

# **EFFECT OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (A CASE STUDY OF UNILEVER NIGERIA PLC)**

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## **Abstract**

The research is focused on the impact of consumer behavior on sustainable development goals (goals 12) of the United Nations. It further investigates the consequent effects of consumer behavior on sustainable development. Data from this study were collected from a sample of 80 respondents through questionnaires. We employed Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Statistical Packages for Social Sciences to analyze the data. The findings of this paper provide empirical support to the proposed relationships. More specifically, sustainable consumption practices were found to have significant impact on sustainable development goals, the findings also support a positive impact of sustainable consumption reducing the absorption of natural resources and minimizing wastes of such resources. The study advocates implications for organizations regarding strengthening the practice of sustainable consumption to achieve sustainable development in the society.

**Keywords: Sustainable development, consumerbehavior, consumer, consumption, environment**

## **Introduction**

Consumer behavior is a very important field of marketing and has taken a new dimension of taken cognizance of sustainable development goals(SDGs) of United Nations. Hence, the major objective of this study is to examine the effect of consumer behavior on United Nations sustainable development goals.

Consumer buying decisions involves stages that every individual undergoes as they buy and make decisions to buy a product from identification of needs for a product, gathering of information about the about the products, evaluating, purchasing and post purchasing of the products. If the products satisfy the needs of the buyer.

Hence, the stage the consumer undergoes to make decision to buy a product is consumer behavior. Consumers faces the problem of selection of products that are environmentally friendly in line with the goal 12(Sustainable consumption) of the United Nations sustainable development goals taken cognizance of economic ,social and environmental growth and now critical approach to the choice of products is one of the trends in consumer behavior ,people began to pay more attention to health ,environmental friendliness and naturalness of products .people show a more responsible approach to their consumer choices due to the combination of breadth of choice and consumer awareness.

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Consumer Buying Behaviour**

According to American Marketing Association (AMA), Consumer behavior is the dynamic interaction of cognition, behavior and environmental events by which human beings conducts the exchange aspect of their lives.

Consumer behavior is an important topic in marketing activities and is all about consumer process decision in making in acquiring, consuming and adoption of products and services.(Ajayi,2019). Consumer buying behavior is about buying products or services for one's personal use or consumption and some factors influences the decisions in buying.

Oladele (2019), viewed consumer behavior as multi-disciplinary subject, which examines the decision process in form of activities of consumer in their own consummation roles. He went further to explain ,that, it is a behavior consumers display in searching for, buying, using, evaluating and disposing of products, services and ideas which they expect will satisfy their needs and wants. Hence, studying consumer behavior gives an individual, the clue to make rational decision to spend their available resources wisely.

If consumers are in dire need of a product, he goes extra miles to get it by displaying some rational behavior to ensure that, such products are purchase, spending his time and resources.

However, emotional states of the consumer or individual will determine his buying behavior either in the state of his dire needs, social classification or to feel noticed and comfortable.

Consumer behavior is basically a preference adopted by every customer or individual in purchasing a product. Consumer at all-time gather information about a product before making decisions to buy.

### **Sustainable Consumption and Development**

According to Dolnicar.(2008),Sustainable Consumption is the consumption that contributes to the quality of life of both the present and the future generations. The quality of life not based on consumption rather on health .safety,education,work and social status, environmental, friendliness and social justice.

Sharma et al,(2010), explain Sustainable consumption model to be the consumption of products that reduces the absorption of natural resources (non-renewable resources) as well minimizes the level of waste generated during consumption.

According to Kielezewski,.(2008), there are six conditions for sustainable consumption as follows :

-ECONOMIC: Such consumption should not affect the stability of both the present and future economy in terms of significant contribution.

-ECOLOGICAL: the consumption should optimally ensure full usage and utilization as well maintain the natural resources and its environment.

-SOCIAL: the consumption should be the one evenly distributed and made available to people timely and in abundant, not causing social problems in the society.

-PSYCHOLOGICAL: Such consumption should be the one promoting and better the quality of peoples' life.

-DEMOGRAPHIC: The consumption should be the one that ensures rapid consumption pattern growth in the society.

-SPATIAL: The consumption should not violate the rules and cause disorder of social order in the society.

### **Convergent View of Consumption and Continuous Sustainable Development**

-Eco-Consumption: Consumption is geared towards protection of the environment .For instance, organic food does not affect ecological in balance through natural method of ground water and avoidance of leaching of nutrient from the soil and guide against the contamination of the soil. Hence, the method, organic farming is the production of abundant high quality food along with the protection of the environment.

-Consumer Ethnocentrism: According to Slaby,(2006), this involves chosen regional consumption of products based on the nature of season in supporting the natural environment and local food producers.

