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## Consumer Education For Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Democracy is a form of government, primarily focused on the people. Nigeria returned to democratic governance on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999 after decades of military rule, but since then, the dividends of democracy have continued to elude the vast majority of the citizens. The political actors have continued to assault the much-cherished democracy that Nigerians toiled for. Currently, it appears that the Nigeria concept and practice of democracy is at variance with international democratic standards and norms. These problems no doubt have negatively impacted the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. This paper thus examines consumer education for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. It reveals that consumer education creates consumer awareness on the right to be properly served by political leaders. The knowledge of Consumer education empowers enlightened consumers to demand that political leaders fulfill campaign promises. The study recommended among others that: government should fund research in consumer education; consumer education curriculum should be constantly reviewed to incorporate current national needs and values as in sustainable democracy; consumer education professionals, consumers and government at all levels must synergize to make Nigeria's democracy work irrespective of the challenges of the current phase. The study concluded that consumer education could sustain Nigeria's democracy because it develops intelligent, responsible and self-directing citizens who are expected to lead in building the desired democratic and indissoluble Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Consumer, consumer education, democracy, sustainable, sustainable democracy

Democracy is a form of government that is primarily focused on the people. Its values and norms are also derived from the culture of the people from societies to societies. According to Sule and Tal (2018), democracy is a system of government which requires a periodic election as agreed and set by the national laws of a given country that operates such system to enable for a peaceful transfer of power from one legitimate government to another. Nigeria returned to democratic governance on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999 after decades of military rule, but ever since, the dividends of democracy have continued to elude the vast majority of Nigerians. The present crop of political actors have been constantly assaulting the much cherish democracy that Nigerians yearn

for. Currently, it appears that the Nigeria concept and practice of democracy is at variance with international democratic standards.

According to Ovwasa (2013), the Nigerian state often experiences governmental instability in the forms of bad policy options and implementation. The basic necessities of life such as electricity supply, water supply, employment and quality education are lacking in the Nigerian society. This is because of the phenomenon of Godfathers protégé crises, money politics, political thuggery and vote buying which are eroding democratic values in the country. Egharevba, Akintunde and Olatunji (2020) argued that, unlike the advanced democracies of Europe and America who practice democracy on the tripod stand of justice, equity and fairness, in Africa, including Nigeria, it is being practiced on the platform of injustice, inequality and a game of the survival of the fittest. These problems have direct negative effects on sustainability of Nigeria democracy.

The success of democracy rests on the enlightenment, activeness and commitment of citizens and hence, there must be active and informed involvement of the people at all levels of governance as willing participants in defining and maintaining their democracy (National Orientation Agency, 2006). A democratic citizen should be concerned with promoting understanding of the ideals of democracy. This is why consumer education is very crucial at this juncture. Consumer education is about enlightenment. Kolawole (2019) sees consumer education as the process of assisting people to acquire the correct information and understanding that will help them make wise decisions when purchasing goods and services. For any democracy to be sustained, it is essential that its citizenry are well informed about ideal democratic values which will aid, guide and direct their conducts in the discharge of their civic responsibilities. That is, democracy is nurtured and sustained only when democratic values are rooted in the minds and actions of citizens (consumers). To this end, the goal of this paper is to examine consumer education for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. It examines the concept of consumer education, democracy and democratic values, attitude of consumers towards democratic values, problems of democratic governance in Nigeria and how consumer education could help to sustain democracy in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

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

**Consumer education:** According to Ukpor (2006), consumer education is the process of exposing people to the knowledge and skills needed by individuals, families and corporate bodies to become competent consumers in a world that is constantly changing. Consumer education is the preparation of an individual to be capable of making informed decisions when it comes to purchasing products. Consumer education generates consumer awareness of their right to be properly served. This implies that consumer education involves orientation of individuals on their rights in relation to available products and services being marketed and sold (Kennedy, 2012).

**Democracy and democratic values:** As an over-flogged concept, Idowu and Etinosa (2013) asserted that democracy as a concept is inextricably linked to the demands of equality, 'one person, one equal vote'. Democracy denotes the rights of the people to choose their own government through institutionalized multiparty system and periodic

secret ballots (Adedeji, 2006). Underlying the value of democracy is individual dignity, equality of all people before the law and equality of opportunities in all aspects of life-social, educational, economic as well as political, and encompassing employment, housing, recreation etc (Idowu and Etinosa, 2013). The people are at the epicenter of the business of democracy. All the programmes, policies, process of governance etc are to be initiated by the people, executed by the people through representation and for the benefits of the people themselves. Avaro (2001) defined democratic values “as the fundamental beliefs and constitutional principles which guide the democratic government put in place in a particular society”. They are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy.

### **Attitude of Consumers towards Democratic Values**

Values entail the beliefs and ideals which a society seeks to achieve. Among such values expected of Nigeria consumers for the sustenance of democratic government according to Nnamdi (2009) are various beliefs in freedom, equality (one-man-one vote), justice, toleration of diversity, unity (national integration), national loyalty (as against sectional loyalty), rule of law, separation of powers, checks and balances, transparency, patriotism, dignity of human person, representative government, self-reliance, due process, electoral credibility (citizens vote must count), common good (acting in the best interest), popular consent, supremacy of the people, toleration of opposition and legitimacy.

But the many years of military rule in Nigeria have been marred by uncivil political behaviours among many consumers that ranged from political apathy to electoral fraud. The attendant effect has been lack of popular participation, and disengagement of many good consumers, from political processes. These developments negate the role of consumers in a democracy. Gatson (2001) argued that in a representative system, consumers especially the youth consumers need to develop the capacity to evaluate the talents, character, and performance of public officials. But many youth consumers care less and this suggests weak civil support for democratic values and institutions by mostly the elite youth consumers who prefer to stay at home during election and watch the proceeding on television.

