



## Property Management Strategies in the Post COVID 19 Pandemic Era in Nigeria: Moving Beyond the Myths and Misconceptions

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### Abstract:

*The paper focuses on the dynamics of real property management strategies adopted by Property Managers (PM) in the post Covid-19 pandemic era in Nigeria. The outbreak of the pandemic has put more pressure on the Nigeria real estate market, especially the Osogbo rental market, which is currently pigeonholed with an array of management crises. The persistent and disturbing setback caused by this action has necessitated the call for urgent and immediate attention and the need to re-evaluate the current property management strategies in Osogbo. Quantitative survey data was collected through the administration of questionnaire on the respondents. This was analysed using descriptive statistical tools. Findings of the study revealed the myth and misconceptions attached to real estate agency practice by tenants. Moreso, there reported cases of hostile relationship between property owners and tenants occasioned by the misconception, the aftermath effect of covid 19 pandemic and the growing cases of rent arrears as the conventional strategies could no longer address the contemporary issues in the post pandemic era. Therefore, the paper recommended the need for aggressive public enlightenment campaign that could help transform tenants' psych/perceptions on the functions of PM, the supplying of more housing units to the housing market through public private partnership efforts and the domestication of basic health guidelines in property management plans, to promote healthy living and situations where landlords and tenants will interact as partners in progress that could engender sustainable rental growth and city development.*

**Keywords:** Property, Property Management Strategies, Post-Pandemic Era, Myths, Misconception.

### INTRODUCTION

The traditional perception of the role of Property Managers (PM) as mere rent collectors or caretaker among tenants and property owners have a multilateral effect on the real property market subsector of the national economy. The myth apart from encouraging animosity in the rental market especially between tenants and PM, is affecting the effectiveness of tenant selection, maintenance and rent collection procedures. It has also threatened the peaceful co-existence of the rental market participants and engendered the intrusion of quacks into the agency and management subsector of the rental market.

More recently, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the later discovery of the omicron variant across the globe, including Nigeria, brought confusion and challenges to the real property market, especially, the agency and management subsector of market. A major challenge of the property management subsector was the initial puzzle on how to respond to the then public health emergency and the modalities for curbing the further spread of the disease among occupants.

In the post pandemic era, particularly in Nigeria, the issue of how best to guard the health and safety of tenants and staff, balancing the investment objectives of the investors with the needs of workers have become a serious issue that property managers (PM) have to contend with in addition to the hostile business relationship existing between property owners/managers and tenants due to the long-standing myth and misconceptions on the role of PM in property agency practice. Rachel *et al.* (2021) suggested the need for property owners/PM to begin to think towards enacting or initiating plans (which could be emergency or scheduled) for business management and permanency as well as developing new strategies that could address or withstand outbreak of any serious public health challenges. Furthermore, Palm (2011) averred that, the competitive nature of the real property market had forced the real estate industries to develop more services-oriented strategies or approach towards property management exercises. However, Ankeli *et al.* (2021) had argued that the consequential impact of COVID-19 on the global economy, specifically the Nigeria real property subsector, has revealed the inadequacy



of the conventional property management strategy adopted by PM in the country due to the dynamic nature of the property market and the low-level knowledgeability or understanding of the pandemic.

There have been reports of changing property use dynamics that affected property management strategies even before the pandemic as property management exercise has gone beyond the mere rent collection to other more sensitive areas of real property investment. The outbreak of the pandemic and the Omicron variant, apart from exposing the unpreparedness of the subsector, have a multiplier effect on property management tactics, amplifies conflicts in the rental market and exposes the inadequacies of the conventional management strategies. Hence, keeping up with the trending pace of the shifting dynamics in real property investment horizon, the myth and misconceptions of the role of PM in the subsector in the post covid 19 pandemic era and the need to be prepared against similar health emergency will require creativeness in real estate management strategies that will reorientate the psych of the investors and property users.

