

Distribution Channel Practices and Consumer Disconnect in the FMCG Industry: Implications for Economic Development in Rivers State

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Abstract

The performance of firms in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry depends not only on product quality but also on the effectiveness of distribution channels in delivering products to consumers at the right place, time, quantity, and price. This study examined the influence of distribution channel practices on consumer disconnect, measured through customer engagement, and its implications for economic development in Rivers State, Nigeria. A quantitative survey design was employed. Data were collected from 256 marketing, sales, distribution, and key-account managers as well as major distributors across 32 registered FMCG firms. Descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis (SPSS version 25) were used. Results showed significant positive relationships between digital distribution practices ($R^2 = .785$), channel responsiveness ($R^2 = .639$), information sharing ($R^2 = .742$) and customer engagement. The study concludes that effective distribution channel practices strengthen manufacturer–consumer relationships, reduce disconnect, and support firm performance and economic development. Firms are advised to expand digital platforms, improve responsiveness, and strengthen information-sharing mechanisms.

Keywords: Distribution Channel Practices; Channel Responsiveness; Consumer Disconnect; Customer Engagement; FMCG Industry; Economic Development

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INTRODUCTION

Business organizations in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry occupy a strategic position in every economy. They produce goods that are purchased frequently and consumed daily. Products such as food, beverages, toiletries, pharmaceuticals, detergents, and household consumables form the backbone of retail trade. They also contribute significantly to employment generation, manufacturing growth, tax revenue, and national economic development. According to Kotler and Keller (2022) and Stern et al. (2019), the success of firms in the FMCG sector depends not only on product quality but also on the effectiveness of their distribution channels. These channels must ensure that products reach consumers at the right place, time, quantity, and price. Consequently, distribution channels have evolved from mere physical routes for moving goods into strategic marketing systems that create value for manufacturers, intermediaries, retailers, and consumers.

Distribution channels consist of manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, logistics providers, and, increasingly, digital platforms. Together they transfer ownership and possession of products from producers to final consumers. Traditionally, FMCG manufacturers relied heavily on wholesalers and retailers because of the extensive geographical coverage required and the need for market penetration (Ifekanandu & Miyene – 2026). However, the rapid growth of digital technologies, electronic commerce, mobile communication, and data analytics has transformed distribution systems across the world. Consumers now expect personalised communication, product availability, faster delivery, transparent pricing, and direct engagement with manufacturers. Firms that continue to rely solely on conventional distribution structures risk losing direct contact with their consumers. This creates what marketing scholars describe as consumer disconnect (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021).

Consumer disconnect refers to the growing gap between brand owners and end users. It results from inadequate communication, poor market intelligence, limited customer engagement, and excessive dependence on intermediaries. When manufacturers have little or no direct interaction with consumers, valuable information about changing preferences, complaints, purchasing behaviour, and product expectations may not reach decision-makers promptly. This disconnect weakens customer satisfaction, reduces brand loyalty, slows innovation, and limits firms' ability to respond effectively to market dynamics (Payne & Frow, 2017). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argued that in highly competitive FMCG markets, firms that fail to establish stronger consumer relationships often experience declining competitiveness despite maintaining extensive physical distribution networks.

The emergence of the digital economy has further changed the nature of distribution channel management. Modern distribution systems integrate physical channels with digital platforms such as company websites, online marketplaces, mobile applications, social media, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and digital payment platforms. These technologies enable manufacturers to communicate directly with consumers while maintaining relationships with intermediaries. Digital distribution practices also generate consumer data that support demand forecasting, inventory management, personalised marketing, and improved customer experiences. Organisations that successfully integrate digital and traditional channels are therefore better positioned to reduce consumer disconnect and create superior customer value (Verhoef et al., 2021; Chaffey, 2022).

In Nigeria, the FMCG sector remains one of the country's largest contributors to manufacturing output and commercial activities. The sector supplies essential products to

millions of consumers through complex networks involving manufacturers, mega distributors, wholesalers, open markets, neighbourhood retailers, supermarkets, and increasingly digital commerce platforms. Nevertheless, infrastructural deficiencies, poor transportation networks, inadequate information sharing, fragmented retail structures, channel conflicts, and limited technological integration continue to challenge effective distribution. These conditions often reduce manufacturers' visibility into consumer experiences and contribute to product shortages, inconsistent pricing, delayed deliveries, and weakened customer confidence (Adeniran & Oniku, 2018; Ateke et al., 2025).

