

Knowledge and Use of the Consumer Protection Act among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Chike Emmanuel Onwe

Department of Mass Communication, Ebonyi state University Abakaliki
chikeisworking@yahoo.com

Kenneth Adibe Nwafor

Department of Mass Communication, Ebonyi state University Abakaliki
kenadibenwafor@gmail.com

&

Chukwuebuka Stephen Nworie

Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
chukwuebuka.nworie.pg95258@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This work investigated knowledge and application of the Consumer Protection Act among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state Nigeria. The methodology anchored on consumer empowerment theoretical frame, this survey research studied Gen-zers born within the year; 1995-2010. Using percentage distribution of the Nigerian national youth population index as reported by UN (2022), the population of Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state is 1,653,675. 322 respondents were sampled using accidental sampling. Close ended questionnaire were employed. Data presentation were done use frequency and weight mean value tables. Results from the survey, there is very low (2,309) knowledge and low application (2.487) of consumer protection act among. The respondents indicated that they have not been educated about the Act and they do not have full grasp of the provisions of the act and do not use it to litigate for their protection during business transactions. They indicate that some of their rights have be breached and most of them unmitigated. Issue of right to full and true information about goods and services, mechanisms to seek redress during infringement of consumers' rights. In the low knowledge of consumer protection Act is tantamount to the low application of the Act for its primary purpose of protecting consumers in business operations. This negating issue with most Nigerian legislation has created sellers' market that has enthroned a buyer beware principle which greatly mar the actualization of enthroning consumers to their rightful position. To this end, there is need for public enlightenment campaign of public legislations to help equip Nigerian for efficient business operation.

Introduction

The paradox of importance in an ideal business practices is that the consumers, rather than being treated as the kings as expected of the pivotal position they occupy in all aspect of business and as often advertised by businesses, is treated as a slaves or servants (Vetrivel & Mohanasundari, 2011). Consumer satisfaction is the pivotal role of every business effort and should guide every business decision. To this cause, economists see efficient market as when the least/last consumer is satisfied. However, Awobamise (2018) argued that the satisfactions of the rights and needs of the consumers as the truism in business practices is greatly undermined in modern business operations and in most business/ promotional communication/campaigns. To Kelly (2005), the ideal business concepts: customer orientation', 'customer focus', and 'customer-driven' strategies have lost their position. These

inadequacies have prompted a movement by consumers to seek protection of their rights; a term called consumerism. As pointed out by Bello et al. (2012), product and service consumers have shown one form of dissatisfaction or the other against the manipulations of producers and their advert agents.

This has been worsened by the advent of new media technologies that has heralded liberal business communication and marketing/promotional campaigns. The digital media sphere is heralded by liberalism of operation that has introduced a controversial two-aged swords business practices. In the negative side, the issue of misinformation, deceptive promotional campaigns, source credibility, spam wares, etc, has heightened the caveat emptor principle which shift the responsibility of consumers right protections on the consumers themselves. Contrary to the above claim, the advent of new media, argued Akase et al. (2018), has broken the jinks of business monopoly, creating high competition among business, high literacy among consumers that now enthrone consumer satisfaction and enthronement of consumers to their rightful pivotal positron, creating an opposing maxim-caveat venditor, sellers beware which businesses have to adopt for sustenance and expansion. Statistics from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2020) shows that where there are laws governing consumer protection, privacy and data protection, and cybercrime, and digital advertising, there is always consumer confidence and trust and the reinstate of consumers to their rightful position as the kings of every business.

Consumer Protection, according to Nwosu and Ata-Agboni (2021, 10) refers to “a state or federal law designed to protect consumers against improperly described, damaged, faulty, and dangerous goods and services in addition to unfair trade and credit practices.” Which include laws on product liability, privacy rights, unfair business practice, fraud, misrepresentation, misinformation in business communication, and other consumer/ business interactions (Nnadi, 2014; Singh, 2019). It connotes legal frameworks to regulate business operations, as well as provisions recognizing the rights of consumers who engage in trade. To Yaro (2020, 60), “consumer protection also means legislative instruments and regulatory enforcement mechanisms that are put in place by the state for the purpose of protecting consumers against some fraudulent and other shady business practices associated with day to day transactions.”

