



Full Length Research

Consumer Education as a Strategy for Sustaining Human Rights and National Security in Nigeria

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Abstract: The 1999 constitution provides for fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy in chapter II, which recognized economic, social and cultural rights of Nigerians. The entrenchment of human rights provisions in Nigeria's constitutions was aimed at creating a society where there is political freedom, social and economic wellbeing of the people. But despite the guarantee of fundamental rights and liberties in the Nigerian constitutions, the country has had the misfortune of bad leadership and governance, resulting in insecurity of greater proportion like kidnapping, ritual killings, terrorism, banditry, youth restiveness, herdsmen/farmers clashes, and cyber-crime. This also has profound and far-reaching effects on the promotion and protection of consumer rights to safety and redress. It is against these backdrops that this paper was written to examine human rights for sustaining national security and the role of consumer education in the promotion of human rights and national security. The methodology adopted in this study was conceptual in nature, through the review of archival literature of newspapers, government journals, journal and conference articles publications and textbooks. The paper suggested that government, its agencies and institutions, corporate bodies and individuals should be held accountable for human rights violations against consumers and threats to consumer security. The paper concluded that consumer education programmes should be intensified in every sector of the economy and be used as a tool for sustaining human rights in both formal and informal educational system. Government should establish mobile consumer complaints centers at ward and senatorial levels across the country to encourage consumers to easily seek redress whenever their rights are violated, and that government agencies and public institutions, corporate bodies and individuals be held more accountable for threats to consumer security (human rights violations against consumers).

Keywords: Human Rights, National Security, Consumer Education, Directive Principles, Public Institutions.

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1.0 Introduction

Consumers' rights are inalienable human rights that must be protected by the consumer, business organizations and the government (Ajagbe *et al.*, 2021a; Zondi *et al.*, 2021b; Ajagbe *et al.*, 2021b; Ilori *et al.*, 2021). According to Ebitu (2014), public policies that emanate from government are to regulate business relationships among the citizenry or distribute social amenities to individuals and communities. According to the National Human Rights Commission (2006), Nigerian government, has over the years established specific Agencies to deal with all matters relating to the protection of consumers' rights as well as human rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the African Charter, the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international treaties on human rights to which Nigeria is a signatory. Sequel to the above, Ndubisi *et al.* (2019) revealed that commissions and agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the Federal Consumer Protection Council of Nigeria (FCPC) are established and charged with the responsibility to protect and safeguard the rights of the consumers against the unwholesome practices of producers. Thus, including, also the suppliers of goods, services and other forms of consumer rights violations in the country (Aluko *et al.*, 2021; Ilori *et al.*, 2021).

Dahiru *et al.* (2015) added that Consumer Protection Council Act, 1992 (CPC Act) is the overall Nigerian Consumer Protection statute for both the goods and services industries. The authors further posited that the CPC Act established the Consumer Protection Council (CPC) as the highest consumer rights protection agency to implement the provisions of the CPC Act and all other consumer protection laws for the promotion of consumers' rights. Unfortunately, many of these consumer rights are being violated by private businesses, the government, and its security apparatus (Manyathi *et al.*, 2021; Madonda *et al.*, 2021b; Zondi *et al.*, 2021a). The rights of Nigeria consumers are no longer protected. Today, millions of consumers suffer from the consumption of adulterated goods, expired food items and drugs, and defective products. Nkamnebe *et al.* (2009) argued that people suffer ill-health and discomfort as a result of the consumption of expired or adulterated drugs and food items. The authors mentioned further that government has also been insensitive to the plights of consumers as food inflation skyrocketed beyond the reach of the average consumers. Poverty, income inequality, unemployment, under-employment, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate, high inflation rate, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, institutional corruption, exceptionally large domestic debt, and rising volume of external debt have reached alarming levels in the country (Held, 1998; Eseyin & Chukwuemeka, 2018; Gubak & Bulus, 2018). In the same dimension, cases of extra-judicial summary and arbitrary executions of consumers by the Police and other law enforcement agencies are still prevalent in Nigeria.