The conventional duty of a PM, particularly in Nigeria, which among others include tenant selection and placement, repairs and property maintenance, compliance with dynamic government regulations, the direct monitoring and reporting of financial and operational performance evaluation of the properties requires an extension to cover other contemporary issues as they arise. With the outbreak of Covid-19 or the ‘new normal’ in December 2019 which was declared pandemic in 2020, other sensitive areas in property management have opened up. The role of the PM due to the ‘new normal’ has been extended beyond the mere rent agent to encompass adequate and proper management of the building, the tenants, security, safety and health of employees, customers/visitors to the premises. The PM is therefore to ensure that all are protected, the property is well maintained, and the aim of profit maximization is not compromised. It has become evident and expedient that to continue in the real property business or to thrive in the competitive real estate market requires the need for the development and preservation of an orientation that is in line with the contemporary occurrences within the environment become necessary.

Despite series of attempt made by the Nigeria Institutions of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (NIESV) at both states and national levels through mandatory continuous professional development and other forms of enlightenment campaigns on the strategic role of PM in real estate agency, myths and misconceptions originating from the psycho-cultural workings or incredulous assessments of property users in the property market persist. Nigeria is a nation with a large human population and huge real property investment potential and challenges (Ankeli *et al.*, 2021a). Some of the basic challenges confronting real property owners or managers are, aside from the unimaginable changes in the property market resulting in volatile rental regime, is the inability of people to at a point freely inhabit and interact with the physical spaces as it used to be due to the pandemic outbreak. The trend gradually brought down demand for spaces, with an increasing glut in the rental market, the conversions of the few available residential housing to other land uses due to financial inducement and the lack of observance of urban land use regulations resulting in the distortions of city master plans (Salihu *et al.*, 2020; Ankeli *et al.*, 2019 and Nwachukwu & Ukpabi, 2008). The myth or misapprehensions of the ‘new normal’ was construed to be a Chinese government ploy to subjugate the world economy. To others, it was a biological weapon against the world or an offshoot of the 5G innovation. These misconceptions prevented many Nigerians from taking adequate preventive measures, thereby slowing its mitigation and eradication processes in the country (Ankeli *et al.*, 2021b). Closely related to this is the misconception on the roles of PM who was seen as a mere caretaker and nothing more. As these delusions continue, the consequences of the pandemic on the real property subsector of the national economy have extended to the post covid 19 pandemic era. The problem has soared and became enormous and disturbing with an unprecedented crisis that require professional strategy for it to be resolved.

The failure to move beyond the myths and misconceptions of the role of PM and the pandemic in the property market is dangerous and must not be allowed to continue. The acceptance and inclusions of some of the Covid-19 protocol as part of modern life practice is cheering. The development and applications of modern strategies that are sustainable and which take care of challenging contemporary issues must be encourage as Gbadegesin (2022) argued that property management processes have moved from the archaic conventional method to more modern practices. However, to achieve this in the post pandemic era, there is the need for the examination of the preparedness of PM towards the changing role, the applicability of the transformative strategies/ innovations in the management of real properties in the post pandemic era as well as the re-evaluation of the myth on the role of PM which is no longer negotiable. Findings from research of this magnitude conducted in Osogbo, could



serve as a baseline information for further future studies on property management strategy in the post pandemic era. It is on this background that, this study is considered justifiable, appropriate and timely.

