

Socio-Economic and Demographic Determinants of Green Consumption

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Abstract: *The concern for sustainable consumption and indeed ecologically responsible behaviour is enormous and well documented in modern marketing literature. However, what constitute the characteristics of green consumers and the effects of these characteristics on environmentally friendly behaviours are yet to be explored in Nigerian context. This study attempts to identify the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of consumers who are environmentally friendly with a view to drawing some marketing implications. With a sample of 102 members of the green brigade in Akwa Ibom State, using both descriptive and inferential statistics, findings revealed that these consumers are mostly graduates of tertiary institutions, mostly males than females, married with home ownership. They are mostly middle class citizens with white collar jobs and they consider environment safety and security very paramount in every purchase decision they make. From the results of arithmetic analysis, correlation, and regression analysis, findings further indicate that the age of respondents, his household income, home ownership, work status, buying pattern, education and residence do significantly influence consumers social responsibility behaviour in a statistically significant way. However, these positive relationships suggest that raising the socio-economic and demographic status of the people will increase consciousness for safe environment among consumers. Based on these findings, some managerial implications were drawn, including directions for further research.*

Keywords: *Demographic and Socio – economic characteristics, sustainable consumption, socially responsible behaviour.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent pasts have witnessed provoked scholarly enquiry into the concerns about environmentally conscious consumption. This is evidenced in the number of published articles in the area (Bannejee, Iyer, and Kashyap, 2003; Bheda and Valente, 2008; Chamorro; Sergio and Miranda, 2009; Chan, 2004; D'Souza, Taghian and Lamb, 2006; Chan, He and Wang, 2012). However, recent publications about environmentally friendly consumption and green marketing are mostly related to green product and even green production without any conscious effort to investigate the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of those consumers who are environmentally friendly particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. This of course was our main motivation for this study.

Environmental consciousness towards providing a safe and secured environment is in the very heart of green marketing concept and it is in the mainstream of modern marketing research. Many scholars such as D'souga, 2004; Erickson, 2004. First and Kheval, 2008; Gadene, Sharma, Kert and Smith 2011; Hoyer and MacInnis, 2004; Kotchen and Relling; 2000 Lian 2000; Lee, 2008; Lee, 2009; Leire and Thidel, 2005; Mintel and Stematiou 2004) had all explored the green marketing concept with a view to obtaining insight into its various dimensions, but an important, however, often neglected challenge facing marketers is the poor knowledge of the demographic and socio-economic profile of these consumers who are environmentally friendly in Nigeria. It is quite obvious that an understanding of the demographic and socio economic characteristics of this market segment would be extremely useful for marketing decisions. Therefore, it is apparently very important that the closer we are at identifying the characteristics of these consumers and the effect of such characteristics on socially responsible consumption behaviour, the better it will be for marketers to develop sustainable green strategies that will appeal to this market segment.

Today, the concept of sustainable consumption is almost unlimited in most current marketing literature. Researchers in the past decade (see for example; Moser and Uzelli 2003; Polosky 2011 Pradash, 2002; Rabbar and Wahid 2011; Rashid 2009; Rex and Baumann, 2007; Sammer and Wishemhagem, 2006; Samders and Thornbull, 2009; Spreyt, Hermans, Houver, Vandekerekhore and Ealen, 2007; Wulf and Schrider, 2003 and Zelezny, chua and Alrich 2006) had all indicated that consumers are aware and are willing to go green if only the necessary catalyst for such behaviour is provided. However, there is limited empirical research which has examined the relationship between the consumer's socio-economic and demographic profile and sustainable consumption question from emerging economies like Nigeria. Many of the studies related to green marketing have been conducted in well developed economies. It must be acknowledge at this point that green marketing when viewed from the context of developing countries may very likely be different. Further suggesting that there is dearth of empirical evidence. It is therefore against this background that there exists a large research gap that calls for urgent scholarly attention in the developing countries like Nigeria. Therefore, our main purpose in this study is three folds:

- i. to identify the socio economic and demographic characteristics of consumers and determine the effect of these characteristics on socially responsible behaviour.
- ii. to advance marketing strategies based on improved understanding of these consumers profiles
- iii. to provoke scholarship particularly in the area of green consumption in other parts of Nigeria.