The uniqueness of African marketing channels further explains this phenomenon. Unlike many developed economies where organised retail dominates, a significant proportion of FMCG products in Nigeria pass through traditional open markets and informal retail systems. These channels are characterised by multiple intermediaries, bargaining practices, fragmented information flows, and limited digital integration. While these traditional channels provide extensive market reach, they may simultaneously increase the distance between manufacturers and final consumers. This makes it difficult for firms to gather timely market intelligence and maintain consistent customer relationships (Stern et al., 2019; Kotler & Keller, 2022).

Within Rivers State, the FMCG industry serves one of Nigeria's most commercially vibrant markets. Port Harcourt and other urban centres host numerous manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, supermarkets, neighbourhood retailers, and informal market operators serving diverse consumer segments. Recent studies conducted in Rivers State have emphasised channel collaboration, logistics optimisation, and information sharing as important determinants of market presence and operational performance. These studies demonstrate that improved collaboration among channel members enhances brand awareness, product availability, logistics efficiency, and distribution effectiveness. However, they largely focus on relationships among channel members rather than examining whether these practices strengthen or weaken manufacturers' relationships with final consumers (Ateke et al., 2025; Okwong et al., 2025).

This creates an important knowledge gap. Existing literature has devoted considerable attention to logistics efficiency, channel collaboration, and market coverage. Yet relatively little empirical attention has been given to how distribution channel practices influence consumer disconnect and the broader implications for economic development. Understanding this relationship is important because consumer disconnect can reduce repeat purchases, discourage innovation, weaken business competitiveness, reduce sales growth, and ultimately constrain employment generation, investment, and economic productivity. Conversely, distribution channels that facilitate direct consumer engagement, digital communication, efficient information sharing, and seamless product availability can strengthen consumer trust, improve firm performance, stimulate investment, and contribute meaningfully to economic development (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Payne & Frow, 2017). Against this background, this study seeks to examine the influence of distribution channel practices on consumer disconnect in the FMCG industry.

Statement of the Problem

In Rivers State, one of Nigeria's foremost commercial and industrial hubs, the FMCG market is served by a complex network of manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, supermarkets, neighbourhood retailers, open markets, and informal traders. Although these channel members facilitate extensive product distribution across urban and rural communities, the

multiplicity of intermediaries may inadvertently widen the communication gap between manufacturers and final consumers. Consumers frequently experience inconsistent pricing, stock shortages, delayed product availability, limited opportunities to communicate directly with manufacturers, and inadequate responses to complaints. At the same time, manufacturers may struggle to obtain accurate and timely information about consumer expectations because much of the customer experience is filtered through intermediaries.

The persistence of consumer disconnect within FMCG distribution systems could have significant implications for economic development. When firms fail to understand changing consumer needs, they may experience declining sales, reduced customer retention, inefficient inventory management, lower production efficiency, and diminished profitability (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021). These challenges may ultimately reduce business expansion, discourage investment, weaken the competitiveness of local enterprises, and limit employment opportunities within the manufacturing and distribution sectors. Conversely, distribution channel practices that encourage effective channel integration, digital engagement, information sharing, customer feedback, and closer manufacturer–consumer relationships are likely to enhance customer satisfaction, stimulate innovation, improve firm performance, and contribute positively to sustainable economic development.

Although the relationship between distribution channel management and organisational performance has received considerable scholarly attention, there is a paucity of studies that specifically investigate how distribution channel practices contribute to consumer disconnect and the implications of such disconnect for economic development within the FMCG industry, particularly in Rivers State. This gap presents both a theoretical and practical concern, as businesses and policymakers require empirical evidence to redesign distribution systems that are more consumer-centred and digitally responsive. It is on this basis that this study is justified.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the influence of distribution channel practices on consumer disconnect in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry and its implications for economic development in Rivers State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the influence of digital distribution practices on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State;
2. Determine the influence of channel responsiveness on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State; and
3. Assess the influence of information sharing on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do digital distribution practices influence customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State?

2. To what extent does channel responsiveness influence customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does information sharing influence customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁:** Digital distribution practices have no significant influence on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.
- H₀₂:** Channel responsiveness has no significant influence on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.
- H₀₃:** Information sharing has no significant influence on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.