It is in the light of the foregoing that the paper is set out to provide answers to the following questions: How prepared are the PM to handle property management issues in the post pandemic era? Is the current approach or strategies in use for property management in the post pandemic era adequate? How can the perception issues on the role of PM by tenants be resolved for PM and tenants to see each other as partners in progress?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic came with profound uncertainties both in the cooperate world and the private lives of individuals. Countries have reacted differently on how to curtail the issues or uncertainties raised by the pandemic. However, to solve the pandemic uncertainties, scholars across disciplines worldwide have modelled several empirical and theoretical approaches or concepts aimed at offering a permanent cure to the new normal, which have become part of our lives or succour on its effect on life endeavours. Fadare (2020) asserted that naturally, adjusting to change is usually difficult but should be taken slowly. He further stated that the pandemic had caused several sudden changes to organizational plans to survive the new normal, which caused some initial frictions in their business operations. However, Ankeli (2022), Sogbon and Olujimi (2015) had earlier argued that the complication of city management problems in Nigeria was due to change in use without recourse to relevant planning authorities. D’Ercole, (2016) reported the migration of businesses from the downtown core of Canada, thereby making the downtown business premises empty with a worrisome rising case of void or high vacancy rates. These studies have shown that, there have been property management problems even before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 but none of these studies strictly addressed property management problem.

Furthermore, Akalemeaku *et al.* (2021) evaluated the strategies for property management in the pandemic era for the emerging markets to determine the possibility of digitalization of property management tasks in the country to achieve the management objectives of the property owner. However, the study concluded that the digitalization of the real estate sector might witness hindrances due to low broadband penetration and the myth or refusal of the people to accept the reality that the new change has become the new normal. The subject coverage and the blanket conclusion may not actually reflect the current trend of happenings across states or cities in Nigeria, as internet services have tremendously improved with options to choose from in many major cities in Nigeria. Also, property owners as well as users have in recent time become more aware and interested in real estate transaction than ever before. Hence, the none coverage of this aspect in the study created a knowledge gap that must be filled.

Oyedeki (2020) studied the impact of Covid-19 on Lagos property transactions, assessed the demand, supply, sales and rental market of the state property market transactions and the problems encountered in the pandemic era. It adopted a descriptive statistical tool in the analysis of the data collected. Findings from the study revealed bank related transaction problems. Since the pandemic outbreak became manifest in Nigeria in 2020 and the study was conducted in the same year, it means that, the research’s period may not be enough to gather adequate data from the Lagos property market. Data collected and used may be on the initial effect of Covid-19 or preliminary data. Again, the study did not examine the strategies for real property management in the study area as events of the post pandemic era have negated most of the study’s findings; hence, the need for a more robust and specific study to fill the observed gap. Ankeli *et al.* (2021b) evaluated rental agreement contents in some selected cities in Osun, Nigeria, to determine the adequacy or otherwise of tenancy agreements in the post-covid-19 pandemic era using a questionnaire survey approach. The study, among other things, revealed a steady dwindling rental market transaction with a deteriorating landlord/tenant relationship. The study examined an aspect of property management; hence, the need to take a deeper assessment of the all-encompassing strategies adopted in the management of real estate by PM as the myth attached to property management and the growing misconception in the public domain on the existence of the virus by property market participants become imperative.

## **Knowledge Gap**

The literature on the subject matter has revealed that previous studies mainly investigated the impact of Covid-19 on real property transactions and the presumed operations of PM in the pandemic era. Though very few studies have theoretically discussed issues relating to real property management strategies in the post pandemic era. Besides being theoretical, these studies’ attentions were more on the presumed new strategies without



quantitatively assessing the adequacy or otherwise of the conventional methods or strategies in use by the PM. More so, the studies were conducted at the onset of the pandemic; hence determining the actual effects of the pandemic on real property transactions were difficult. While appreciating the fact that the earlier researches were period bound and the emanating findings were specific, recent happenings had shown that their findings and recommendations were vague. Previous studies on rental agreement adequacy were based on a fraction/insignificant proportion of the locality studied; thus, findings from such a study cannot be generalized to cover the whole country. Again, none of these studies considered the psycho-cultural tendencies of the market participants in the post pandemic era. A concerted effort in this direction could help debug the mindset/perceptions of the citizenry towards the role of PM in the post pandemic era. Therefore, it is necessary to contentiously identify the conventional strategies in use and the need for contemporary strategies that could take care of critical issues in the post covid 19 pandemic era.

