ayuba (2019), Ayuba and Aliyu (2018), Saraih *et al.* (2021), and Oluwasanmi and Ogunro (2021) corroborate this finding, concluding that marketers engage in unethical practices such as fuel adulteration and fuel price hikes. Basil (2016), in her study, expressed disappointment that motorists in Nigeria have lost a lot of money due to petroleum product adulteration, and she also noted that unethical marketing activities have cost customers their money and even lives in some circumstances. These findings confirm that unethical marketing practices such as fuel adulteration and an increase in petrol price per litre negatively affect motorists in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it is evident that black marketers' unethical marketing practices significantly affect households and motorists in Akwa Ibom State. This study primary objective was to investigate the issue of fuel adulteration as well as the impact of exploitative pricing on motorists. To streamline this investigation, the researchers collected primary data from motorists (keke and minibus drivers) in various black market places in the Akwa Ibom State using a structured questionnaire survey. The survey data underwent statistical analysis using both descriptive and inferential methods. Given this, the study's findings suggest that unethical marketing practices

significantly and negatively affect motorists. Based on the research results, the following recommendations for potential implementation were made:

- i. In order to prevent marketers from unnecessarily raising fuel prices, the Nigerian government must do all in its power to alleviate its nationwide fuel crisis.
- ii. It is suggested that the appropriate law enforcement agencies in Nigeria step up their efforts to monitor and enforce regulations that prohibit the adulteration of petroleum products.

Limitations and Future Research

This investigation focused exclusively on the operations of black marketers within Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, we urge scholars to conduct analogous studies in various regions of the country to assess the congruence of research outcomes across different geographical settings. Furthermore, given that earlier investigations have substantiated the widespread occurrence of unethical marketing practices across various industries, we encourage scholars to extend their enquiries beyond the petroleum sector. It is essential to include other economically vital sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, banking, and telecommunications, thereby expanding the breadth of existing research outcomes.

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