

CONSUMERISM: AN IMPEDIMENT TO CONCERTED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ehumadu, Rophina Ifenyinwa Chima

Abstract

The study investigated why consumerism in developed economies yields positive results, while same lifestyle in developing countries such as Nigeria impedes concerted national development. The study was conducted in Owerri in Imo state of Nigeria. The population for the study was drawn from politicians, civil servants, and business men and women in the study area. The sample of 252 was randomly selected from the population through proportionate random sampling technique. Questionnaire which was developed by the researcher was used for data collection. Collected data were analyzed using mean computation. A mean point of 3.0 and above was accepted. Results revealed that consumerism without productivity is an impediment to concerted national development. It was recommended that discouraging importation of goods and services produced locally, and encouraging productivity beyond consumption level, amongst others, would curb the problems of consumerism as an impediment to concerted national development.

Keywords: Consumerism, Impediment, National development

Introduction

Consumerism transcended from the social transformation of the 16th, 17th and 18th century Europe. The consumer society emerged in the late 16th century and intensified throughout the 18th century. Some experts claimed that the situation was propelled by the growing middle-class who embraced new ideas about luxury consumption and the growing importance of fashion as an arbiter for purchasing rather than necessity (James & Szeman, 2010; Stearns, 2014). Others believed it emerged as a result of a political and economic necessity for the production of capitalist competition for markets and profits (Sklair, 2002; Majfud, 2012). Yet, many others contended that consumerism resulted from the increasing political strength of international working class organizations during the rapid increase in technological productivity and decline in necessary scarcity as a catalyst to develop a consumer culture based on therapeutic entertainments, home ownerships and debts (Alan, 1992; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

Consumerism revolves on social, political, economic, anthropological, historical, cultural, biological and even abstract phenomena. Development of these phenomena and more in later years resulted from the intensity of production of goods and services needed by consumers such as Quaker Oats cereal, an exemplifying tradition and heritage marketed through constantly changing advertising messages in the New Exchange Shopping Centres in 1609 in London (Coghlan, 2009; Paul, 2008).

In Africa, more so Nigeria, consumerism takes a different dimension. It is merely a continual expansion of one's wants and needs for high tastes and choices for goods and services without a matching productivity level (Mayah, 2016). Consumers merely shop for their tastes and choices of expensive goods and services based on their availability in the markets and not on their productivity ratio. The affluent even shop for those goods and services beyond Nigerian shores without any regard to its devastating effects on the country's debilitating economy which produces little or nothing to argument their high consumption tastes and choices.

While consumers' high tastes and sophisticated choices are adequately satisfied by producers in the civilized economies, the situation is not the same in a debilitating economy like Nigeria. While intense consumption of sophisticated goods and complex services by consumers of producing nations helps producers' dynamism in their manufactures, the same is still not true for those countries like Nigeria which depends on the alien producers and their products for their consumptions.

This research is conducted to find out why consumerism societies like the United States of America, for example, which 'wants more and more stuff that they don't really need in consumption', maintains a high degree of healthy, stable and standard evergreen economy and donates surpluses of such goods and services as 'relief materials' to other needy countries of the world, even on emergency, while, similar consumerism societies like Nigeria, wobbles and staggers on unstable and unhealthy economy characterized with intense insufficiency and scarcity of such goods and services.

Consumerism and national development

Consumerism as a concept has been seen in many different ways than mere 'consumption of goods and services by consumers.' It has exhibited good and weird results to both individuals and societies at different times through distinct approaches and unique circumstances. Consumerism has positive and negative dimensions (Lears, 1994). It is endowed in numerous facets including social, economic, political, anthropological, biological, historical, cultural and abstract domains.

Consumerism has a lot of implications. It spells prosperity to individuals and societies endeared in productivity such as the United States of America (Veblen, 2015), and doom to those with fickle and debilitating economies such as Nigeria which depends on products of buoyant countries to satisfy their consumption needs (Mayah, 2016). These distinctions in practice have

confusingly conflicting meanings and connotations in the definitions of the subject by different experts exemplified by Bernard Mandeville in 1714 in which he pointed out that ‘a country’s prosperity ultimately lay in the self-interest of the consumers’ (Pick, 2005).