Conceptual Framework

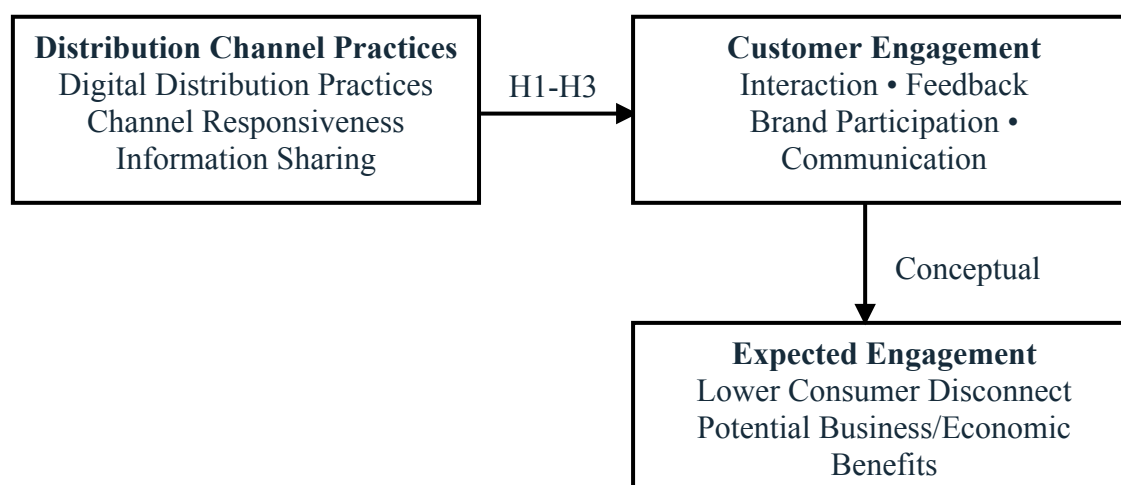


Figure 1: Conceptual framework linking distribution channel practices to customer engagement.

Source: Author-generated framework (2026).

The three arrows represent the study's three hypothesized relationships. Customer engagement is used as an inverse proxy for consumer disconnect; economic-development benefits are conceptual implications and were not directly tested.

The conceptual framework for this study is anchored on the premise that distribution channel practices determine the extent to which FMCG manufacturers remain connected with or disconnected from their final consumers. Effective distribution channels extend beyond the physical movement of products. They facilitate communication, customer interaction, information exchange, timely product availability, and relationship building. Consequently, distribution channel practices that promote digital interaction, efficient information flow, and responsive logistics are expected to reduce consumer disconnect by strengthening customer

engagement and enhancing manufacturers' understanding of consumer needs (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Stern et al., 2019).

Consumer disconnect occurs when manufacturers become increasingly detached from end users because distribution channels fail to provide adequate opportunities for communication, feedback, and relationship management. In contemporary marketing, customer engagement has become one of the strongest indicators of the level of connection between firms and consumers. Higher customer engagement reflects stronger relationships and lower consumer disconnect, whereas weak engagement suggests a widening gap between manufacturers and consumers (Brodie et al., 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021). The framework therefore proposes that improvements in digital distribution practices, channel responsiveness, and information sharing will significantly reduce consumer disconnect by enhancing customer engagement among FMCG consumers in Rivers State. Consequently, stronger manufacturer–consumer relationships are expected to improve organizational competitiveness and support sustainable economic development.

Digital Distribution Practices

Digital distribution practices refer to the application of digital technologies in facilitating product distribution, communication, transactions, and customer interactions across marketing channels. These practices integrate traditional distribution systems with digital platforms such as e-commerce websites, mobile applications, social media platforms, electronic payment systems, CRM software, and online marketplaces. Unlike conventional distribution systems that rely heavily on physical intermediaries, digital distribution practices enable manufacturers to establish direct relationships with consumers while maintaining efficient coordination with distributors and retailers. This integration enhances market reach, operational efficiency, and customer convenience (Chaffey, 2022; Kotler & Keller, 2022).