The remaining of this study is organized as follows: section 2 examines the literature on the concept of green marketing and green consumption amidst the relationship between consumer characteristics and sustainable consumption issues. In section 3, we present the methodology, while section 4 presents the data and results of data analysis including a discussion of findings. The final section is on conclusion and study implications, including directions for further studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Green Marketing and Green Consumption

Green consumption is a construct under the concept of green marketing, meaning responsible consumption behaviour that is aimed at sustainable environment. The consumers who are socially responsible and who sees environmental protection as key in their consumption experience is regarded as green consumers. That is why they are often described as environmental friendly consumers. These consumers see the environment as worth being sustainable and they translate this into their consumption behaviour by buying or consuming biodegradable or recyclable products that will not litter or pollute the environment; thereby preserving the environment for the future.

Environmental friendly, environmental marketing, ecological marketing or green marketing, according to American marketing Association is the marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe. By implication, green marketing refers to the process of marketing products and services based on their environmental benefits. That is, such benefits must be environmentally friendly. Hence, the obvious assumption of green marketing is that consumers would view a product or service greenness as a benefit and therefore base their consumption behaviour accordingly.

Economists the world over had since observed that resources are limited but that human wants are unlimited and because of this, it becomes imperative that marketers utilize the resources available to them efficiently without waste. From this premise of limited resources, there has been growing interest among consumers, producers and the government over the protection of their environment, and indeed sustainable environment. Available evidence indicates that many more people the world over are concerned about the environment than ever before. Green marketing therefore emerges as a concept designed to protect the environment for sustainable and socially responsible production and consumption behaviour. Scholars like Rex and Baumann (2007); Rashid (2009); and Rahbar and Walid (2011), have highlighted several reasons for going green to include:

1. The pressure from government
2. The need to become socially responsible
3. Pressures emanating from competitors
4. The cost and profit issues and
5. The concern about opportunities and competitive advantage.

Evidently, there have been streams of empirical research on this subject. Prior research mainly focused on either psychographic or demographic characteristics and provided insights about predictors of ecological behaviours, but more importantly these research efforts had been very inconsistent in their findings particularly as it affects consumers in the developing countries. For instance, the general findings that environmentally friendly consumers are younger, more educated, belong to a higher income class and enjoy a higher occupational status (Murphy, 1978 and Van Liere and Dunlap, 1980) have been challenged by scholars like Crosby et al, (1981), Granzin and Olson (1991).

However, these past researches indicate that going green is reputational. That environmental responsibility has become a key to sustainable competitive advantage in the market place. (Karna, Hansen, and Juslin, 2003; Menon and Menon, 1997). The fact that consumers today are more informed and proactive about environmental issues suggest that organizations and even the consumers be concerned with whether their product or their containers are biodegradable or recyclable.

In the light of this concern, it is important to understand what characteristics make green consumers and secondly, what relationship exist between these characteristics and social responsible consumption behaviour. Based on this mixed findings of previous researches and the need to reposition green marketing in the context of developing economies, this study attempts to build on existing body of knowledge with particular emphasis on developing economies like Nigeria.

2.2 Relationship between Socio – Economic and Demographic Characteristics and Socially Responsible Behaviour

Knowledge of the consumer is fundamental in the development of marketing strategy. In order to create value for both the consumer and the organizations, strategy oriented towards a targeted behavioural characteristics is critical for the success of the firm. Thus, there had been concerted efforts by scholars since 1970s to identify consumers who are environmentally friendly (Berkowitz and Lutterman, 1968; Anderson and Cunningham 1972). Their efforts at identifying these consumers reveal that a highly socially conscious person are female, pre-middle aged with a high level of education with an above average socio economic status (Karna Harsen and Juslin 2003; Hailes 2007)

Further studies by McIntyre Meleche and Lewis (1993) revealed that females were more conscious than their male counterparts, but a survey by Reigenstein, Hills and Philpot (1974) discovered that only men were willing to pay for sustainable environmental protection. However, Balderjahn (1988) investigated the relationship between environmentally conscious attitudes and the use of green products and came to the conclusion that the use of non-polluting products was more intense among men than were among women. Hendon (1972) in his finding also observed that consumers with high or medium income bracket were more likely to be environmentally conscious than the below average income consumers because their high level of income and education were likely to increase their sensitivity to social and environmental problems. Samdahd and Robertson (1989) in their empirical studies found out that the environmentally conscious consumers are less educated and has a lower than average income in America. Accordingly, they conclude that income and education are not good predictors of environmental consciousness.