Ugwu (2013) and Ukpore (2006) expressed their profound dissatisfaction to the inability of governments at all levels to protect the socio-economic interests and rights of Nigerian consumers as entrenched in the federal constitution, the African Charter, the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international treaties on human rights, which the authors argued has negative impacts on overall national security. This is because unresolved complaints and continuous abuse of the fundamental human rights of consumers over a period of time will give rise to mass protests that threaten national security. Onigbinde (2008) opined that national security is understood as the acquisition, deployment and use of military force to achieve national goals. National security has traditionally been about the survival of the state

against any internal and external threats. Nigeria has its own peculiar security threats, many of which were triggered by government's violation of consumers' rights to socio-economic prosperities (Ogbonna, 2015). Nigerian Consumers are not happy with the poor socio-economic condition they are subjected to by Government. Some of the outcomes of this anger are manifested in security threats including: attacks on crude oil pipeline installations, pipelines vandalization, hostage taking, kidnapping, drug trafficking, human trafficking, ritual killing, sectarian violence, communal strife, and pervasive acts of normlessness, and amongst others (Nkamnebe *et al.*, 2009; Adebakin, 2012).

Sasikumar & Usha (2014) investigated on the mutual connection between national security and human rights. The authors intended to understand the roles of consumer education in promoting human rights and national security. The study found that consumer education has a profound effect on consumer protection and awareness. In addition, creation of awareness in consumers, generates greater levels of cooperation between them, businesses, civil societies, government and other public regulatory agencies. Dzulkarnain

et al. (2014), in their study, reported that consumer education has profound and far reaching effects on the promotion and protection of consumer rights to safety and to redress. It is against these backdrops that this paper was written to examine human rights for sustaining national security. The paper examined the concept of human rights, national security and consumer education. The researcher highlighted consumer rights as human rights, threats to consumer rights and national security as well as the roles of consumer education in the promotion of human rights and national security.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

The major concepts that feature in this paper are explained for proper understanding:

Human Rights: Howard-Hassmann (2011) viewed the concept as to imply rights that in principle, all human beings are entitled to, merely by virtue of being biologically human. The author added that such rights include individual rights, not tied to particular social status or group, community, national, or any other membership. However, human rights are legally guaranteed by human rights law, protecting individuals and groups against actions that interfere with fundamental freedoms, civil liberties and human dignity (Eseyin & Chukwuemeka, 2018). Human rights are rights that are unconditionally held by all human being, unalterable, and inalienable (Ugwu, 2013). Such rights include rights that are inherent in all human beings whatever the nationality and place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language or any other status (Eseyin, 2009). Thus, human rights are those rights which accrue to all humans by virtue of their nature as human beings. The United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes human rights to include rights to freedom, life, liberty, security of persons, among others. The declaration condemns all forms of slavery, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, arbitrary arrest, among others.

National Security: Security as an essential concept is commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to cherished values, especially the survival of individuals, groups or objects in the near future (Gubak & Bulus, 2018). According to Adebakin (2012), security is the activities that ensure protection of a country, persons, properties of the community against future threats, danger, mishaps, and all other forms of perils. Security must be interwoven with the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis, threats to human injury among others. In recent times, the concept of national security includes social, economic (Ajagbe *et al.*, 2021b; Aluko *et al.*, 2021), cultural, technological and political consideration. Truly, any society that seeks to achieve adequate national security against the background of acute food shortages, population explosions, low level of productivity and per capita income, low technological development, inadequate and inefficient public utilities, and chronic problem of unemployment, has a false sense of security. National security must be broadened to accommodate economic, environmental, and demographic issues as they are important in understanding the new causes of intra-state conflicts (Onigbinde, 2008; Zondi *et al.*, 2021a).

Consumer Education: In the opinion of Ukpore (2006), consumer education is the process of exposing people to the knowledge and skills required by individuals, families, and corporate bodies to become competent consumers in a world that is constantly changing. It is the preparation of an individual to be capable of making informed decisions when it comes to purchasing products in a highly competitive market. Aziah *et al.* (2002) posited that consumer education is a means of providing knowledge to buyers so that the individual consumer would be able to develop or acquire skills, competencies, aptitude and values that are required to become a responsible and responsive consumer in the marketplace as well as in the society. Weeks *et al.* (2016) suggested that consumer education generally covers various consumer goods and services, prices, consumer expectations, standard trade practices, etc. This implies that consumer education involves orientation of individuals on their rights in relation to available products and services that are offered for sale and are subsequently purchased (Kennedy, 2012; Ajagbe *et al.*, 2021a). Be that as it may, consumer education is thus, a process of gaining skills, knowledge and understanding that are necessary for people in a society such that they can make full use of consumer opportunities presented in today's complex marketplace.