In the FMCG industry, digital distribution practices have become increasingly important due to changing consumer purchasing behaviour and the rapid adoption of digital technologies. Consumers now expect real-time access to product information, online ordering options, personalised communication, digital customer support, and convenient payment systems. Firms that effectively implement digital distribution channels are better positioned to collect customer data, understand buying patterns, monitor market trends, and respond quickly to changing consumer preferences. Consequently, digital technologies improve customer experiences while reducing the communication barriers that traditionally exist between manufacturers and consumers (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Digital distribution also enhances supply chain visibility by enabling manufacturers to monitor inventory movement, product demand, and consumer purchasing behaviour across different channel members. Real-time information generated through digital platforms supports better forecasting, inventory management, and decision-making, thereby improving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. These capabilities reduce delays, improve product availability, and strengthen consumer confidence in FMCG brands (Christopher, 2016).

Channel Responsiveness

Channel responsiveness refers to the ability of a firm's logistics and distribution system to respond rapidly, efficiently, and accurately to customer requirements, market changes, and unexpected disruptions. It encompasses timely order processing, efficient inventory

replenishment, reliable transportation, flexible delivery schedules, and rapid problem resolution. Logistics responsiveness ensures that products are delivered to consumers at the right location, in the right quantity, and at the right time while maintaining acceptable service quality (Christopher, 2016).

Within Rivers State, logistics responsiveness is particularly important because transportation infrastructure, traffic congestion, seasonal flooding, and distribution network complexities often affect the timely movement of FMCG products. Firms capable of responding quickly to these operational challenges are more likely to maintain product availability and stronger customer engagement. Therefore, logistics responsiveness represents an important distribution channel practice that can significantly reduce consumer disconnect.

Information Sharing

Information sharing refers to the systematic exchange of timely, accurate, relevant, and reliable information among members of a distribution channel to facilitate coordinated decision-making and improved organizational performance. Effective information sharing involves the continuous communication of inventory levels, market demand, customer feedback, pricing information, sales performance, promotional activities, and consumer preferences between manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and final consumers. It serves as a foundation for collaboration and enhances transparency within the distribution system (Mentzer et al., 2001).

In contemporary marketing, information sharing extends beyond communication among channel members to include direct interaction between manufacturers and consumers. Advances in digital technology enable firms to obtain customer reviews, complaints, product ratings, purchasing histories, and behavioral data almost instantly. Such information supports product improvement, service innovation, demand forecasting, and customer relationship management. Organizations that maintain effective information-sharing systems are more capable of responding to changing consumer needs and reducing communication gaps that contribute to consumer disconnect (Payne & Frow, 2017).

Information sharing also contributes to operational efficiency by reducing uncertainty within distribution channels. When manufacturers and intermediaries exchange timely information regarding inventory status, transportation schedules, and customer demand, supply chain disruptions are minimized and product availability improves. Consumers are therefore more likely to experience consistent product supply, transparent pricing, and prompt responses to their concerns, thereby strengthening customer engagement and trust (Christopher, 2016).

Consumer Disconnect (Customer Engagement)

Consumer disconnect refers to the degree to which manufacturers become detached from their final consumers due to ineffective communication, limited interaction, poor feedback mechanisms, and inadequate understanding of consumer needs. It reflects a situation where consumers experience weak relationships with brands despite regular product purchases. Consumer disconnect has become increasingly important in modern marketing because the presence of multiple intermediaries often limits direct manufacturer–consumer engagement (Kotler & Keller, 2022).

Customer engagement represents one of the most important behavioural manifestations of consumer connection and is therefore an appropriate indicator of consumer disconnect.

Customer engagement encompasses consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement with a firm's products, services, and brand activities. Highly engaged customers actively communicate with firms, participate in promotional campaigns, provide feedback, recommend products, and demonstrate stronger brand loyalty. Conversely, declining customer engagement reflects increasing consumer disconnect (Brodie et al., 2019).

In digital marketing environments, customer engagement occurs through online reviews, social media interactions, loyalty programmes, mobile applications, customer communities, and electronic feedback platforms. Organizations that encourage continuous customer engagement develop stronger relationships with consumers and obtain valuable market intelligence for product innovation and service improvement. Consequently, customer engagement serves as an important mechanism through which distribution channel practices influence consumer disconnect (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Nexus between Digital Distribution Practices and Customer Engagement

Digital distribution practices enhance customer engagement by enabling direct, interactive, and real-time communication between FMCG manufacturers and consumers through digital platforms such as e-commerce websites, mobile applications, social media, and CRM systems. Unlike traditional distribution systems that rely heavily on intermediaries, digital channels allow firms to understand consumer preferences, personalize marketing communications, respond promptly to complaints, and provide seamless purchasing experiences. These interactions foster trust, satisfaction, and active participation in brand-related activities, thereby strengthening customer engagement. Consumers who can easily access product information, place orders online, track deliveries, and communicate directly with manufacturers are more likely to develop stronger emotional and behavioural connections with brands (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021).

