

MASS MEDIA AND PROMOTION OF CONSUMERS' RIGHTS IN IMO STATE: A SURVEY OF RESIDENTS IN OWERRI METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The knowledge of the rights of the consumer and how to stand for it is not a common one, despite its importance. This has led to a consistent violation of consumer rights in the state. This study investigated the role of the mass media in educating and promoting consumers' rights in Owerri metropolis. A quantitative research design was adopted for the study. The sample size of 384 was generated using Wimmer and Dominick's online sample size calculator from the population of 555,500 metropolis residents and data collected through the use of a questionnaire was face validated. The multistage sampling technique was employed. Data was analysed using simple percentages and frequency. Findings revealed that the mass media have a very low report on consumer rights and that it contributes to most consumers not knowing their rights. The findings also revealed that an average of 63% of respondents confirmed that mass media awareness of consumer rights has not helped in reducing the rate of rights violations. The researchers recommended that the media should intensify efforts in creating awareness of consumers' rights so that consumers will become aware of their rights. Also, given that violations of consumers' rights are still prevalent in Imo State, the media should know that they have a great role to play in helping to reduce the rate of consumer rights violations by working closely with the Consumers Protection Council in protecting consumers' rights.

Keywords: Consumers, Consumers' rights, Mass media, Violation.

Introduction

The need to educate Nigerians on their various consumer rights is increasingly becoming necessary given the level of abuse they suffer at the hands of manufacturers of goods in the country. Charles and Shaibu (2018) assert that "studies have established that there are imbalances between the producers of goods and services and their consumers in the Nigerian and global markets." According to Vanisree (2013), "Regardless of occupation, age, gender, community, or religious affiliation, everyone is a customer. Consumer rights and welfare have become an important aspect of everyday life for most people, and we have all used them at some point in our lives."

Every year on March 15th, "World Consumer Rights Day" is commemorated. It honours former US President John F. Kennedy's landmark statement of four essential consumer rights in 1962: the right to safety, the right to be informed, the freedom to choose, and the right to be heard. Similarly, some of the rights granted to Nigerians are similar to those supported by consumer rights organizations and organisations. Two chapters of the Nigerian constitution (chapters 2 and 4) are particularly relevant to consumer protection. These chapters dwell on the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy and fundamental rights. Interestingly, these rights place emphasis on two of the four bills of rights proposed by the acclaimed father of consumerism and former President of the USA, John F. Kennedy, to the American Congress in 1963 (Kotler, 2007 cited in Charles & Shaibu, 2018).

The mass media have been very remarkable in discharging their functions of information, education, and entertainment. Anyanwu et al. (2019) opines that "The mass media are crucial in national development since it influences opinion, shape behaviour and attitudes." Ibrahim (2011) cited in Nkwam-Uwaoma and Mishack (2020) noted that "the mass media can contribute to people's awareness of potential dissatisfaction and desire to change (positively or negatively)". With the obvious capacity that the media possess in awareness creation, education information etc, one wonders what the mass media are doing to educate their audiences who also measures as consumers in their basic rights and promote adherence to these rights by producers of goods and services? It is against this background that this study investigated roles of the media in educating and promoting the rights of consumers in Imo State.

Statement of the Problem

There is an obvious imbalance between the producers of goods and services and their consumers in Nigeria

and globally. This is not because there are no legal provisions to protect the rights of consumers, but rather negligence or downplay of these provisions, or maybe ignorance on the part of the consumers about their rights. Because its reach reaches heterogeneous masses of the country's population at the same time, mass media is considered as a veritable platform for achieving a cause. With the help of mass media, messages can be sent and received in any part of the world, whether rural or urban (Vanisree, 2013). With the potential of the mass media, one can confidently say that the media possesses what it takes to educate and promote consumer rights in Nigeria, but this may not have been exactly so. This is what prompted this research.

Research Questions

1. To what extent have the mass media create awareness about consumers' right among residents of Owerri metropolis?
2. To what extent have the the mass media awareness on consumer rights influences the residents of Owerri metropolis to stand for their rights?
3. To what extent have the mass media awareness on consumer rights reduce the rate of rights violation?