Britannica Concise Encyclopedia (2008), posited that “Consumerism is a term used to describe the efforts to support consumers’ interest”. It denoted that by the early 1970s, it was the accepted term for the field and began to be used as “the concept that consumers should be informed decision makers in the marketplace.” In this way, practices such as product-testing make consumers informed. Supporting this viewpoint, Sturken & Cartwright (2001), explained that this was based on the notion that “the concept of marketplace itself is responsible for ensuring social justice through fair economic practices”, that is, consumer protection practices and laws compel manufacturers to make products safe; or on the concept of “the field of studying, regulating or interacting with the marketplace”, which means that consumer movement which refers to all actions and all entities within the marketplace, gave consideration to the consumer.

In another sense of the understanding, Janet (2014) and Glickman (2012), denoted consumerism to mean, “high level of consumption”. This, they explained, gained popularity since 1970s and began to be used to denote “consumerism as the ‘selfish’ and ‘frivolous’ collecting of products or economic materialism”. In protest to this, some people promoted “anti-consumerism” and “advocacy” for simple living. Still on another sense, Levine (2011) & Barber (2013), believed consumerism to be “a force from the marketplace which destroys individuality and harms society”. These tantamount to globalization in protest factor of which some people promoted the “anti-globalization movement”. This typifies the illustration of the United States of America and Nigeria which hinged on ‘consumerism-productivity and consumerism-anti-productivity’ factors respectively.

In practice, while civilized economics enjoy the gains of consumerism which enhance their productivity, replication, and continued development, the uncivilized nations emulating the ratio of such consumption rate in developed societies without a matching productivity level, destroys their individuals and national development.

Postulations of many other experts on consumerism include seeing “it as organized efforts by individuals, groups, and governments to help protect consumers from policies and practices that infringe consumer rights to fair business practices” (Lears, 1994), “the doctrine that ever-increasing consumption of goods and services forms the basis of sound economy” (Miller, 1990), “a continual expansion of one’s wants and needs for goods and services” (Eisingerich, Bhardwaj and Miyamoto, 2010) and more. The social order and ideology encouraged the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts. This dream of the early critics of consumerism in 1899 came to fruition by the end of the 20th century through the process of globalization (Veblen, 2015).

Swagler (1997), noted that the term, differently called consumerists’ movement, consumer protection, or consumer activism, sought, protected and informed consumers by enquiring such practices an honest packaging and advertising, product guarantees, and improved safety standards. This was a political movement or a set of policies aimed at regulating the products, methods, and standards of manufacturers, sellers, and advertisers in the interest of the consumer, while the economic domain protected consumers from economic policies placing emphasis on consumption. Again in his treatise, Goss (1993), denoted consumerism as the consideration that the free choice of consumers should strongly orient the choice of manufacturers of what is produced and how, and therefore, orient the economic organization of a society. In this sense, consumerism expresses the idea not of “one man, one voice” but of “one dollar, one voice” which may or may not reflect the contribution of people to society.

The number 2 at Ford Motor Company, John Bugas, coined the term 'consumerism' as a substitute for 'capitalism' to better describe the American economy (Britain, 2008). He explained that,

... the term consumerism would pin the tag where it actually belongs – on Mr. consumer, the real boss and beneficiary of the America system. It would pull the rug right out from under our unfriendly critics who have blasted away so long and loud at capitalism

Bugas' view was in line with Australian economics founder, Carl Menger's vision in his 1871 book – Principles of Economics of Consumer Sovereignty, whereby the economy is controlled entirely by consumer preferences, valuations and choices (Caldwell, 1990). This concept was, however, directly opposed to the Marxian perception of the capitalist economy as a system of exploitation. Sklair (2012), in his turn, changed the meaning of consumerism from positive world about consumer practices to a negative world of excessive materialism and waste. Advertisement in his 1960 book, the Waste Makers, prominently featured consumerism in a negative way.

Consumerism is used anthropologically and biologically as a phenomenon of people purchasing goods and consuming materials in excess of their basic needs which would make it recognizable in any society including ancient civilization such as the Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome (Sklair, 2012). Historically and culturally, consumerism posited specific set of relationships of production and exchange that emerged from the particular social, political, cultural and technological contents of the 19th and 20th capitalism with visible roots in the social transformation of the 16th, 17th and 18th century Europe.