Nexus between Channel Responsiveness and Customer Engagement

Channel responsiveness contributes significantly to customer engagement by ensuring that products are delivered accurately, promptly, and consistently to consumers. Responsive channel systems enable firms to process orders quickly, replenish inventories efficiently, resolve delivery issues promptly, and maintain product availability across various retail outlets. Such operational efficiency positively influences customer experiences because consumers associate reliable product availability and timely delivery with organizational competence and service quality. When customers consistently receive products as expected, their confidence in the brand increases, encouraging repeat purchases and stronger engagement with the manufacturer (Christopher, 2016; Kotler & Keller, 2022).

Ateke, Nwulu, and Damian-Okoro (2025) reported that logistics optimization significantly improves distribution efficiency among FMCG distributors in Rivers State. Similarly, Asiegbu, Akekue-Alex, and colleagues emphasized that efficient logistics capabilities strengthen customer relationships by ensuring product accessibility and service reliability. Therefore, responsive logistics systems not only improve operational performance but also foster customer engagement by creating positive consumption experiences that encourage sustained interactions between consumers and FMCG brands.

Nexus between Information Sharing and Customer Engagement

Information sharing plays a critical role in strengthening customer engagement by ensuring that accurate, timely, and relevant information flows seamlessly among manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and consumers. Effective information sharing enables consumers to receive reliable information regarding product availability, prices, promotions, product usage, and after-sales support. At the same time, manufacturers obtain valuable customer feedback concerning product quality, preferences, complaints, and expectations. This two-way communication enhances transparency, builds confidence, and encourages consumers to participate actively in their relationships with brands. Relationship marketing theory suggests that organizations that maintain open communication channels are more likely to cultivate long-term customer engagement and loyalty (Payne & Frow, 2017; Mentzer et al., 2001).

In the Nigerian business environment, effective information sharing has been identified as an important driver of customer satisfaction and relationship quality. Ateke, Nwulu, and Damian-Okoro (2025) found that information sharing among FMCG channel members significantly improves market presence and operational performance in Rivers State. Similarly, Okwong, Ikegwuru, and Ateke (2025) reported that efficient information exchange enhances coordination among distribution partners and improves customers' experiences with FMCG products. When consumers receive consistent information and have opportunities to communicate their concerns directly or indirectly to manufacturers, they become more involved with the brand, resulting in stronger customer engagement and reduced consumer disconnect.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored primarily on Relationship Marketing Theory and supplemented by Channel Management Theory to provide a robust explanation of how distribution channel practices influence customer engagement and reduce consumer disconnect in the FMCG industry.

Relationship Marketing Theory

Relationship Marketing Theory was first advanced by Berry (1983) and later expanded by Morgan and Hunt (1994). The theory argues that the primary objective of marketing extends beyond attracting customers to establishing, maintaining, and enhancing long-term relationships that create mutual value for both organizations and consumers. According to the theory, successful organizations prioritize trust, commitment, communication, cooperation, customer satisfaction, and continuous interaction rather than focusing solely on transactional exchanges. Relationship Marketing Theory emphasizes that sustainable competitive advantage is achieved when firms develop enduring relationships with customers through effective communication, responsiveness, and value creation (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The theory further posits that customer relationships are strengthened through continuous interactions that enable organizations to understand customers' evolving needs, preferences, expectations, and experiences. In contemporary marketing environments, these interactions occur through multiple distribution channels, including traditional retail outlets, digital platforms, CRM systems, and social media. Effective distribution channel practices therefore become strategic mechanisms for facilitating customer engagement, gathering market intelligence, responding to customer complaints, and delivering superior customer

experiences. Conversely, ineffective channel practices weaken communication between manufacturers and consumers, resulting in consumer disconnect, declining customer loyalty, and reduced organizational performance (Payne & Frow, 2017).

