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ACTIVISM AMONG THE NIGERIA CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The study is aimed at finding out the level of consumer activism among the Nigerian consumers. To achieve this objective, some related literature was reviewed. The stratified sampling, hypothesis testing and frequency distribution were adopted for analysing data. The results of the study revealed that a great number of the Nigerian consumers are willing to join consumer associations where they can be active to fight for their rights and power. Based on this findings, it is therefore recommended that government should encourage the setting up of consumer associations, consumer associations should step up their public enlightenment campaigns, manufacturers should set up consumer protection and customer service units in their organisations and finally, manufacturers should maintain a record on consumer complaints and treat these complaints to the satisfaction of the consumers.

KEYWORDS

Activism, Level, Nigeria and Consumers.

INTRODUCTION

Consumerism or consumer activism is the concerted efforts, actions, and collective reaction of consumers to protect their perceived interest in the market place. It is intended to reduce, limit or control the over-bearing excesses of manufacturers and/or vendors such as high prices, poor quality and artificial scarcity of goods.

The basic concept behind consumer activism vis-à-vis the manufacturer, can be likened to two main forces that are exerting pressure on one another, with the possibility of the stronger force gaining an upper hand over the weaker one. The situation is that, while the manufacturer is out to maximise profit, consumers, on the other hand, through their collective efforts are willing to fight for their rights. They complain in order to maximise their satisfaction. The end result of these actions is consumer activism and protection that exist all over the world including Nigeria.

Over the years, the Nigerian consumer has been bombarded with all sorts of low quality products in the market place, especially in the area of drugs, food, petroleum products, motor spare parts, cosmetics, chemicals and services. According to the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) (1997), about 60% of the goods produced in Nigeria are sub-standard, while about 25% are fake. Durojaiye (1998), also supported this position by saying that the Nigerian consumer needs to be protected against the sale of substandard goods. In his view, sub-standard goods, especially automobile spare parts are imported into Nigeria from countries such as Taiwan, while expired drugs come in from Europe and are passed on to unsuspecting consumers.

As a result of these exploitative tendencies of the manufacturers and their agents against the Nigerian consumers, the government responded by establishing some regulatory agencies and enacted some legislation to protect the Nigerian consumers. The legislations include the Price Control Act of 1970, Standards Organisation of Nigeria Decree of 1971 and National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) Decree of 1973. Others include the Weights and Measures Act of 1990 and Hire Purchases Act of 1990.

Against the background sketched above, the aim of this study therefore is to examine the level of consumerism or activism in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the paper has been sectionalized into five parts to include introduction which is already discussed, literature review, methodology, data presentation and discussion of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kotler (2002), defined consumerism as an organised movement of citizen and government agencies to improve the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers.

Two broad, but related, interpretations have been given to the phenomenon of consumerism. One interpretation sees it in terms of power relationships between consumers and producers, while the other concerns itself with consumers and the remedies of their perceived injustices (Akerle, 1990).

In the so-called free enterprise system, sellers have traditionally been more powerful than buyers- most of the time. Historically, human needs and wants have demanded more than what could be supplied from available sources. The economics of the market place, which are claimed to put the consumer in a rather powerful position to determine the fate of the producer and seller (Friedman, 2003), are meaningless as long as the consumer cannot have all his needs met. Another source of a possible power disequilibrium, is sheer organisation. The seller has available massive economic resources, similar to those associated with political power in most societies. He has been able to influence the dispensation of political power in a way that made the laws more favourable to himself rather than the consumer. It has been required for the buyer to be hurt before seeking redress (the famous caveat emptor) instead of being protected in the first place. The collectivity of individual buyers each without the necessary economic resources lacked political power to seek protection. In practice, the remedies provided under common law were purposely cumbersome, expensive, had uncertain results and were, therefore, of doubtful value to the individual unorganized consumer, (Watson, 2001).

A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CONSUMERISM

American business firms have been the target of organised consumer movements on three major occasions. The first consumer movement took place in the early 1900s. It was fueled by rising prices, Upton Sinclair's writings on conditions in the meat industry and scandals in the drug industry. The second consumer movement, in the mid-1930, was sparked off by an upturn in consumer prices during the Great Depression and another drug scandal.

The third movement began in the 1960s. Consumers had become better educated, products had become more complex and hazardous, and people were unhappy with American institutions. Ralph Nader, an American consumer advocate, forced many issues to public attention especially in the area of product safety and quality and other well-known writers accused big businesses of wasteful and unethical practices. In the same view, President John F.Kennedy declared consumers' rights as follows:

The right to safety
 The right to be informed
 The right to choose
 The right to be heard.