It is believed that, education of the society leads to change in the perception of the quality of life exclusively through consumption as its very necessary as well as awareness of the consumers constantly and this satisfies their needed materials and this ultimately makes them happy about life .When consumer is making decisions about the purchase of a particular product ,the consumer influences the demand of this product, which in the long run translates into large volume of supply. Consumer responsibility ,however, does not have to be limited to adequate consumer decisions .A manifestation of such responsibility may also be expressed in the form of active participation in discussions on the activities of various companies or using official communication channels to influence the policies of these companies ,Lewicka,(2006).

The practical implementation of the concept of consumer behaviour and sustainable consumption has become the main priority and objective of United Nations activities to raise consumer awareness and strengthening their rights in accessing product and producer information and ensuring security offered products.

### **Sustainable Consumption and Consumption Behaviour**

In this contemporary world of ours, people have many goods but still even wants more and this make them to buy goods that are not even important to them and this is done through the use of strategies and conviction made to them, hence, those goods are less important and are not their needs or necessities to them.(Fraj et al,2007).

According to the study carried out by Schor,(1994) on 1,800 consumer groups ,it was found out that, people wants to earn more and wish to achieve maximum utility from the consumption of goods they bought . Respondents were asked about their disposable income and the products that, they would want to have, hence,their response was that, they would like to earn more income to fully have access to buy more of their wants in order for them to be fully satisfied.

Presently, consumption is made possible regularly to consumers without any constraints to their consumption pattern through credit facilities availability, loan accessing from the banks and other financial institutions and through instalment sales and payment.(Gilg,2005).

All the means raised above brings about excessive purchase of goods and this leads to unsustainable consumption as a results of rapid economic growth.(Brunso,2004). Excessive buying of products leads to the below problems:

-Syllogomania:This is the accumulation of unnecessary products/goods that are worthless and irrelevant ,hence, this is a excessive consumption.

-Ephemerization: this is the aggressiveness of the consumer in buying and having a new products and this is a continuous wish and desire of the consumer.

In summary, from the two scenarios above, it showed that consumers 'houses are converted into warehouses, hence, such unprecedented consumption results to environmental degradation via excessive exploitation of natural resources , and waste of goods and human labours and this is as a result of excessive consumption which is a source of waste generation(Thorgersen,2017).

With these, the idea of sustainable consumption resurfaced as one of the vital element of sustainable development and this brought about the concept of consumerism which is relevant and important to this 21<sup>st</sup> century and generally accepted by the United Nations and the community of the world as behaviour of consumer that ensures economic development, environmental protection, and social justice, fairer, inclusive, greener and better future world to the local, regional and global continent (Biermann et al,2017).Golka,(1993), posits that, consumption is not all about meeting the needs rather than satisfying one's needs and desires

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study work is based on the following consumer behaviour theoretical models as follows:

### **Factors That Influences Consumer Behaviour**

Customers are the main reasons for the existence and continuity of all business in the world by this. By this, it is critically and important for business and marketer to thoroughly studied and understand to the fullest the personalities and various behavior consumers display in buying and taking decisions on products. According to Wadera& Sharma,(2018),factors influencing consumers are mainly classified as Internal and External factors as they affects consumer at pre, during and post buying stages of a product.

### **Internal Factors**

These are factors that resulted from different dimensions within the context of consumer in the area of culture, personal aspects as well as customer loyalty which has influences on the behavior of customers.

#### **Culture**

Culture is the ways of life of set of people living in a particular place or area which is dynamic in nature and it can be transmitted to generations. People from the same culture has same value of oneness and this seem to have affect them while taking decisions and organisations must be aware of this and take bold steps in understanding the aspects of every cultural factors in their products and markets to meet and surpass customers' expectations and demands.

#### **Personal Factors**

Lifestyles and one's personality developed over a long period of time or years do influences consumers in taking decisions, even globalization contributed to this coupled with consumer ages, background and environment.

#### **Customer Loyalty**

Customer past experience about the use and benefits of products to him do influence him to have a repeat purchase of the brands. Customer satisfaction over a products functions in terms of services, qualities and trust worthiness makes and triggers consumer to be loyal to the core in repeating the process and decision of buying a products.

### **External Factors**

External factors are the factors that is beyond the power of the consumer to control on decisions about having a products and this is as a result of changes in the behavior of consumer occasioned by society, social media, crisis and motivational impacts. consumers are majorly influenced by products or services at optimal level, that satisfies their needs and wants with better quality, convenience and unique in its own way than other competitive products seem to wider the imagination of consumers and makes them have changes in behaviour towards such products and services.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theory relevant to this study work is Maslow Theory of Motivation ,hence ,Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the best known theories of motivation .Maslow' theory of motivation states that our actions are motivated by certain psychological and physiological needs that progress from basic to complex.