Review of Related Literature

Consumer Rights and Mass Media

Consumer rights and welfare are now an integral part of the lives of individuals, and we all make use of them at some or other point in our daily routine. Shaibu (2018) observes that "in spite of the explosion in the global marketing environment, most consumers still complain of dissatisfaction in exchange relationships. In most cases, the experience derived from goods and services purchased is unsatisfactory and below expectations, a situation that has left consumers with little or nothing to fall back on (Alaba, 2015).

Consumer rights and consumer protection laws provide a way for individuals to fight back against abusive business practices. These laws exist at the state and federal levels and are designed to hold sellers of goods and services accountable when they seek to profit by taking advantage of a consumer's lack of information or bargaining power. According to Ekimini (2012), consumer rights laws are enforced by government agencies, the offices of attorney general, and through individual and class action lawsuits filed by victims. It is common practice in contemporary times for nations to make laws that are designed to protect the interests of their citizenry in the course of buying and using goods and services. In Nigeria, this is provided for in the Consumer Protection Council (CPC) Act, under Chapter C25, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 and in the statutes establishing the other regulatory agencies.

No one else, in general, is better at expressing the concerns of society, a social group, or, in some situations, individual problems than the media. The impact of media on our civilization's structure, value system, and viewpoint is a defining feature. Many socioeconomic issues, mass education, and social awakening can be best addressed through the media (Vanisree, 2013).

Through media content, people have become aware of certain issues in society, such as the violation of consumer rights, among others. The concern for consumer protection has been made popular through the efforts of the mass media, particularly the broadcast media (Nabirasool & Prabhakar, 2014). Due to the potency of the broadcast media in educating and promoting the rights of consumers, it has been leveraged in educating and promoting the rights of consumers. Every consumer needs to be treated with great regard in order to have value for the goods or services paid for (Vanisree, 2013).

Empirical Review

Charles and Shaibu (2018) conducted a study on regulatory mechanisms and consumer rights protection in Nigeria. Using a qualitative approach, it was revealed that the level of consumer awareness in Nigeria was relatively low. The findings also show that, despite the existence of some regulatory mechanisms to protect consumers, there is still evidence of corporate neglect that extends beyond the quality of the core product; insufficient consumer education and information; and poor or non-existent after-sales service delivery, to name a few examples. The study recommended that there should be sustained public enlightenment and education that is aimed at promoting the interest of consumers in Nigeria. Vanisree (2013) carried out a study on the role of the media in consumer protection. The study used an exploratory survey research approach, and the results demonstrated that the majority of consumers read consumer interest articles. However, the number of people who read these items on a regular basis is low. The audience of these items is small and intermittent, indicating that there is only a sporadic and lukewarm interest in consumer issues. Consumers' expectations in

relation to the consumer column vary. Most consumers, on the other hand, prefer to read about consumer interests, judicial rulings, and government policies that affect consumers' interests. This suggests that readers are only interested in the consumer movement for a specific reason. There is a general lack of enthusiasm for reading about consumer concerns and the operations of local consumer organizations. The majority of consumers believe that these articles aid them in learning about consumer rights and the consumer movement. Izaguirre (2020) conducted a study on consumer protection and regulation. Despite regulatory efforts, irresponsible provider activities were discovered in several countries, indicating that the frameworks did not adequately safeguard customers or incentivize firms to establish a culture of fair customer treatment. In reaction to misbehaviour scandals, numerous governments formed high-level stakeholder committees, according to the findings. In a study on consumer protection and e-commerce in Oman, Belwal, et al. (2020) in their study revealed that consumer protection activities in Oman are well-established for offline transactions, but are new and restricted for e-commerce. Despite the passage of consumer protection laws, electronic transaction laws, and cybercrime laws, Oman's consumer protection measures for e-commerce do not address a huge number of the global problems that are required to develop consumer confidence and trust in the online environment.