### **Moving Beyond the Myths and Misconception Stance**

Nations had and are still adopting and modifying processes and strategies aiming at ameliorating or supporting tenants and real property investors during and after the covid 19 era. The challenge is the determination of how these changes or modifications have so far helped in the transformations or benefit the real property market participants in the post covid 19 pandemic era. Though, the outbreak of the pandemic, came with changes that have hit harder on real property investors across the value chain and altered the traditional functions of the PM. The mitigation of health risks for tenants/customers, visitors and employees have become the latest addition to the array of functions of the PM. Operating income and rate of returns were affected with default in rent payment, delays and stoppages in construction work, agitations for concession and abatement due to the failure to meet lease obligations caused by the pandemic and void rental contracts or glut in vacancy rate.

The common misconception stance among property users in Nigeria is that, PM are mere rent collectors that often aid/influence increase in urban property rentals. In similar vein, myths and misconceptions are gradually becoming synonymous with diseases outbreak in the Nigeria. The outbreak of every disease in the country are often received with misconception. Izekor *et al.* (2020) observed that it is gradually becoming historical for myths and misconceptions on health matters in Nigeria to have connections with peoples’ culture and religious beliefs. The initial flagrant refusal to use facemasks and the none acceptance of Covid-19 vaccination by some Nigerians at the onset of the pandemic, the assumptions without medical proof that the virus cannot survive under Nigeria’s hot climatic condition, contributed to the myth linked to cultural and religious sentiments. The misconception that the vaccine is a ploy targeted at reducing or controlling population did not helped matter; neither did our background in the rich and edifying cultural practices as people, educational escapade or religious belief that influences our cognitive and affective reasoning system. The misconception stance has, however, been traced to the none transparency in the handling of the pandemic cases by the government (Keni *et al.*, 2020; Busari *et al.*, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020 and World Health Organization 2020a). The impact of the myths and misconceptions on the real property market subsector of the economy is enormous. Though, it may look as if the pandemic is over but its impact will forever remain. Hence, the earlier the PM adopt and display exemplary conventional management strategies, the quicker and better the likelihood for the diminishing effects of the myths and misconceptions in the property industry. More so, the adoption of digitalization and unconventional analytical property management approaches could help in moving beyond the myth and misconception in the post pandemic era; thereby, building a harmonious relationship between the PM and space users through trust-building and behavioural change.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The study was conducted in the metropolitan city of Osogbo, the capital of Osun state. Osogbo has and still witnessing tremendous transformation in her city landscape. The rapidity of residential property development and the influx of men and business ventures into the city was attributed to the cheap cost of living and land cost (Ankeli, 2020). Residential properties managed by PM in Osogbo metropolis were enumerated based on the numbers managed by the PMs. The total number of properties in this category that were enumerated was 546 out of which, 235 of such properties constituting 43% were randomly selected for the study. The study’s target population consist of property management firm which are either professional estate surveying and valuation firms, non-professional firms/quacks that dabbles into the act of managing properties as house agents on behalf of the property owners in Osogbo Metropolis and tenants of residential properties under the management portfolios of the selected PM. The inclusion of the quacks/charlatans in the study become necessary as this



group are the most patronised by the property owners and have the highest number of properties in their management portfolio. The total number of practising estate surveying and valuation firms in the city was arrived at through consulting the 2019 directory of the Nigeria Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers, and the list obtained were reconciled with the list of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (ESV) practicing firms in Osogbo obtained from the Osun state branch of the Nigeria Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers. The reconciliation of the list became necessary as a reasonable proportion of the practicing ESV firms do not have their names listed in the directory. The study population extracted from the directory and the list obtained from the state branch was therefore put at 12 ESV firms. Actual physical enumeration of house agents/non-professional property managers with offices was done. 35 house agents were identified and used for the study; hence, a sample frame of 47 property managers was arrived at and used as the sample size for the study, since the number is within manageable size. For the tenants, 235 tenants. To get a proportionate number of respondents from the sample PMs, 5 respondents were selected from each of the management portfolio of the 47 property management firms picked for the study. Questionnaires designed and used for the study were proportionately administered to the respondents to solicit information on the strategies adopted in the management of property, the level of preparedness of PM towards property management in the post pandemic era among others. A total of 282 questionnaires, (that is, 47 questionnaires administered on PM and 235 questionnaires on tenants) was administered, but only 257 were adequately filled and returned for analysis, representing a 91% response rate.