The relevance of Relationship Marketing Theory to this study lies in its explanation of how distribution channel practices influence customer engagement. Digital distribution practices enable direct communication and personalized interactions with consumers; information sharing promotes transparency, trust, and customer participation; while channel responsiveness ensures reliable service delivery and enhances customer satisfaction. Collectively, these practices strengthen relationships between manufacturers and consumers, thereby reducing consumer disconnect. The theory therefore provides a strong conceptual foundation for explaining the relationships among the study variables.

Channel Management Theory

Channel Management Theory, as articulated by Stern and colleagues (Stern et al., 2019; Coughlan et al., 2006), provides complementary insights into the design, coordination, and control of marketing channels. The theory emphasizes that channels are systems of interdependent organizations that must collaborate to deliver value to end consumers. Effective channel management involves the selection of appropriate intermediaries, the design of incentive structures, the management of power and conflict, and the continuous flow of information. When channel members share information, respond promptly to market signals, and adopt digital tools, the entire channel becomes more efficient and more closely aligned with consumer needs.

By integrating Relationship Marketing Theory with Channel Management Theory, this study recognizes that reducing consumer disconnect requires both relational investments (trust, communication, engagement) and structural channel capabilities (digital platforms, responsive logistics, information systems). Together the two theories offer a robust theoretical foundation for examining the influence of distribution channel practices on customer engagement in the FMCG industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the positivist research philosophy, which assumes that phenomena can be objectively measured and analyzed using empirical data. The positivist paradigm is appropriate because the study seeks to examine the causal relationships between distribution channel practices (digital distribution practices, channel responsiveness, and information sharing) and consumer disconnect, measured through customer engagement, within the FMCG industry in Rivers State. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design is suitable because it enables the researcher to collect quantitative data from respondents at a single point in time to describe existing distribution channel practices and determine their influence on customer engagement. The cross-sectional approach is appropriate since data were collected once from selected respondents without manipulating the study variables. This design has been widely adopted in marketing and consumer behaviour studies because it facilitates the examination of relationships among variables within natural business environments (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

The population of the study comprised 35 FMCG manufacturing and distribution firms registered with the Rivers State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The sample size was

determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size from a given population. According to the table, for a population of 35, the recommended sample size is 32. Therefore, 32 firms were selected. A total of 256 subjects—comprising marketing managers, sales managers, distribution managers, key account managers, and major distributors—were surveyed, with eight respondents drawn from each of the 32 firms. These respondents were considered knowledgeable because they are directly involved in designing, implementing, and managing distribution channel activities and maintaining relationships with distributors, retailers, and consumers.

Table 1: Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Size Determination (Extract for N = 30–40)

Population (N)	Sample Size (S)	Source
30	28	Krejcie & Morgan (1970)
35	32	Krejcie & Morgan (1970)
40	36	Krejcie & Morgan (1970)

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2026.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Distribution Channel Practices and Consumer Disconnect in FMCGs Industry Questionnaire (DCPCDIFMCGIQ). The acronym DCPCDIFMCGIQ stands for Distribution Channel Practices and Consumer Disconnect in FMCGs Industry Questionnaire. The measurement items were adapted from validated scales reported in previous marketing and supply chain management studies, with appropriate modifications to suit the Nigerian FMCG context. Face and content validity were established through expert evaluation by five specialists in marketing and research methodology (three academic experts from the Department of Marketing and two industry practitioners with over ten years of FMCG distribution experience). Their observations and recommendations were incorporated before the final administration of the questionnaire.

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents drawn from FMCG firms outside the main sample (but within Rivers State) who possessed similar characteristics to the target population. An overall Cronbach Alpha value of 0.86 was obtained, which exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.70 and indicates good internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The DCPCDIFMCGIQ employed a four-point Likert scale ranging from Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2, to Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1. The criterion mean was set at 2.5 (the midpoint of the scale). Responses below 2.5 were considered not significant, while scores of 2.5 and above were deemed significant. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items measuring the study constructs. Distribution channel practices were operationalized using the dimensions of digital distribution practices, channel responsiveness, and information sharing. The dependent variable was assessed using indicators of customer engagement.