3.0 Consumer Rights as Human Rights

The Consumer Protection Council Act described the consumer an individual who purchases, uses, maintains, or disposes products and services (NHRC 2006; Ukpore, 2010; UNDP 2011). Consumers are the recipient of goods and services for use and consumption. However, consumers, when exhibiting their habits or engaging in the purchase of goods and services are not just contracting but are

exercising the right they have to “consume”. That right is a bundle of rights culminating in other legal relationships. Ogbonna (2015) asserted that consumer rights are those rights given to a consumer to protect him from unnecessary exploitation from unscrupulous manufacturers of goods and services. This is achieved through consumer protection laws. Through the instrumentality of these laws, the government aims at protecting the Rights of the Consumers. Eseyin & Chukwuemeka (2018) opined that there is a logical, moral, and political force in the proposition that the consumers should have the right to take decision about the allocation of resources for their own needs. Furthermore, on March 15, 1962, John F. Kennedy presented a speech to the United States Congress in which he extolled four basic consumer rights, which were later called the Consumer Bill of Rights (NHRC 2006; Ndubisi *et al.*, 2019; UNDP 2011). Such rights are identified as follows:

Right to Safety: The right to be protected against the marketing of goods which are hazardous to health or life of the individual.

Right to Choose: The right to be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of products and services at competitive prices. Also, in such industries where competition is not workable and government regulation is substituted, an assurance of satisfactory quality and service at fair prices.

Right to Information: The right to be protected against fraudulent, deceitful, or grossly misleading information, advertising, labeling, or other practices and to be given the facts s/he needs to make an informed choice.

Right to be Heard: The right to be assured that consumer interests will receive full and sympathetic consideration in the formulation of government policy, and fair and expeditious treatment in its administrative tribunals.

Eseyin (2009) stressed that these rights were later expanded to 8 in the UN Consumer Bill of Rights. The UN in April 1985 adopted its guidelines for consumer protection. The guidelines have been interpreted by International Organization of Consumer Union now known as Consumers International (CI) and translated into clear consumer rights as follows: the right to the satisfaction of basic needs, the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose, the right to be heard, the right to redress, the right to consumer education and the right to a healthy environment (Adebakin, 2012; Adetoro, 2012). It is however sad to note that in spite of the efforts of the UN guidelines on consumer rights as human rights, much is still left to be desired in the protection of consumer rights as human rights particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. The implication of this threatens the country’s national security.

4.0 Threats to Consumer Rights and National Security

Dzulkarnain *et al.* (2014) argued that consumers are exposed to risks and threats due unsafe or substandard products or services and government’s neglect of its responsibilities to the citizens. The consumer is exposed to many hazardous-physical and environmental exploitation due to unfair trade practices (Ajagbe *et al.*, 2021a; Madonda *et al.*, 2021a). A consumer that is not protected for instance, against products which are unsafe for consumption (drugs, adulterated foods or household products) such as defective electrical appliances that may cause serious body injury may result to violent agitation to seek redress (Madonda *et al.*, 2021b; Zondi *et al.*, 2021a). This will no doubt constitute another threat to the national security. Nigeria consumers most often do not get protection against market malpractices, deceitful sellers and overzealous security agencies (Dahiru *et al.*, 2015). The imbalance in the society exposes them to inadequate rights and right of recourse to remedial measures against defaulting businessmen and abuse by security agencies.

Gubak & Bulus (2018) stressed that Nigeria consumers need protection against environmental pollution of air, water, and noise. Poor protection of consumer rights destroys consumerism. Poor consumerism results in poor economy for a nation. A decline in a nation’s economy results in hyper-inflation, high inflation in economy results in high cost of goods and services (Zondi *et al.*, 2021b; Ajagbe *et al.*, 2021b). High cost of goods and services especially food stuff in the market births agitated consumers; all these on the long run, add to insecurity in the land. Eseyin & Chukwuemeka (2018) argued there is no doubt that the Nigeria government persistently violates consumers’ right to good standard of living with direct implication on national security. It is regrettable to note that these violations are heightened by high corruption in the public services. It is an abuse of consumers’ rights to have corrupt leaders in the public services. Adetoro (2012) reported that Nigeria as a “cesspool of corruption” still suffers denial to cheaper availability of petroleum products arising from fuel subsidy scandal created by over-invoicing and round tripping. This is in a country where over 70% of the population live below the poverty line (UNDP, 2011). This scenario represents a flagrant violation of peoples’ right to improved standard of living, and a threat to national security.