By the demands created by the untrue practices in modern businesses, nations of the world have enacted laws to ensure protection of their citizens from harmful business practices. In 2004, the Obasanjo-Led federal government enacted Consumer Protection Act, Cap 25 to ensure that ideal business processes are enshrined and the rights of the people guaranteed. In 2019, the Buhari’s-led administration enacted yet another law; the Federal competition and consumer protection Act t reinstate ideal and healthy business competition and regulate business for consumers’ protections. Grossarchive (2019) argued that laws and organisations in charge of consumers’ protections in Nigeria are lagging behind which many Nigerian still suffering the inherent evil in caveat emptor principle and unregulated digital markets. According to Eze et al. (2010) cited by Bello et al. (2012, 72), “There is a global recognition of the fact that there exists real and perceived imbalance of power relations between the producers and consumers of goods and services. This imbalance of power appears always to the advantage of the producers, who are strengthened by the traditional legal maxim ‘Caveat emptor’ (buyers beware) and the ever growing free market philosophy, which seems to put the producers at liberty to do whatever they want.”

Ndubisi et al. (2016, 7) cited in Nwosu and Ata-Agboni (2021, 10) submitted that the failure of the caveat emptor to ensure consumer protection necessitates legal backing by countries.

According to the authors, “the buyer beware is no longer an adequate prospective measure because the principle is based on the premise or assumption that the buyer knows what he wants, has knowledge necessary to choose wisely and has adequate contact with the sellers. These complaints by consumers over a period of time gave rise to mass movement of people (consumers) referred to as “consumerism” a situation that forced marketing practitioners in most advanced countries of the world such as Europe and America to adopt better ways to deliver goods and services without abusing the funds, mental and human rights of consumers. These mass movements comprised of those formed directly by consumers groups or representative groups as well as the government.

In most quarters of the world, especially developing countries, caveat emptor business practice has failed to protect the (uninformed) consumers who are in the majority. It could be argued that it is exploitive and manipulative especially against uneducated and poor members of the society, and currently, among the generation-Z (Yaro, 2020). If the consumers are warned to beware when their level of understanding the qualities of goods and services, and their commercial rights and privileges are not guaranteed (Gitari, 2021), then there is need for government to come to the aid of the consumers.

Yaro (2020) captured the Nigerian situation aptly; thus, modern business operations are loaded with unfair practices are widespread coupled by the inadequacies of most Nigerian existing laws that are founded on the buyers beware principle. Again, the expertise of business executives overwhelm the prudence of the (mostly uninformed and uneducated) consumers. The untrained consumer is no match for these business representatives who attempt to persuade the potential consumer for patronage on terms and conditions suitable to their business, mostly. To this negating situation, the Nigerian consumer needs protection by law due to the inequality of power existing between them and the producers or their vendors. At most cases, businesses employ expatriates as vendors with sole aim of convincing consumers and closing the lapses in their goods and services with rhetoric. And even for the literates, the general lack of information prevalent in trade practices in Nigeria reduces the consumers’ ability to make any prudent business decision. In most transactions, consumers appear to be their own best guide and judge and when their right infringed upon, they do endure instead of litigation.

In today’s business communication, the Gen-Z business experiences are digital, semi-regulated, decentralized and thus demands for maximum consumers protection. Before now, most business operations were interpersonally and physical connection. But with advent of new media, businesses now operate on jet-technological platform that are greatly utilized by business against the rights and privileges of the consumers. In a research by Uzougbo et al. (2021) on Enhancement of consumer protection in cryptocurrency transactions: Legal strategies and policy recommendations, the researchers submitted that the potencies of consumer protection is greatly leaning on the level of knowledge of the legal framework by the public.

In contrast, findings from a study by Ateke et al. (2020) established the fact that brand-loyalty is basically attracted by the level at which consumers’ projections is assured and practiced by a brand. Thus, there is high competition, and brands that retain their consumers for a long time could be argued to be upholders of efficient consumer protection paradigm. Hence consumers’ dissatisfactions arise as a response to unethical business practices that undermine their rights and privileges. This dissatisfaction is subject to the level of consumers’ education and awareness of their commercial rights. The functionality of consumer protection legal frameworks is based on the consumers’ knowledge and their level of use. To this case, this

work explored the rate of knowledge and use of consumers' protection Act among Gen-Z in Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the rate of knowledge of Consumer protection Act among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
2. To investigate application of Consumer Protections Act among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The tenets of Consumer Empowerment Theory (CET) by Sanam Akhavannasab, Danilo C. Dantas, and Sylvain Senecal (2014) was employed to ascertain the legal empowerments provisioned by consumer protections Act (CPCA) and how the rate of knowledge of the law empowers the Gen-Zees to undertake business and fight for their rights. As pointed by Jenkins (2010), consumers are currently having an increased market control and essential overwhelming participation. From buyers beware, most of consumers are now empowered by their knowledge of their rights, legal frameworks, increased competitions among sellers/producers, dwindling monopoly/oligopoly to Liberal (digital) markets, etc., and are now taking full control of what they buy, litigating for the breach of their rights and protections, having the locus to decided and determine quality of goods and services built on their informed purchasing decision, etc. (Marta & Fabio, 2021). Thus, from sellers market, the world over is now experiencing buyers market; and from buyers beware principle, most countries are now swiftly shifting to sellers beware principle. However, where there are now such empowerments as listed above or there is lack of knowledge and application of them, the status quo remains and buyers beware maxim enthroned with its attending implications.