Data analysis was carried out using linear regression on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25.0. SPSS version 25 was selected because it remains widely used and validated in social science and marketing research in Nigeria and elsewhere; it offers robust linear regression procedures, diagnostic tools, and reliability analysis modules that are consistent with those available in earlier and later versions (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). Similar studies on channel practices and customer engagement in the Nigerian context have

successfully employed SPSS versions 23–26 (Ateke et al., 2025; Okwong et al., 2025), confirming the suitability of version 25 for the present analysis.

RESULTS OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1

To what extent do digital distribution practices influence customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Responses on Digital Distribution Practices and Customer Engagement (N = 256)

Item	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Overall digital distribution practices and customer engagement	256	3.65	0.30	0.02
Firm uses digital platforms to communicate directly with customers	256	3.85	0.48	0.03
Digital platforms enable immediate response to enquiries/complaints	256	3.84	0.36	0.02
Customers easily obtain product information via digital channels	256	3.81	0.47	0.03
Customers actively interact with the firm regarding products/services	256	3.09	0.80	0.05

Criterion mean = 2.50. All item means exceed the criterion mean.

Grand mean = 3.65 indicates a high extent of influence.

Source: Author's field survey, 2026 (SPSS output).

Analysis of Table 2 shows that all questionnaire items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating acceptance of the influence of digital distribution practices on customer engagement. With a grand mean of 3.65, respondents confirmed that the influence of digital distribution practices on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State is to a high extent.

Research Question 2

To what extent does channel responsiveness influence customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Responses on Channel Responsiveness and Customer Engagement (N = 256)

Item	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Overall channel responsiveness and customer engagement	256	3.82	0.29	0.02
Distribution system ensures timely delivery of products	256	3.76	0.56	0.04
Firm responds promptly to product shortages	256	3.85	0.48	0.03

Logistics system addresses delivery-related concerns	256	3.86	0.36	0.02
Customers provide feedback that improves products/services	256	3.80	0.47	0.03

Criterion mean = 2.50. All item means exceed the criterion mean.

Grand mean = 3.82 indicates a very high extent of influence.

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2026.

Analysis of Table 3 shows that all questionnaire items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. With a grand mean of 3.82, respondents confirmed that the influence of channel responsiveness on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State is to a very high extent.

Research Question 3

To what extent does information sharing influence customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State?

Table 4: Mean Responses on Information Sharing and Customer Engagement (N = 256)

Item	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Overall information sharing and customer engagement	256	3.57	0.31	0.02
Information sharing helps understand customers' changing needs	256	3.64	0.48	0.03
Customer feedback is effectively communicated to the organization	256	3.83	0.42	0.03
Information is shared promptly among channel members	256	3.81	0.47	0.03
Firm maintains continuous communication with customers	256	3.16	0.80	0.05

Criterion mean = 2.50. All item means exceed the criterion mean.

Grand mean = 3.57 indicates a high extent of influence.

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2026.

Analysis of Table 4 shows that all questionnaire items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. With a grand mean of 3.57, respondents confirmed that the influence of information sharing on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State is to a high extent.

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: Digital distribution practices have no significant influence on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.

Table 5: Linear Regression of Digital Distribution Practices on Customer Engagement

Predictor	B	Beta	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	Sig.
Digital Dist. Practices	.817	.886	29.355	.886	.785	.784	.028	.000

Dependent variable = Customer Engagement. Hypothesis H₀₁ is rejected ($p < .05$). Digital distribution practices account for 78.5% of the variance in customer engagement.

Source: Author's field survey, 2026 (SPSS output).

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: Channel responsiveness has no significant influence on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.

Table 6: Linear Regression of Channel Responsiveness on Customer Engagement

Predictor	B	Beta	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	Sig.
Channel Responsiveness	.764	.799	20.440	.799	.639	.637	.037	.000

Dependent variable = Customer Engagement. Hypothesis H₀₂ is rejected ($p < .05$). Channel responsiveness accounts for 63.9% of the variance in customer engagement.

Source: Author's field survey, 2026 (SPSS output).

Hypothesis 3

H₀₃: Information sharing has no significant influence on customer engagement in the FMCG industry in Rivers State.

Table 7: Linear Regression of Information Sharing on Customer Engagement

Predictor	B	Beta	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	Sig.
Information Sharing	.778	.861	26.034	.861	.742	.741	.030	.000

Dependent variable = Customer Engagement. Hypothesis H₀₃ is rejected ($p < .05$). Information sharing accounts for 74.2% of the variance in customer engagement.