5.0 Role of Consumer Education in the Promotion of Consumer Rights as Human Rights for National Security

Sasikumar & Usha (2014) found that consumer education programme denotes a systematic and conceptually developed initiative to impart knowledge, awareness and skills to consumers regarding consumer behaviour. The researchers opined that consumers can be educated through formal training, advice, and instruction, as well as informal means, for example, experience and individual research. They stressed further that the education has two important aspects: development of adequate knowledge of consumer issues; and development of the skills to apply that knowledge and make informed decisions. However, the process of educating consumers may be carried out by governments, civil society and businesses along with other interested stakeholders (Aziah *et al.*, 2002). Most of the consumers' rights that are being infringed upon by manufacturers of goods and services as well as government agencies and security apparatus can be properly situated within the realms of human rights. Some of these rights like right to life, dignity of human person and right to privacy have been entrenched and guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (Dahiru *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, consumers whose rights have been violated, through the consumption of unsafe and hazardous products can seek redress through enforcement of their human rights to life, health, safety, and welfare. This is justifiable by Section 46 of the Nigerian Constitution and the Fundamental Rights (Enforcement procedure) Rule 2009 which provides that persons whose fundamental rights as contained in Chapter iv have been infringed upon may apply to a high court in that state for redress. Aziah *et al.* (2002) concluded that it is pertinent to state that it is the knowledge of consumer education that enables consumers recognize their rights and discern when these are being infringed upon.

Consumers many times resort to self-help of violence and become security threats when desired expectations are not met or when their socio-economic rights are constantly violated by the public institutions put in place to protect them. The knowledge of consumer education is to enable the consumer function effectively and responsibly in an increasingly complex marketplace (Adebakin, 2012; Adetoro, 2012). Consumer education will not only make consumers understand the complexity of the marketplace, but also get familiar with safety measures put in place for their protection and their roles and responsibility within that context. This knowledge and understanding will no doubt reduce the eagerness to use self-help of violent agitation which threatens national security, to seek redress. Dzulkarnain *et al.* (2014) stressed that consumer education is a means towards achieving a harmonious and civilized society based on the principles of fairness to all, equity, and truth. Through consumer education, consumers know their rights and become responsible for their own consumption choices including the sustainability of the environment. Consumers' knowledge of rights and responsibilities induces the manufacturers and marketers to be more responsive to safety levels of the products and services in the marketplace (Aluko *et al.*, 2021). It will also enable government to be more committed to good governance and national security.

In most countries, Dzulkarnain *et al.* (2014) argued that education is an important tool for consumer protection. Through education, consumers obtain information that protects and empowers them, makes them aware of their rights and responsibilities and helps to ensure their welfare. When consumers are aware about their welfare, they will demand for it whenever it is infringed upon. Consumer awareness motivates action to protect them as well as advance their rights against their violators. According to Ukpore (2010) these include: the right to basic goods and services to guarantee survival (adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and sanitation); the right to safety from the sale of goods or services that are hazardous to health and life; the right to be protected against dishonest or misleading advertising or labeling, the right to be compensated for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services and the right to live and work in an environment which is neither threatening nor dangerous and which permits a life of dignity and wellbeing. When the nation enforces these rights, there will be a huge reduction in the occurrence of security threats.

6.0 Conclusion of the Study

In this paper, after a vivid literature review of archival studies, the paper found that a nation's national security is predicated on national interest, and strategic alliances within the region and the global arena. In view of this, for Nigeria to have an effective and result-oriented national security, the socio-economic condition and rights of consumers must be adequately guaranteed and protected by the government and its relevant agencies. These are the catalysts that propel growth and development, which in turn assures the wellbeing of the citizenry. This cannot be achieved by one single element of government security agencies alone, the combination of national security power, strategic security plan, and the knowledge of consumer rights, should be harnessed. Hence, consumer education remains a vital element in the overall national security strategy. The paper thus concluded that consumer education

programmes should be intensified in every sector of the country. The following recommendations are proposed: All the security agencies in the country should be held accountable for any act of consumers' rights violation and human rights abuses. Culprit (s) should be publicly and strictly prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others. Consumer education should be treated as a tool for human rights in both formal and informal educational system. Consumers should be encouraged to seek redress and not suffer in silence whenever their rights are violated in whatever forms. Government should establish mobile consumer complaints centers at wards and senatorial districts across the country. This will encourage consumers to easily seek redress whenever their rights are violated. Government, its agencies and institutions, corporate bodies and individuals should be held accountable for threats to consumer security (human rights violations against consumers). Government at all levels should live up to their constitutional responsibilities of ensuring the socio-economic wellbeing of consumers.

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