Research by Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) Anderson and Cunningham (1972); Van Liere and Dunlap (1981) saw green consumers as being younger than average age, while most recent studies by Sandahl and Robertson 1989; Vining and Ehreo, 1990 and Roberts (1996) identified green consumers as being older than average. In addition, most studies about the relationship between

consumers demographic and socio economic characteristics and socially responsible consumption behaviour has been quite contradictory (Roberts, 1996; Simon, 2007; Adekoye, 2010 and Guess 2012); and the fact that they exert a significant influence upon their thinking including their consumption behaviour is not in doubt

Awareness of environmentally friendly products is recognized in most consumer behaviour research as a characteristic that influences decision process. Consumer's awareness is a significant construct affecting how consumers collect and interpret information (Murrey and Schlacter, 1990). Thus; empirical evidence supporting the effect of consumer's awareness of environmental issues on ecologically favourable consumption behaviour is somewhat contradictory. For instance, Maloney and Ward (1973) recognized no significant relationship between awareness and ecologically compatible behaviours; whereas Chan (1999) in a separate study had observed that awareness is a significant predictor of how friendly a consumer is with his environment, when it concerns consumption behaviour. Based on this, we hypothesize that consumer's socio economic and demographic characteristics are associated positively with socially responsible consumption behaviour.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an exploratory design covering a sample of 102 respondents drawn from safe a population of 180 green brigade consumers, a voluntary association that fronts safe environmental consciousness in Akwa Ibom State. A well structured survey questionnaire was used to elicit data which was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data collection was done mostly on evenings when respondents were most likely to be at home. Respondent's participation in the exercise was voluntary. A total of 180 green brigade members were contacted and given the questionnaire but 102 useable copies were returned representing 57 percent. The response rate was satisfactory as it was just enough to provide sufficient insight into the issues under investigation. However, in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, a pre- test was conducted and minor adjustments on the questionnaire were made. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first part measured ecoliteracy with five questions. The answers given indicated how much respondents knew about the environment and its safety and security issues. The second part measured consumers demographic and socio economic characteristics in terms of sex, age, income, marital status, educational level, family size, buying pattern, home ownership etc.

Reliability tests were also conducted on each of the factors. The results show that the Cronbach alphas for each of the variables varied from 0.67 or 67 percent to 0.98 or 98 percent for all the constructs, which we considered quite satisfactory for this study. Correlation matrix was also conducted to evaluate the ability of the items to measure environmental consciousness among the consumers the results of the investigation are as presented in the next section of this study. However, all the questions asked were rated on a 7- point scale and tested at 0.01 and 0.05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the result and discussion of the study. The first sub-section is devoted to demographic and socio economic characteristics of green consumers in the study area, while the other sub-section is devoted to the effect of socio economic and demographic characteristics on socially responsible consumption behaviour.

Table1. Demographic and socio economic characteristics of respondents in the study area

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Age		
21 – 30	10	9.80
31 – 40	30	29.41
41 – 50	42	41.18
51 and Above	20	19.61
Total	102	100
Education		
Tertiary	58	56.86
Secondary	32	31.38

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Primary	12	11.76
Total	102	100
Sex		
Male	75	73.53
Female	27	26.47
Total	102	100
Marital Status		
Married	45	44.12
Single	42	41.18
Seperated	15	14.70
Total	102	100
Home Ownership		
Own a Home	74	72.55
Not Own a Home	28	27.45
Total	102	100
Household Income		
50.000 – 100,000	14	13.73
101.000 – 150.000	32	31.37
151,000 – 200.000	34	33.33
201,000 and above	22	21.57
Total	102	100

Source: Field survey, 2013.

Table 1 showed that most of the green consumers (41.18%) are aged between 41 – 50 years. This could be regarded as middle age. Only 9.80% were very young (21 – 30) years while about 19.61% could be regarded as fairly old ie. 51 years and above. Responsible consumption involves a lot of maturity and age is an important variable in a study involving green consumers and their activities.