Source: Author's field survey, 2026 (SPSS output).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined the influence of distribution channel practices on consumer disconnect in the FMCG industry and its implications for economic development in Rivers State. The intention was to determine whether digital distribution practices, channel responsiveness, and information sharing significantly reduce consumer disconnect by enhancing customer engagement among FMCG consumers.

Analysis of primary data collected from 256 respondents representing FMCG manufacturing and distribution firms registered with the Rivers State Ministry of Commerce and Industry revealed that digital distribution practices are significantly associated with customer engagement ($R^2 = .785$). This finding supports Verhoef et al. (2021), who reported that organisations that encourage continuous customer engagement through digital channels develop stronger relationships with consumers and obtain valuable market intelligence for product innovation and service improvement. It is also consistent with Christopher (2016) and Kotler and Keller (2022), who maintained that when customers consistently receive products as expected, their confidence in the brand increases, encouraging repeat purchases and stronger engagement.

Channel responsiveness also exerted a significant positive influence on customer engagement ($R^2 = .639$). This aligns with Ateke, Nwulu, and Damian-Okoro (2025), who reported that logistics optimisation significantly improves distribution efficiency among FMCG distributors in Rivers State, and with earlier work emphasising that efficient logistics capabilities strengthen customer relationships by ensuring product accessibility and service reliability.

Information sharing similarly showed a strong positive relationship with customer engagement ($R^2 = .742$). Okwong, Ikegwuru, and Ateke (2025) reported that efficient information exchange enhances coordination among distribution partners and improves customers' experiences with FMCG products. When consumers receive consistent information and have opportunities to communicate their concerns to manufacturers, they become more involved with the brand, resulting in stronger customer engagement and reduced consumer disconnect. Consequently, customer engagement serves as an important mechanism through which distribution channel practices influence consumer disconnect.

Overall, the findings align with Relationship Marketing Theory (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and Channel Management Theory (Stern et al., 2019). They demonstrate that relational and structural channel practices jointly reduce the distance between manufacturers and end consumers. The results diverge from studies that focus solely on physical logistics efficiency without considering digital and informational dimensions; the present study shows that digital practices explain the largest share of variance in engagement, underscoring the growing importance of digital channel capabilities in the Nigerian FMCG context.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that effective distribution channel practices are fundamental to strengthening the relationship between FMCG manufacturers and final consumers. Specifically, digital distribution practices, channel responsiveness, and information sharing enhance customer engagement and thereby reduce consumer disconnect within the FMCG industry. These improved relationships have the potential to contribute to business growth, increased sales, employment generation, and broader economic activities within Rivers State.

The study contributes to knowledge by empirically linking three specific dimensions of distribution channel practices to customer engagement as a proxy for consumer disconnect in an African emerging-market context. It extends prior work that focused mainly on channel collaboration and logistics efficiency among intermediaries (Ateke et al., 2025; Okwong et al., 2025) by demonstrating that the same practices also shape the manufacturer–consumer relationship. The findings therefore bridge channel management literature and relationship marketing literature in the Nigerian FMCG setting.

The findings largely align with existing studies that emphasise the value of digital channels, responsiveness, and information sharing for customer relationships (Verhoef et al., 2021; Christopher, 2016; Payne & Frow, 2017). They diverge from purely logistics-centric perspectives by showing that digital distribution practices account for the largest proportion of variance in engagement, highlighting the strategic importance of digital transformation for FMCG firms operating in Rivers State.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which precludes strong causal inferences over time. Data were collected only from managers and distributors; the views of end consumers were not directly captured. The sample was restricted to firms registered in Rivers State, limiting generalisability to other Nigerian states or countries. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, incorporate consumer-side data, and compare results across multiple states or countries. Qualitative studies could also explore the mechanisms through

which digital practices translate into engagement, while experimental or quasi-experimental designs could test specific interventions aimed at reducing consumer disconnect.

Recommendations

Based on the objectives and findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. FMCG firms should expand the adoption of digital distribution platforms to improve direct interaction and engagement with consumers.
2. Organisations should implement customer engagement initiatives that promote continuous interaction, relationship building, and prompt response to consumer concerns.
3. Manufacturers should strengthen information-sharing mechanisms across distribution channels to facilitate timely communication and effective customer feedback.

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