Theoretical Framework

The theory deemed most appropriate for the anchorage of this study is the social responsibility theory. This is because this theory prescribes for the media certain duties and obligations that they owe the society. "The social responsibility theory is an extension of the libertarian theory. McQuail (1987) cited in Asemah, et al (2017,p.48), opines that "the social responsibility theory owes its origin to an initiative – commission on freedom of the press". "The theory evolved because the press exploited the freedom that they gained as a result of the free press," they add. A free press is expected to provide a steady stream of impartial information to citizens, allowing them to make informed political decisions and other crucial decisions in their everyday lives.

From this theory, journalists are expected to "accept and fulfil certain obligations to society and meet those obligations by setting high standards of professionalism, truth, accuracy and objectivity" (Baran, 2009 cited in Nkwam-Uwaoma & Mishack, 2020). Baran further argued that "the media should do this by prioritising cultural pluralism by becoming the voice of all the people not just elite groups that had dominated national, regional, or local culture in the past.

This theory is in line with this study, given that this study seeks to investigate the part the mass media have played so far in the education of the public about their rights as consumers. This is in line with the views of Baran (2009) cited in Nkwam-Uwaoma and Mishack (2020), who noted that the media should be the voice of all the people, not just the elite groups that have dominated national, regional, or local culture in the past.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method because it is used to collect information on a broad range of things, including attitudes, behaviours and opinions. According to City Population, an online-based population database, it has a 2016 projected population of 555,500. Out of this population, 384 was derived as the sample size using Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator at a 5% error limit and 95% confidence level. The multi-stage sampling technique was used. At the first stage, Owerri Metropolis was divided into the three local governments that comprise the area. These are Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal. Stage two: Each of the local governments is further broken down to the communities/villages that make them up. Two communities were purposively selected from each local government area because they were largely exposed to radio programmes. Therefore, there would be a total of six communities representing three local governments in Owerri metropolis; they were Orji, Uratta, Umuguma, Ihiagwa, Umuoyima, and Umuororonjo. Stage Three: In stage three, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the selected communities that make up the metropolis. That is 384/6 64. Thus, the researchers gave out 64 copies of the questionnaire purposively to respondents in these communities. A questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection and it was face validated by a research expert in the field of communication. A face-to-face approach was employed in administering the instrument. The data was analysed using simple percentages.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

From the 384 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 350 (%) were found valid and usable, while 35 (%) were void and could not be used. Meanwhile, the analysis of this study was done using 350 valid copies of the questionnaire.

The bio-data of the respondents is 160 females and 190 males. Out of this figure, 120 are graduates within the age bracket of 29 to 45, while 230 of them are mainly into business and crafts within the same age bracket.

Table 1: To what extent did mass media create awareness about consumers' right among residents of Owerri metropolis?

Items	Yes	%	No	%	Can't Say	%
Are you exposed to the Media	329	94%	7	2%	14	4%
What is your extent of exposure	Large extent		Moderate extent		Low extent	
	126	36%	175	50%	49	14%
Are you aware of media reports on consumer right	Yes		No		Can't Say	
	147	42%	119	34%	84	24%
How often do the media create awareness on consumer right	Very often		Often		Not often	
	14	4%	56	16%	280	80%

Source: *Field survey, 2021*

The result from table 1 above reveals that 94% of the residents of Owerri metropolis are exposed to the mass media. This means the majority of Owerri metropolis residents are exposed to the mass media. This is impressive as it will have a positive impact should the media promote consumer rights with their content. Meanwhile, 50% of the residents expose themselves to the mass media in a moderate manner. This high level of moderate exposure could be a result of the media not doing enough to promote consumer rights. On the third question, which borders on whether they are aware of media reports on consumers' rights, 42% agreed to have heard a media report on consumers' rights. This is not impressive as those who never heard and those that can't remember if they did are more than those who had heard of media reports on consumers' right as they make up 58% of the total respondents. This is in line with the findings of the Charles and Shaibu (2018) study, which revealed that the level of consumer awareness towards consumer protection rights in Nigeria was relatively low. On how often they believe the media reports on consumer rights content, 80% of the respondents in Owerri metropolis believe the media reports on consumer rights content are not quite often. The implication is that the media's reporting on the rights of consumers is very poor. As is evidenced by the 80% as against both the 4% and 16% that believe that the media reports are very often and often respectively. This contradicts the basic tenets of the social responsibility theory upon which this work is framed.