Only about 11.76 percent of them did not have atleast a secondary education (Table 1). In essence, majority of them (56.86 percent) have attended Tertiary level education. Kanna et. al (2003) supported this claim when they stated that educational level of consumers is one of the variables related to socially responsible consumption behaviour. The result on gender of respondents revealed that 73.53 percent are males while only 26.47 percent of them were females. This result indicates that most of the green consumers in Akwa Ibom State are males.

Moreso, table 1 revealed that majority of the respondents, 44.12 percent were married, 41.18 percent were singles while only a very few were separated or divorced (14.70 percent). Lastly, table 1 further showed that about three quarters (72.55 percent) of the respondents in the study area have a home of their own. Only about 27.45 percent of them did not currently have a home. Home ownership is an important yard stick in measuring how responsible someone is in the society and since access to home ownership can lead to responsible attitude, this therefore suggest that this is going to have a significant effect on socially desirable behavioural patterns. On income of respondents, findings revealed that a good majority of them have income well above 100,000 representing 86 percent of the respondents. This income group can be regarded as middle class in the society.

Table2. Descriptive statistics of variables (n=102) (Socio-economic/ Demographic characteristics)

ITEMS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Sex	3.224	.962
Age	2.991	.562
Income	3.387	.665
Marital Status	2.833	.765
Education	2.852	.818
Buying pattern	2.851	.752
Home ownership	3.647	.461
Overall Result	3.084	.752
Environmental Responsiveness	3.478	.601

Source: Field survey, 2013.

As can be seen from this table above, the description statistics of the main variable (that is socially responsible consumption behaviour) and the independent variables: sex, age, income,

marital status, education, buying pattern and home ownership are as portrayed in table 2. above. Thus, respondents generally considered that they are environmentally friendly from their socio economic and demographic profile and that these are affecting their consumption behaviour (mean = 3.478, SD=.601). But they perceived that they are insignificantly influenced by sex (mean = 3.224, SD= .962). Income (Mean = 3.387, SD = .665) Residence (Mean = 2.833, SD= .765) respondents agreed that they are moderately influenced by Age (2.991 SD = .562); (Education=2.852,SD=.818) and buying pattern (mean = 2.851.SD= .752).

Five out of the seven socio economic and demographic characteristics were used to measure the influence of these socio economic and demographic characteristics on environmentally sustainable consumption. Table 2 present the descriptive statistics for each of the item.

Table3. *Effect of socio economic and demographic characteristics on environmentally sustainable consumption behaviour*

DEMO/SOCIO ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
1. Our educational attainment level is to increase or maintain our friendliness with the environment	3.428	.866
2. Our income level is intended to increase or maintain our likeness of the environment through our purchase	3.987	.359
3. My gender is to help me contribute positively to my environment	3.428	.502
4. Our buying pattern are intended to increase or maintain our satisfaction with the environment	3.132	.621
5. My age has helped me to increase or maintain our environmental quality	3.438	.657
TOTAL MEAN	3.478	.601

From the table above, it could be observed that all the five variables show moderate results. The highest average value being that our income level are intended to increase or maintain our environmental consciousness (mean=3.987; SD=, 359), followed by my gender is to help me effect my environment positively (mean = 3.438; SD=502). Our educational attainment in life is intended to increase or maintain our friendliness with the environment (mean=3.428, SD = .866) my age has helped me to increase or at least maintain our environmental quality (mean = 3.438; SD = .657) and our buying pattern are geared towards sustainable environment (mean = 3.132; SD = .621). Thus, in general, the respective appear to be moderate about environmental friendliness by different demographic and socio – economic profiles of the consumers.

The study also examines the nature of relationship that exists between the independent and the dependent variables using Pearson correlation Matrix. Thus, the correlation matrix is as presented in table 3.