Since consumerism began, Eriksson (2002), various individuals and groups have consciously sought an alternative lifestyle. The movements range on a spectrum from moderate 'simple living', 'eco-conscious shopping', and 'localvore' or 'buying locally' to freeganism on the extreme. Consumerist societies are more prone to damage to the environment, contribute to global warming and use up resources at a higher rate than other societies. In corroboration, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and a German historian Oswald Splengler, denoted that: life in America is exclusively economic in structure and lacks depth, and a French writer, George Duhamel, held "American materialism up as a beacon of mediocrity that threatened to eclipse French civilization".

They posited that human society is in a "global-overshoot", consuming 30% more materials than is sustainable from the world's resources, and that at present, 85 countries are exceeding their domestic "bio-capacity" and compensate their lack of local materials by depleting the stocks of other countries which have a material surplus due to conscious consumption and sufficient compliment by production (internet: <http://bab522.wordpress.com/2008/07/17/Australia-pope-consumerism/>). But James & Szeman (2010), regretted that *such consumerist materialistic countries exert little or no reasonable efforts for production thus destroying their people and economy*. This is where Nigerians, as a people of a developing nation, require ardent consciousness.

National development is the gradual manifestation of positive changes in the economic, industrial, political, social, cultural and administrative life of a country. It involves a large quantity of productive resources as well as efficiency in using them (Ehumadu, 2010), which Maier (1984) noted, is different from mere economic growth or development. Nwosu (1999), posited national development to deal with human endowments – natural, physical, psychological, and other factors. For him, national development goes beyond having just plenty of money. It embraces all aspects of social behavior, such as establishment of law and order, swift judiciary, resourcefulness in business dealings, honesty in business relations, sophistication and broadmindedness, familiarity with science, modern technology and mechanical gadgets as well as overall positive national and individual wellbeing centered on adequate production of needed goods and services.

Schramm (1964) was not distinct. He believed national development to encompass the idea of deliberate planning in order to direct, influence, facilitate and accelerate economic, administrative, social, political, cultural, and industrial changes in a condition considered desirable to achieve the purpose of civilization. These are in tandem with this research on 'consumerism – an impediment to concerted national development', which James & Scerri (2012) deduced, cannot thrive in a country whose citizens and leaders are predominantly corrupt, tricky, voracious, illiterate, and exhibit laissez-faire attitudes towards productivity, replication, and guided conscious consumption.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine the problems of consumerism which impede concerted national development.

Research questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the problems of consumerism which impede concerted national development?
- 2) What are the remedies to the problems of consumerism as an impediment to concerted national development?

Scope of the study

The research work was basically aimed at finding out why high and expensive tastes and choices of people of some countries for goods and services impede their concerted national development. Politicians, civil servants and business men and women in Owerri metropolitan city of Imo state, Nigeria, obliged our request to elicit desired information.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted because it is a design in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting data and analyzing from only a few groups or items considered to be representative of the entire group or items.

The research work was carried out in the government offices for politicians, universities for civil servants, and Owerri metropolitan market for business men and women in Owerri metropolis. The population of the study comprised all the politicians, civil servants and business men and women in Imo state. A total of three groups were selected for sample. From these, 252 were picked as respondents. Proportionate random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was administered to the people selected as means of data collection. The questionnaire was structured in line with the four point scale of response options of strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point). The instrument was subjected to content and face validation by two lectures from Home Economics Department of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Umuahia, Abia state. Their suggestions and corrections on items of content and construction of the items were reflected in the final development of the questionnaire. The instrument, through a trial test and the use of test-retest method, has a reliability coefficient of 0.75 indicating a positive and high correlation that shows the instrument could be used to collect valid and reliable data from the respondents, and results there from will be used for generalization. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores which were used in answering the research questions. Any mean point of 3.0 and above stands to be accepted, while any mean below 3.0 points stands rejected.

Data presentation and analysis

The data are presented in tables to which they address. To get the mean \bar{X} and F_x is the summation of four point scale divided by the number of questionnaire collected. To get F_x is the mean multiplied by the total number of respondents in the study, i.e. $252x(x)$

Research question 1

Table 1: What are the problems of consumerism which impede concerted national development?