Relative Importance Index (R.I.I.) was used to rank the variables on tenants' satisfactory level of the management strategies adopted by PM, preparedness for the task in the post pandemic era among others. Frequency counters and simple percentages were used to describe the level of awareness and perceptions of the challenges in the post pandemic era by collating the frequencies of all the variables measured and calculating their percentages and degrees. The variables/indices tested/used in the study were harvested from literature and the responses obtained from the field. The formula for R.I.I. used by Ankeli *et al.* (2020a) and Nuhu *et al.* (2022) was adopted for this study:

$$R.I.I. = \frac{\sum W}{A*N} = \frac{5n_5+4n_4+3n_3+2n_2+1n_1}{5N}$$

Where the variables are given the following weights: W= weighting is given to each of the respondents' statements and ranges from 1 to 5, n<sub>5</sub> = strongly agreed; n<sub>4</sub> = agreed; n<sub>3</sub> = uncertain; n<sub>2</sub> = disagreed; n<sub>1</sub> = strongly disagreed, A=Higher response integer (5); and N=Total number of respondents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Property Managers' Profile and Preparedness for Property Management Task in the post Pandemic Era.

To establish the level of preparedness of the PM towards real property management exercise, the suitability of the data collected were measured through information relating to the profile of the property managers and their level of preparedness. Their responses are as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Property Managers' Preparedness for Management Task in the Pandemic Era**

Types of Property Manager	Number	%	How Prepared for the task	%
Professional (ESV)	12	25.5	10	83.3
Non-Professional	35	74.5	07	20
Total	47	100	17	

The Table shows that 25.5% of the responding firms are professional firms while 75.5% are non-professional firms. This shows the level of penetration of charlatans into the property market in Osogbo. 83% of the professional firms sampled shows high level of preparedness in their operational conduct and structures. Only 20% of the non-professional firms exhibited signs of preparedness for the challenges in the post pandemic era as the study observed that records of tenants were not properly kept, no risk assessment plan among others

### Property Management Strategies adopted by Property Managers in the Study Area.

The study collected responses on the nature of the strategic management principles adopted in the management of properties by PM. Some of the conventional management strategies extracted from literature and questions were asked on are mode of inspection, tenant selection, rent collection, maintenance among others, while the contemporary strategy include the use/application of modern technology as information and communication technology in property management and the fusion of basic health guidelines in tenancy agreement. The

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information collected was further screened to know if such strategies are adequate to take care of the contemporary challenges in the post pandemic era and how satisfied the tenants are with the management strategies adopted by the PM.

Table 2 shows the responses of the respondents on the management strategy and the percentages/degree of satisfaction. The cognitive and affective proficiencies of both the PM and tenants were tested. The data obtained on which percentages and degree were computed thereof are data on the management tactics, operational conduct and structure of the firms among others. The Table further revealed that, 65% (234<sup>o</sup>) of the PM are charlatans/quacks; hence still adopting the convention management strategy (70%). On the level of satisfaction with the management strategy, about 80% of tenants representing 288<sup>o</sup> are not satisfied with the management strategy in use. The dissatisfaction has in part led to high-level default (85% representing 306<sup>o</sup>) in rent payment.