Table 4. *Correlation Matrix (n = 102)*

CONSUMERS PROFILE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Sex	1							
Age	.1457xxx P = 000							
Income	.59xxx P = 000	.501xxx P = 000	1					
Residence	.589xxx P = .000	.695 xxx P = 000	.457xxx P = 000					
Education	.145 xxx P = 137	.199xxx P = 000	.272xxx P = 000	.189xxx P = 109	1			
Buying pattern	.356xxx P = 000	.532 xxx P = 000	.267xxx P = 000	.398xxx P = 000	.377xxx P = 090	1		
Home ownership	.622xxx P = 000	.507xxx P = 000	.756xxx P = 000	.583xxx P = 000	.699xxx P = 000	1		
Environmental friendliness or performance	.287xxx P = 000	.286xxx P = 000	.488xxx P = 000	.409xxx P = 000	.147xxx P = 104	.467xxx P = 000	.393xxx P = 000	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (I - tailed)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1- tailed)

As can be observed from the table above, all the independent variable show a negative and significant relationship to environmental responsible consumption behaviour except education. This means that education of the consumers is one most significant predictor of a socially responsible behaviour among consumers. This goes further to buttress the fact that consumers are becoming increasingly more conscious and sensitive regarding environmental issues and therefore consumer awareness of environment related product attributes should increase proportionately. This goes to suggest that environmental responsibility has become crucial to corporate reputation and competitive success in the marketplace. This implies that green orientation should be pursued vigorously. The findings are strategically important and call for a rethink in terms of marketing philosophy and reinvention of new ideas in terms of product design, marketing communication tactics as well as other visible activities.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The description results for the demographic and socio economic characteristics of respondents show that there were a larger proportion of male respondents (58%) as opposed to females the majority (72%) of the green consumers in Akwa Ibom State are above 45 years of age. The educational level among the sampled group is generally high where over 60% of the respondents are university graduates. Household size ranges from a minimum of two people to a maximum of 8, with 9 mean of about 5.1 in each household. Household incomes of the respondents are largely middle class whose average income is between ₦ 100,000 and above. According to Cha, He and Wang (2012) a progressive demographic profile has a positive. Evidence from the research confirms this line of arguments and it is consistent with the views of scholars like, Doyle (1992); D'souga (2004); Bleda and Valette (2008); Bannerjee, Iyer and Kashyap (2003).

Furthermore, this study has attempted to identify factors influencing responsible green behaviour among people. Evident from the research support literature the statistically significant variables, at 1 and 5% level are education, sex age, income, home ownership, buying pattern and residence. The results of this study suggest several ways in which green marketers can actively market their products. The findings suggest that an adjustment in each one of the significant variables can significantly influence the probability of green consumption. That is socio economic and demographic developments that affect such variables can help consumers improve participation or consumption and encourage formal market participation. Therefore, beneficial institutional improvements can be in the form of creating more awareness and innovative marketing arrangements. Be that as it may, it is worth noting that successful marketing programe of any kind is based on innovativeness and commitment However; the government can support the green revolution through technical innovations. These may be in the form of investments in public facilities such as improved infrastructure.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has confirmed that there is a significant connection between consumer's socio economic and demographic characteristics and socially responsible consumption behaviour. It was found that an improvement in educational level would enhance socially responsible attitude of consumer which ultimately will improve ecological friendliness. This finding provides some implications in several aspects. Theoretically, it is supportive that understanding the socio economic and demographic profile of consumers towards sustainable consumption is important to improve green consumption. Practically green marketers have no choice but to adopt innovation particularly in green production and marketing by means of recyclable packaging and creating the necessary awareness through consumer's education. Only through this way can green marketers improve their marketing performance.

Nevertheless, there are many other factors, which would influence green consumption beyond the scope of this study. For instance; other possible factors that may explain socially responsible consumption behaviour are consumer orientation of the need for environmental protection (Meksonscy, 2007); infrastructure (Chen et.al 2007); institutional framework (Fazio, 1986);

friendliness of logistic services (Gadenne, 2011); and the role of government and suppliers (Rashod, 2009).

Therefore, all the economic agents' manufacturers, government, suppliers and even the consumers have to effectively play their respective roles, so that green marketing firms can enhance their performance and achieve the much desired green environment that will be sustainable.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is exploratory in nature and we can acknowledge its limitations. First, the use of a single data set is subject to the vulnerability in construct validity. Second, because the data were collected from a specific geographic area. Akwa Ibom State, generalizability will be some how difficult. Thirdly, there was a limitation regarding our data collection method, which might have affected the respondents by giving information which might not have been accurate. Other factors not investigated in our study such as institutional framework and infrastructure for green consumption could also influence our findings and warrant future studies. Future research should consider these researchable areas and expand the spectrum of knowledge and scholarship.

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