S/no	Items = 252	F_x	\bar{X}	Remarks
1.	Consumerism is a mere luxury consumption of goods and services	81	3.11	Accepted
2.	It is a political and economic necessity for capitalist competition	79	3.19	Accepted
3.	It is a mere continual expansion of one's wants and needs for high tastes and choices of goods and services without matching productivity ratio	63	4.00	Accepted
4.	Consumers merely shop for their high tastes and choices for expensive goods and services based on their availability in the markets and not on their productivity rate	59	4.27	Accepted
5.	The affluent shop abroad without consideration for the damage in their domestic economy	74	3.41	Accepted
6.	Consumerism flourishes the economies of high productivity nations, but destroys those of low or non-productivity nations	78	3.23	Accepted
7.	Consumerism is a 'selfish' and 'frivolous' collecting of products or economic materialism	82	3.07	Accepted
8.	It is "a force from the marketplace which destroys individuality and harms society"	77	3.27	Accepted
9.	Emulating ratio of consumption by civilized produceristic countries destroys the economies of non-productivity nations	75	3.36	Accepted
10.	Consumerism to debilitating economies is a mere excessive materialism and waste	84	3.00	Accepted
11.	Anthropologically biologically, consumerism is people purchasing goods and consuming materials in excess of their basic needs to exhibit affluence which destroys developing economies	76	3.32	Accepted
12.	Consumerist societies are more prone to damage the environment, contribute to global warming and use up resources at a higher rate than other societies	66	3.82	Accepted
13.	Consumerism has plunged human societies into "global-overshoot" consuming 30% more materials than is sustainable from the			

	world resources and destroying, as a result, developing economies like Nigeria	71	3.55	Accepted
14	Consumerism has made 85 countries of the world to exceed their domestic “bio-capacity” and this is devastating to the low-productivity economies like Nigeria	67	3.76	Accepted

All the respondents (1-14) scored between 3.0 and above and thus are top in the mean analysis. This means that consumerism without productivity to match, is an impediment for concerted national development.

Research question II

Table II: What are the solutions to the problems of consumerism which impede concerted national development?

S/no	Items = 252	Fx	X	Remarks
1.	Discourage importation of goods and services produced locally	59	4.27	Accepted
2	Encourage productivity beyond the quantity of local consumption	68	3.71	Accepted
3	Guide against wasteful consumption of goods and services	60	4.20	Accepted

All the solutions (1-3) scored above 3.0 and thus are top in the mean analysis. This means that these factors should be strictly adopted to curb the problems of consumerism as an impediment to concerted national development.

Results

From the analysis, the results show that consumerism consisted an impediment to concerted national development. It is a mere luxury consumption of goods and services (3.11); a political and economic necessity for capitalist competition (3.19); a mere continual expansion of one’s wants and needs for high tastes and choices of goods and services without a matching productivity ratio (4.00), where consumers merely shop for their high tastes and choices for expensive goods and services based on their availability in the market and not on their productivity rate (4.27), and where the affluent shop abroad without consideration for their domestic economy (3.41). Consumerism flourishes in countries with high productivity rate but destroys the economies of non- or low-productivity nations (3.23); it is a ‘selfish’ and ‘frivolous’ collecting of products or economic materialism (3.07), with “a force from the marketplace which destroys individuality and harm society” (3.27).

Emulating rate of consumption by civilized produceristic countries destroys the economies of non-productivity nations (3.36) because, to debilitating economies, consumerism is a mere excessive materialism and waste (3.00). Anthropologically biologically, consumerism is people purchasing goods and consuming materials in excess of their basic needs to exhibit affluence which destroys developing economies (3.32); thus, consumerist societies are more prone to damage the environment, contribute to global warming and use up resources at a higher rate than other societies (3.82). It has plunged human societies into “global-overshoot” by consuming 30% more materials than is sustainable from the world resources and destroying, as a result, developing economies like Nigeria (3.55). Consumerism has made 85 countries of the world to exceed their domestic “bio-capacity” and has caused devastation to the non-productivity economies like Nigeria (3.76).

The results reveal that the solution to the problems of consumerism which impede concerted national development include: discouraging importation of goods and services

produced locally (4.27); encouraging productivity of such goods and services beyond quantity of local consumption (3.71), and guiding against wasteful consumption of goods and services (4.20).

Conclusion

Consumerism has a lot of implications. It spells prosperity to produceristic societies, but doom to those countries which are not capable of producing their major goods and services. It corrupts those at leadership positions in less technological economies as they strive to loot and dupe the economies of their nations in order to satisfy their high tastes and choices for expensive goods and services from developed economies, to boost their capitalist tendencies, thus, destroying their own economies, and more.

Recommendations

Government should discourage importation of goods and services produced locally. She should encourage productivity of such goods and services beyond the quantity consumed locally by her people, and must guide against wasteful consumption of the goods and services by all individuals in order to make savings, boost their economy, and enhance national development through incomes from exports of such goods and services.