Similarly the U.S congress investigated certain industries and proposed consumer protection legislation. Since then, many consumer groups have been organised, and several consumer laws have been passed. The consumer movement has spread internationally and has become very strong in Europe (Kotler and Armstrong, 2000).

CONSUMERISM IN NIGERIA

The growth of vibrant consumerism in Nigeria in the past years has been rather slow and lifeless where it exists. This may be attributed to the fact that the supply of various commodities is expensive and are never enough. A case of scarcity of these commodities is therefore established as one of the primary reason for poor development of consumers in Nigeria. This is why the Nigerian consumer takes whatever is available, good or bad. Infact, in some cases, fellow consumers will intimidate others to accept a bad product. A case in point was the bad fuel supplied to petrol stations during the early part of 1997. As a result of the scarcity of the commodity, anxious consumers who were desperate to have the product, scolded those who questioned the bad smell of the product, despite the fact that the product was said to be bad to the health of the consumer. But recently, the Nigerian consumers seems to be somehow active in view of their activism against GSM Operators, Complaints to NAFDAC, Public Complaints Commission (PCC) and Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON).

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CONSUMERIST MOVEMENT

The extent to which the consumerist ideas have been made operational naturally varies between individual Countries. In Sweden, the consumerist movement has done much to protect consumers while in France and Germany; the movement is still in its early stages and has consequently achieved comparatively less. The achievements of consumerists in the United States and Britain lie somewhere between the two extremes. However, even within their own terms of reference, the protection of consumer right in the market place, (with the possible exception of Sweden) Consumerists have decided to attain their basic objective.

Consumer organisations, associations and government protection agencies in Nigeria virtually achieved nothing in actually protecting the Nigerian consumers. Although some consumer associations have emerged and the Nigerian government has established some consumer protection and laws to protect the consumers, but they don't seem to be effective.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this study, include a sample size of 858 questionnaires which were duly completed and returned. The questionnaires were administered to adults in six major towns of Edo and Delta States of Nigeria. The six towns chosen are Benin, Auchi, Ekpoma, Warri, Asaba and Sapele.

The stratified sampling method was adopted for the study. This is to ensure adequate or proportional representation of the different categories or types of elements that make up the population in the selected sample.

The level of an individual's consumer activism was measured by his or her willingness or unwillingness to join, finance, uphold decisions of the association, serve the association, attend meetings and solicit for members for the association. In each case, the respondent was asked to indicate on a five point scale his or her willingness to participate in consumer activism, ranging from certainly yes to certainly not.

In the data analysis plans, the hypothesis testing method was adopted using multiple regression analysis and simple frequency distribution.

DATA PRESENTATIO AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The level of consumer activism was disaggregated into SIX elements, namely, willingness to:

- join consumer associations;
- support consumer associations financially;
- serve consumer associations in an official capacity;
- participate in or attend meetings of consumer associations;
- uphold or abide by the decisions of consumer associations; and
- solicit or canvass for new members to join consumer associations.

Consumers willingness to engage in these activities was measured in terms of the following levels of likelihood:

- * Certainly Yes
- * Maybe Yes
- * Not Sure
- * Maybe Not
- * Certainly Not

The results and discussion of findings are presented below:

WILLINGNESS OF CONSUMERS TO JOIN CONSUMER ASSOCIATION AS A RESULT OF INJUSTICE

The results of the study showed that 51.7% of the respondents who constituted the highest score, are willing to join consumer associations and that 26.8% may be willing to join, while 6.3% of respondent are not willing to join. The results imply that most of the respondents are willing to join consumer associations. See table 4.1 for details:

TABLE 4.1

Responses	Frequencies No	%
Certainly Yes	444	51.7
Maybe Yes	230	26.8
Not Sure	100	11.7
Maybe Not	30	3.5
Certainly Not	54	6.3
Total	858	100

Source: Authors Fieldwork, 2010

WILLINGNESS OF CONSUMERS TO SUPPORT A CONSUMER ASSOCIATION FINANCIALLY

The results from table 4.2 below show that 41.6% of the respondents are willing to support a consumer association financially. Another 32.1 % may be willing, while 4.2% are not willing to support a consumer association financially. The results reveal that most respondents are willing to support a consumer association financially.

TABLE 4.2

Responses	Frequencies No	0/0
Certainly Yes	357	41.6
Maybe Yes	275	32.1
Not Sure	140	16.3
Maybe Not	50	5.8
Certainly Not	36	4.2
Total	858	100

Source: Authors Fieldwork, 2010

WILLINGNESS OF CONSUMERS TO SERVE IN CONSUMER ASSOCIATION AS AN OFFICIAL

The results from table 4.3 below revealed that respondents willingness to serve in consumer associations as official constituted 40.6% while 28.2% may be willing to serve. About 5.4% are not willing to serve as officials in consumer associations. The results suggest that most of the respondents are willing to serve as officials in consumer associations.