Table 2: To what extent did the mass media awareness on consumer rights influences the residents of Owerri metropolis stand for their rights?

Items	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	M	Decision
You know your consumer rights	21	6%	84	24%	7	2%	238	68%	1.6	Reject
Media educated you on your rights	28	8%	21	6%	119	34%	182	52%	1.7	Reject
You defend your right as a result of media awareness	21	6%	28	8%	49	14%	252	72%	1.4	Reject
You know where to complain when your consumer right is infringed	28	8%	28	8%	84	24%	210	60%	1.6	Reject
Average mean									1.5	

Source: *Field survey, 2021*

Analysis of data revealed that an average mean of 1.5 respondents confirmed that mass media awareness of consumer rights does not influence the residents of Owerri metropolis to stand for their rights. As seen from

their responses. This means that Owerri metropolis residents do not know their rights as consumers, which is a very bad situation that portends constant violation of consumers' rights without their taking proper actions. The Vanisree (2013) study found that consumers read articles on their interests; nevertheless, the frequency with which they read these pieces on a regular basis is low. The audience of these items is small and intermittent, indicating that there is only a sporadic and lukewarm interest in consumer issues. In a similar study, Belwal, et al. (2020) discovered that, despite the passage of consumer protection laws, electronic transaction laws, and cybercrime laws, consumer protection measures for e-commerce in Oman do not address a large number of global concerns required to build consumer confidence and trust in the online environment.

Table 3: To what extent have the mass media awareness on consumer rights reduce the rate of rights violation?

Items	Yes	%	No	%	Can't Say	%
The media is doing enough through their contents in reducing consumers' rights violation	43	12%	237	68%	70	20%
Manufacturers/sellers are now careful of the right of consumer when dealing with consumers	Yes		No		Can't Say	
	126	36%	175	50%	49	14%
What extent have the media through their awareness contents on consumers' right help in reducing the rate of rights violation	Large extent		Moderate extent		Low extent	
	55	16%	48	14%	247	70%

Source: *Field survey, 2021*

Analysis of the data revealed that an average of 63% of respondents confirmed that mass media awareness of consumer rights has not helped in reducing the rate of rights violations. The huge percentage shows that the media has not been doing enough to help reduce consumer rights violations. By implication, the issue of consumers' rights violations will still persist. This is in tandem with that of the Charles and Shaibu (2018) study, which revealed that even though there exist some regulatory mechanisms to protect the consumer, there is still evidence of corporate neglect that has been extended beyond the quality of the core product to include inadequate consumer education and information. Also, the study by Izaguirre (2020) revealed that despite these efforts by regulatory agencies, irresponsible providers of services to consumers still go about violating consumers' rights, which indicates that the frameworks of regulation do not sufficiently protect customers or motivate businesses to instill a culture of fair customer treatment. As a matter of responsibility, as the social responsibility theory recommends, the media ought to be responsible for protecting the interests of consumers in Imo State.

Conclusion

The fact that the awareness level of consumers in Imo State is low calls for concern because the rate of consumers' right violation is going to be high and the effort in reducing it by the media will be unlikely. Also, according to the findings, the mass media are not making sufficient effort to educate their audiences on their rights as consumers, which must have contributed to their attitude regarding consumers' rights.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the researchers recommended that:

1. The fact that respondents' level of awareness of consumers' rights is low calls for the media to intensify their efforts in creating awareness of consumers' rights so that consumers will become aware of their rights.
2. The regulatory agencies like the Consumer Protection Council should be more involved in programmes and other media awareness content that will be capable of influencing them towards

- consumers' rights.
3. Given that violations of consumers' rights are still prevalent in Imo State, the media should know they have a great role to play in helping to reduce the rate of consumer rights violations by working closely with the Consumers Protection Council in protecting consumers' rights.

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