**Table 2: Management Strategies Adopted by PM and the level of Satisfactions**

Management Strategies	Frequencies (N=257)	Percentage (%)	Degree
<b>Number of Properties Managed by PM</b>			
Professionals	90	35	126
Non professionals	167	65	234
Total	257	100	360
<b>Management Strategies</b>			
Conventional	180	70	252
Contemporary	77	30	108
Total	257	100	360
<b>Provision for the Enforcement of COVID-19 Protocol</b>			
Adequate	44	17	61
Not Adequate	213	83	299
Total	257	100	360
<b>Property Inspection Strategies</b>			
Inspections Rarely Done	221	86	310
Inspections Often Done	36	14	50
Total	257	100	360
<b>Satisfaction with the Management Strategies</b>			
Satisfied	51	20	72
Not Satisfied	206	80	288
Total	257	100	360
<b>Observance of Rent Obligations in the post pandemic era</b>			
Frequent rent payment	39	15	54
Accumulated rent arrears	218	85	306
Total	257	100	360

**Strategic Plan Indices for Property Management in the Post Pandemic Era.**

To determine the best practices for property management in the post pandemic era using the contemporary method, some variables/indices were identified and presented to the 47 property managers using Likert scale and ranked on the Relative Importance Index (R.I.I.). Table 3 presented the outcoming of findings and the standing of each of the variables for contemporary property management strategies in the post pandemic era.

**Table 3: Strategic plan Indices for property management in the post pandemic era.**

Variables/indices	*S.A.	*A	*N	*DA	*S.D.	ΣW	R.I.I.	Ranking
*The need for the creation of a risk assessment or contingency plan	36	8	-	2	1	216	0.919	2 <sup>nd</sup>
*Observance of basic health guidelines	25	15	2	5	-	201	0.855	3 <sup>rd</sup>
*Property protection tactics and what to outsource	15	20	2	6	4	177	0.753	5 <sup>th</sup>
*Keeping space users/tenants, visitors and employees safe	40	6	1	-	-	227	0.966	1 <sup>st</sup>
*Property management through remote security practices	24	10	7	6	-	193	0.821	4 <sup>th</sup>



\*SA= Strongly Agree; \*A= Agree; \*N = Neutral; \*DA = Disagree; \*SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 further shows that all the variables were significant. The strategic plan that will keep space users/tenants, visitors and employees safe is the most critical variable with R.I.I. of 0.966; hence ranked first and the need for the creation of a risk assessment plan with R.I.I. of 0.919 ranking second while property protection tactics and the decision on what to outsource with R.I.I. of 0.753 is the least critical factor though significant.

Despite the myths and misconceptions on the role of PM and the new normal, there are good takeaways from the phenomenon. The pandemic had infiltrated and sapped into every sector of the economy. The real estate investors were unable to reap from their investment and the failure of space users to keep to their lease obligations within the pandemic era were in part due to the neglect of the role of PM and the effect of the pandemic. The glut in the real property market that did not allow business spaces to expand as staff work from home encourages business fund diversifications and revitalization of the need for the use of professional property managers and the adoption of contemporary management strategies. The pandemic reduced business risk but increased the prospect of future rental growth as real property is generally believed to hedge against inflation. The pandemic has increased the high demand for functional urban housing where one can perfectly combine work, leisure and living under the same roof. More so, the new normal made property investors/owners, space users/tenants and designers to recognized and appreciate the need for the integrations of technology into aesthetics and the structural frame of the building, where compact smart structures development and mixed-use properties development are encouraged with a more cautious health and safety requirements of the immediate environment. All these will further necessitate the need for contemporary real property management strategies.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has reassessed property management strategies in the post pandemic era in Osogbo, the Osun state capital. In order to achieve the aim of the study, PM preparedness for the task of real property management in the pandemic era were determined in order to measure the degree of satisfaction tenants derived from the services provided. The outcome shows that most of the professional PM were prepared for the task. Hence, to move beyond the myths and misconceptions of the pandemic, the study recommends the need for an aggressive public enlightenment campaign that could help transform tenants’ psycho-cultural perspective on the role of PM and effect of the pandemic, the inclusion of basic health guidelines in property management plans to promoting good health, a harmonious relationship between landlord and tenants where both parties will see each other as partners in progress and ensure sustainable rental growth and city development.

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