TABLE 4.3

Responses	Frequencies	No	0/0
Certainly Yes	348		40.6
Maybe Yes	242		28.2
Not Sure	150		17.5
Maybe Not	72		6.3
Certainly Not	46		5.4
Total	858		100

Source: Authors Fieldwork, 2010

WILLINGNESS OF CONSUMERS TO ATTEND A CONSUMER ASSOCIATION MEETING

The results from table 4.4 below indicate that 52.6% of respondents are willing to attend consumer association meetings and that 29.3% may be willing to attend. Only 0.9% of respondents are unwilling to attend consumer association meetings. These results mean that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are willing to attend consumer association meetings.

TABLE 4.4

Responses	Frequencies	No	0/0
Certainly Yes	451		52.6
Maybe Yes	251		29.3
Not Sure	133		15.5
Maybe Not	15		1.7
Certainly Not	08		0.9
Total	858		100

Source: Authors Fieldwork, 2010

WILLINGNESS OF CONSUMERS TO UPHOLD THE DECISIONS TAKEN AT CONSUMER ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

The results from table 4.5 below revealed that 56.2% of the respondents are willing to uphold the decisions taken at consumer association meetings and 23.4% of respondents may be willing to uphold the decisions taken at consumer association meetings. While 4.4% of respondents are not willing to uphold the decisions taken at the meetings. It therefore implies that respondents are not only willing to attend consumer association meetings, but also to uphold the decisions taken at such meetings.

TABLE 4.5

Responses	Frequencies	No	0/0
Certainly Yes	482		56.2
Maybe Yes	201		23.4
Not Sure	82		9.6
Maybe Not	55		6.4
Certainly Not	38		4.4
Total	858		100

Source: Authors Fieldwork, 2010

WILLINGNESS OF CONSUMERS TO HELP SOLICIT FOR MEMBERS FOR CONSUMER ASSOCIATIONS

The results from table 4.6 below, shows that respondents willing to help solicit for members for consumer associations constituted 52.7% and 25.2% of respondents may be willing to solicit for members. While 2.9% of respondents are not willing to solicit for members. The result implies that respondents are willing to help solicit for members for consumer associations.

TABLE 4.6

Responses	Frequencies	No	0/0
Certainly Yes	452		52.7
Maybe Yes	219		25.5
Not Sure	108		12.6
Maybe Not	54		6.3
Certainly Not	25		2.9
Total	858		100

Source: Authors Fieldwork, 2010

INDICES OF CONSUMER ACTIVISM

Table 4.7 below summarize the indices of consumer activism. Each index is on a scale of 5. A score of 5 indicates 100% or complete willingness while a score of one indicate the minimum level of willingness. A close look at the table shows that virtually all the indices are above four (4) indicating a very high level of consumer associations and to attend their meetings, uphold their decisions, as well as solicit for members for them. The willingness to serve the associations in an official capacity was the lowest although it was also high. The result generally indicates that respondents are willing to participate in consumer activism since all the indices are basically high.

TABLE 4.7: INDICES OF CONSUMER ACTIVISM

Components of Activism	Index of Activism *
Willingness to Join	4.14
Willingness to support financially	4.01
Willingness to serve as official	3.90
Willingness to attend meetings	4.31
Willingness to uphold decisions at meeting meeting	4.21
Willingness to help solicit for new members	4.19

Source: Author Fieldwork, 2010

*Maximum Index Value = 5

Minimum Index Value = 1 (The higher the index the higher the level of activism)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Consumer activism is basically the concerted efforts, actions, and collective reaction of consumers to protect their perceived interest in the market place. The study revealed that although the Nigerian consumer is naive and shy in voicing out complaints about bad products, but it is interesting to note that a great number of them are willing to join a consumer associations as compared to a few who are not willing.

The results of the findings is expected because the Nigerian manufacturers and their middlemen as revealed in the study have been exploiting the Nigerian consumers in the form of fake products, adulterated goods, imitation products, expired products and cheating of all kinds. This bad business practice by the manufacturers may have propelled the Nigerian Consumers to be willing to join consumer associations.

In view of the above, the following recommendations will be advanced:

- i. Government should ensure that manufacturers produce quality products by making sure that they comply with the existing laws on quality control.
- ii. The setting up of consumer associations should be encouraged by government by funding them.

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