References

- Alan, D. (2012). *How much is enough: The consumer society and the future of the earth*. New York: www. Norton.
- Barber, B.R. (2013). *Shrunken sovereign: "consumerism, globalization and American emphasis"*. World Affairs.
- Britain, F. (2008). Global climate change and energy co production - An international perspective (2009). Achieved 28 February, at the way back machine. Newind Press .com.
- Britannica Concise Encyclopedia (2008). *Consumerism online consumerism, answers.com*
- Calder, L.G. (1990). *Financing the American dream: A cultural history of consumer credit*. Princeton: NV.: Princeton University Press.
- Caldwell, B.J. (1990). *Carl menger and his legacy in economics: Principles of economics of consumer sovereignty*. Duke University press.
- Coghlan, A. (2009). *Consumerism 'is eating the future'*. NY.: Sussex. "Consumerism – Big Ideas." (2010). NY. Susset.
- Ehumadu, P.C. (2010). Mass media as purveyors for re-branding economy – A study of illiteracy and corruption as bane for national development. *Journal of school of languages, vol. 1, no 1 (JOSOL)*.
- Eisingerich, A.B., Bhardwaj, G., & Miyamoto, Y. (2010). "Behold the". Harvard Business Review 88.
- Eriksson, K. (2002). "On self-service democracy: Configurations and Individualizing governance and self-directed citizenship." *European Journal of Social Theory*.
- Glickman, L.B. (2012). *Buying power: a history of consumeractivism in America*. Paper back ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goss, J. (1993). The "magic of the mail": An Analysis of form, function, and meaning in the contemporary retail Built Environment. *Annals of the Association Journal*. <http://bab522.wordpress.com/2008/07/17/Australia-pope-consumerism/>.
- James, P., & Scerri, A. (2012). "Globalizing consumption and the deferral of a politics of consequence." Check ur 1=value. *Globalizations* 9(2).
- James, P., & Szeman, I. (2010). *Globalization and culture*, vol.3: Globalization.
- Jenet, L. (2014). *The simple living guide*. In Joe Bowin quez, Vicki Robin: *Your money or your life*". USA: Penguin Group.
- Lears, J. (1994). *Tables of abundance*. Santa Barbara: Calif.
- Lebow, Victor – <http://hundredgoals.files.world.press.com/2009/05/journal-of0retailing>.
- Levine, M. (2011). "Challenging the culture of affluence." *Independent School*, 67.1.
- Maier, G. (1984). *Lagging issues in economic development*. New York: Oxford University press.
- Majfud, J. (2012). "The Pendemic of Consumerism". UN Chronicle.
- Mayah, E. (2016). Special Report – Nigeria's Elephant Group in #5.5million Rice Import Mess. *Premium Times of 24 June*.
- Miller, E. (1990). *Attracting the Affluent*. Naperville: Illinois Financial Source Books.
- Nwosu, I. (1999). *An overview of relationship between communication and rural national development*. In Nwosu, I.E. (ed.) *Mass communication and national development*. Aba: Drontier Publisher Ltd, pp. 18,22& 30.
- Paul, R. (2008). *The end of food*. New York: Houghton Miffliniln Michael human: th Small-mart revolution. San Francisco: Berrett-koehler Publishers.
- Pick, L. (2005). *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture Seventeenth Century*. England: Cambridge Press.
- Schramm, W. (1964). *Mass media and National development*. Standard University Press.
- Sklair, L. (2012). *Culture-ideology of consumerism*. The Wiley-blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization.

- Sklair, L. (2002). From chapter 5 of *Globalization: Capitalism and its alternatives* 3rded. Oxford University press. Reprinted with permission of Oxford UP.
- Stearns, P. (2014). *Consumerism in World History*. NY.: Routledge.
- Sturken, M., & Cartwright, L. (2001). *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to visual culture*. Oxford University press.
- Swagler, R. (1997). "Evolution and Applications of the term Consumerism: Theme and variations". *Journal of consumer Affairs*, 28(2): pp. 347-360.
- Swagler, R. (1997). "Modern Consumerism". In Brobeck, Stephen Encyclopedia of the Consumer Movement. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO. pp.172-173.
- Veblen, T. (2015). *The theory of the leisure class: an economic study of institutions*. Dover Publications: Mineola, N.Y., (1899).