Competition (absence of monopolistic/Oligopolistic market), technology (advent of new media), consumer-centric strategies, and consumer policies (legal frameworks), are the four main forces which provide consumer empowerment facilitators. Consumer empowering facilitators are availability of information and options (consumers' literacy), consumer-to-consumer interactions (consumerism group), consumer-to-supplier interactions (integrative marketing principle), and consumer-to-legal activists' interactions (litigation for consumers' rights). "These facilitators increase consumer subjective feeling of empowerment which includes consumer self-efficacy, perceived choice and consumer knowledge. Finally, this subjective experience of empowerment enhances consumer feeling of social and personal powers" (Sanam et al., 2014, 1). The defeat of *caveat emptor* is dependent on the availability of the sources of consumer empowerment which are mostly embedded in the legal frameworks that societies rely in ensuring legitimate business operations where rights and obligation of both consumers and sellers are guaranteed. However, the advent of digital landscape has introduced new sphere of business communication purportedly defeats the provisions of mostly legal frameworks intended to protect the consumers' and sellers' rights and obligations.

According to this theory, the presence and functionality of legal framework is an empowerment to consumers. Hence with such laws available, the consumers are empowered to conduct business undaunted by the sellers. When consumers know the technicalities of ideal business operation, the legal clauses for the protections of their right, it empowers them to participate in business unheated and when cheated, they are empowered to seek redress. However, when there is no knowledge of such legal provisions, the rights of the consumers are mostly trampled upon unabated, to this end, the researcher hypothesizes; thus:

- There is high knowledge of the Consumers' Protection Acts among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria
- There is high application rate of the Consumers' Protections Acts by Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

Methodology

Survey design was applied in this research. The aim of ascertaining the rate of knowledge and application of consumers' right protection Act (CPCA) necessitates the use of survey. This work focuses on Gen-Zers (those born within the year 1995-2010). Although there is argument on the age range of Generation –Z, this work will focus on the above age range. Gen-Zers are considered as the get-age generation where information and communication technologies herald most human endeavours-including businesses. According to the United Nations (2021), the generation-Z constitutes more than 50% of the Nigeria's population. By conservative estimate approach, we peg the stake of the Gen-Zers' population to 51% of the country. Ebonyi state with 2022 projected population of 3,242,500. This forms the area of study. Therefore, the population of Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state is 1,653,675, using percentage distribution of the national population. Applying Australian online calculator, the sample size was determined to be 384. Close-ended questionnaire was employed to sample the respondent drawn using accidental sampling technique using pre-administration survey question that was used to determine if respondents fall within the Gen-Z age range; 1995-2010. The instrument was validated by professional researchers of media law and society. Frequency tables and weighted mean table were majorly employed in data presentation and analysis. A 5-point weight mean value on Likert scale is utilized with a midpoint rule of 3.00

Data Presentation

Of the 385 copies of questionnaire distributed, 322 (83.64%) copies were filled and returned and is basically used for the research analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Data of the respondents

Questions	Frequency of responses	Percentage %
Age:		
1995-2000	62	19.25
2001-2005	179	55.59
2006-2010	81	25.15
Education qualification:		
No basic education	11	3.41
FSLC/SSCE	83	25.77
Tertiary Education	228	70.80
Occupation of the respondent		
Civil service	54	16.77
Academics	22	6.83
Agriculture	86	26.70
Commerce/trade	66	20.49
others	94	29.19

Source: Survey (2021)

From the records, most of the respondents are educated to the tertiary level. This is pointer that the respondents are intellectually equipped to undertake business activities without been cheated. Most of the respondents are into commerce as their occupation.

Table 2: Have you had business deals that warrant/deserves legal litigation?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	206	63.98
No	116	36.02
Total	322	100

Source: Survey (2021)

From the above table it would be inferred that most business among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state result to breach of rights that deserve litigations.