### **Maslow Theory of Human Needs**

It can be deduced that, there are some driving forces within an individual which propel an action to achieve some objectives. However, Abraham Maslow's theory of needs and motivation is in hierarchy as follows:

- Basic physiological Needs: The need trigger the consumer to buy food, drinks and other consumable food to remove hunger and thirst.
- Safety Needs: After satisfying the above needs, consumer becomes concern about his safety, security and stability.
- Love/Social Needs: The consumer will seek for love and try to be identified with a group
- Esteem/Ego Needs: is the need for consumer to buy luxury or exotic products as assign of success and prestige.
- Self-Actualization: Is the need for consumer personal development and individuality.

### **Relevance of Maslow Theory To Consumer Behaviour And Marketing**

- i. There is a relationship between subsistence income and discretionary purchasing power, hence, the greater the discretionary purchasing power in a market, the more marketing concentrates in changing the behavior of consumer.
- ii. The theory enables the marketer or company to appropriately apply their marketing mix to changes in the behavior of consumer.
- iii. It is deduced that, marketing concept is all about needs, therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of consumer needs and changes in their behavior.
- iv. The theory is beneficial to be used as a marketing strategy to understand the driving forces that motivates the consumer as well as changes in their behaviors.

### **Methodology**

The study used a descriptive research design as it required seeing and reporting employee behaviour ,attitudes and activities as they were at the time of the study .The research was limited to a survey of Unilever Nigeria plc.A sample size of 80 was obtained from the 100 questionnaires distributed . Primary source of data was adopted for the study .Data collection was done through personal visits to the sampled ,and data was collected using questionnaire items .The questionnaire was designed in Likert scale format .The content validity of the questionnaire was determined by distributing the initial draft to colleagues in the same discipline of marketing .Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the instruments.While correlation analysis was performed to establish relationship between the variables under the study ,Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis with the aid of statistical packages for social sciences ( SPSS)

### **Results**

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) technique was adopted in this study to analyze data related to the hypotheses.

### **Test of hypotheses**

#### **Hypothesis 1**

Ho: There is no significant relationship between consumer behaviour and sustainable development.

Hi: There is significant relationship between consumer behaviour and sustainable development.

There is significant relationship between consumer behaviour and sustainable development.  
Consumer behaviour influences sustainable development.

It was observed from the hypotheses one tested that, there is a significant relationship between consumer behaviour and sustainable development at Pearson correlation value (.586) and the significant value of (.000).

#### **Hypothesis 2**

Ho: sustainable consumption does not significantly affect quality of life at both the present and in the future.

Hi: Sustainable consumption does significantly affect the quality of life at both the present and in the future.

The hypothesis tested revealed that, sustainable consumption does affect significantly the quality of life at both the present and the future. This was observed at (.792) Pearson correlation value and significant value (.000).

### **Hypothesis 3**

Ho: Consumption behaviour of consumers does not reduces absorption of natural resources and minimization of wastes.

Hi: Consumption behaviour of consumers does reduce absorption of natural resources and minimization of wastes.

It was observed from the hypothesis tested that, consumption behaviour of consumers does reduces the absorption of natural resources at a Pearson correlation value (.651) and the significant value of (.000).

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study investigated the effects of consumer behaviour on sustainable development. The results of the hypothesis one revealed that, there is significant relationship between consumer behaviour and sustainable development at Pearson correlation Value of (.586) and significant value of (.000)).Hypothesis two revealed that, sustainable consumption do significantly affect the quality life of both the present and future generation at Pearson Correlation value of (.792) and significant value at(.000).The third hypothesis showed that, consumption behaviour of consumer reduces the absorption of natural resources at Pearson correlation value(.651) and significant value of (.000).The study unanimously revealed and agreed that, the behavior and attitude of consumer significantly change due to sustainable consumption.

### **Conclusion**

A lot of study and research has been conducted on consumer behavior and sustainable development in the recent but were not focusing on retail and consumer markets extensively. However, this seminar paper gives an in depth insight on sustainable development in relation to consumer buying decisions on consumable items like food, retail products and other consumable products.

The study revealed that, people indicated their interest to products that seem to satisfy their needs and wishes to earn more to buy more products like consumable products which led to the increase in demand and supply of products.

Unilever as an organization with different brands launched Business and sustainable Development commission as a core business strategy

In all ramifications, Unilever should try to up their game, strategies and tactics to reduce to the barest minimum reduction of wastes and improvement of the environment.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study suggested the following recommendations:

1. Marketing as a field and profession is a vital veritable tools for achieving sustainable development goals, hence, it importance should not be neglected or over-emphasized.
2. Sustainable development practices undertaken by companies are a strategy for enhancing reputation of an organization in the society.
3. Marketing communication tools should be adopted by companies to create awareness about sustainable consumption and sustainable development to the consumers in the society.
4. In making sustainable marketing activities effective and achieve its goals, different environmental culture should be utilized on consumers of various market segments.

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