Table 3: Identify the aspects of your rights that have been undermined/breached in a business deal

Categories of consumer's rights	No of responses	%
Right to full knowledge of the information about the goods and/or service	218	67.70
Safety issues associated with the goods/service	88	27.33
Right to damages accrued from the course of the business	167	51.86

Source: Survey (2021)

From the above table, it is pertinent to state that there is high rate of untrue business practices which include issue of the consumers' right to have full knowledge of the goods/service, right to safety issues associated with purchased goods and service and the right to seeking redress on damages accrued from business practices.

Table 4: Ascertaining the rate of knowledge of Consumer protection Act among Gen-Zees in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Questions	Analysis							Remark
	SA	A	N	D	SD	X		
Are you familiar with the Consumer Protection Act?	54	33	29	87	119	2.428	Reject	
Do you have good understanding of your rights and privileges as a consumer under the CPCA?	30	26	20	105	181	2.189	Reject	

Do you know how to identify and report the breaches of your consumer's rights as provisioned by the Act?	42	44	9	154	73	2.434	Reject
Do you agree that the Act is efficient in protecting your rights in modern business?	21	19	76	89	117	2.186	Reject
Grand mean						2.309	Reject

Source: Survey (2021)

From the above table 4, the null hypothesis is accepted, thus: there is low knowledge of the Consumer Protection Act among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. With low knowledge of the provisions of the Act (2.189); low knowledge of the mechanism of identifying and reporting breach of consumers' rights as enshrined by the Act (2.434); and mostly the high rate of disagreement by the respondents on the efficiency of the Act to protect consumers in modern business are all pointers to literacy rate of the Act among Nigerians.

Table 5: Rate of application of consumers' protections Act by Gen-Zees in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Questions	Analysis						Remark
	SA	A	N	D	SD	X	
CPCA has been used to guide your business operations	43	71	51	112	45	2.860	Reject
Have you applied CPCA to seek redress of your consumers' right infringements?	12	23	80	76	131	2.096	Reject
Grand mean						2.478	Reject

Source: Survey (2021)

The null hypothesis is accepted; thus, there is low rate of application of Consumer protection Act among Gen-Zers in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The Act, accordingly, has not been used effectively by consumers. This could be caused by the factor of low knowledge of the Act by the respondents; hence, there is a high relationship between rate of knowledge and rate of application of Consumer protection Act among Gen-Zs.

Discussion of Findings

The rate of public awareness of the legal frameworks for consumer protection is low and alarming. The reality of every legal statute is their application. Low public awareness implicate that there would be low application. Business laws should enjoy high public awareness and utility. Where the people for whom their protections necessitated the enactment are not aware of the law, it would be pertinent to argue that such law is irrelevant. It implicate that Nigeria should always educate the populace after legislation. The unwelcomed reality in business operation that undermine the position and power of the consumer as the wheel on which business decision thrive is greatly encouraged by the low knowledge and application of the legal provision enacted to undo such ugly situation. This is in support with a submission made by Vetrivel and Mohanasundari (2011) when they argued that consumers instead of been treated as kings are handled as slaves or servant.

Without full knowledge of the legal provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, the consumers are vulnerable to the expatriate and unprofessional antics of the marketers and their advert agents. It is when they are greatly informed that consumer could press for integrative business operation where every action shall revolve around ‘consumer satisfaction’ paradigm. The major role of consumer protection Act is to enthrone consumer / buyers’ market where ‘consumer satisfaction is the major market force. Yaro (2020) argued that in most cases the sellers/marketers overwhelm the limited education/exposure of the consumers and invariably enthroning buyers beware principle. Therefore, with little knowledge and application of Consumer protection Act among Nigerians, we submit that there still exist sellers market where the rights of the consumers are mostly not guaranteed.

Limitations

The findings of this work are greatly affected by the area of study-Ebonyi state Nigeria and the segment of the population as well-Gen-Zers. This could affect the generalization of the result as other demographic factors like education level which varies geographically and as well by age and exposure could affect the rate knowledge and application of consumer protections laws. Again, this work only focused on the Consumer Protection Council Act in exclusion of other consumer protections laws whose knowledge and application among Nigerians may vary.

Recommendation

In line with the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that mass education schemes/ programmes should be ignited to equip the people of the provisions of laws like CPCA and other consumer protection statutes that will equip the people against unprofessional business operation inherent in today’s markets. Not only on consumer protection Acts, every piece of legislation should be succeeded by public education programmes. Without public knowledge, laws are only but document. Media campaigns chaired by legal advisers would greatly increase public knowledge and application of Public laws in Nigeria.

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