The indifference in the perception of consumers who are mostly youth towards democratic values has proven to be a major obstacle that has marred democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It is the obstacle to youth positive participation in the democratic settings. This has contributed to both the elites and youths surprisingly showing weak commitment to basic symbols and values of democracy. Hence, there is serious manifestation of greed, inordinate ambition to win power, thuggery, dishonesty, personalization of political/public offices, insincerity, disrespect for others, intolerance, etc. in our national polity (Omorogbe&Orobor, 2007).

Moreover, many consumers who are mostly youths lack democratic ideals. Rather, these youths take to political thuggery. Thuggery has been largely responsible for the evolution and sustenance of violent political culture in the country. This has emboldened some desperate politicians to threaten and actually resort to violence when they fear that they might lose elections. Undemocratic values like political thuggery by some of the youths discourage the electorates or voters from

exercising their franchise and thereby create the unacceptable situation of 'low turnout' during general elections.

Many consumers are losing confidence in the Nigerian democracy owing to many years of failed campaign promises by elected political leaders. Some consumers are gaining confidence in the ladder of crime that dirty politics and thuggery provides. If this trend does not tackle, it will jeopardize the credibility of leadership in Nigeria democratic rule. Some of these consumers who do not have regard to ideals democratic values choose to engage in thuggery and other violence after considering personal factors such as joblessness, poverty, financial and material gains as well as situational factors such as the power/authority, influence and protection (which includes protection from the aims of the law) of godfathers.

### **Problems of Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

Nigerian state has been constantly struggling between the forces of democracy and authoritarianism (Oganwu&Aina). Rather than being at the service of the people, it is in the service of the ruling oligarch, thus condemning the vast generality of the consumers to poverty and frustration. Ayatse, Onaga and Ogoh (2016) identified some of the problems of democratic governance in Nigeria to include the following:

**Non-independent judiciary:** A democratic government is established with unbiased independent judiciary, which protects the citizens (consumers) from the oppression of the ruled and fellow citizens in Nigeria, the appointment of Judges is directly influenced by the executives. The Executive heads have often used their power to appoint persons known to support their policies.

**Ethnicity:** Democratic processes in Nigeria are criticized by observable leadership bias, in appointments, employment and distribution of national resources. Ethnicity has unrelentingly affected civil governance in Nigeria. Okam as cited in Omoregie and Idada (2017) described ethnicity as the bane of Nigerian politics. The history of elections in Nigerian state has been characterized by threats to statehood based on the manipulation of ethnicity as divisive mechanism for the acquisition of political power by political actors, the fragile nature of political cum democratic institutions is acquainted with poor democratic culture among Nigeria citizen (Omodia and Egwemi, 2011).

**Greed:** This is one of the central problems of democratic practices in Nigeria. The greedy nature of our political leaders is revealed in their inordinate ambition for material wealth, power and glory. One of the most agonizing aspects of Nigeria's brand of democracy that had actually given license to "do-or-die" politics is the problem of greediness of ineffective leadership. Nigerians has not been opportune to enjoy the dividends of good and exemplary leadership, be it military or civilian, who have the interest of the people at heart and also ready to sacrifice personal gains for the greater number of the citizens.

**Fraudulent Elections:** Awhen, Edinyang and Ipuole (2014) posited that democracy is not working in a pure perfect form anywhere in the world. In the case of Nigeria, elections are massively rigged and its results doctored. The 2007 and 2011 elections in

Nigeria were reported to be massively rigged. This does no good to ideal democratic values.

**Disintegrative nationalism:** The political history of Nigeria is dominantly characterized by disintegrative nationalism which refers to the inclination towards sectional consciousness, due to perhaps the fragmentation of the nation into several nationalities at the damage of National loyalty, integration and stability.

### **Consumer Education for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria**

One of the primary functions of government in any democratic society is the safety of lives and properties of consumers. Democracy becomes fragile when consumers' lives are threatened by fake and substandard products owing to corrupt practices of those at the helm of affairs. Consumer education is considered a veritable tool for improving the lives and safety of the consumers and has been an important priority to every nation (Moguluwa, Nwankwo, Anyasor and Agina, 2018). Consumer education generates consumer awareness of their right to be properly served by political leaders. Through consumer education, political leaders are pressured by enlightened consumers to fulfill their campaign promises. Campaign promises like provision of quality infrastructure, and other good things of life that will raise the standard of living of consumers. When consumers are happy with quality of leadership, it will sustain Nigeria democracy.

Consumer education defines consumers as individuals who make use of the goods, services and gift of nature to satisfy their needs and enhance their general wellbeing (Adeyanju&Kolawole, 2021). Consumers buy a lot of things to fulfill their needs. These things may include products such as clothing, food, fuel, health products, electronics etc. Services are facilities offered to consumers by various agencies, and organizations with or without payment. These services may include water, education, transportation, communication, sanitation and health. Consumers expect the political leaders to provide these services to better their lives. Inability of political leaders to provide these essential services will result in agitation and clamour for regime change by the consumers. Therefore, consumer education becomes useful instrument in educating the consumers about their rights in democratic society which by implication helps in sustenance of democracy.

Consumer education helps to expose the consumers to problems of the state, especially in regard to quality of services. Here, consumer education helps to expose the consumers to some emerging issues and problems prevalent in the democratic society e.g poverty, unemployment, fake drugs, adulterated food, terrorism, etc with the aim of making the consumers hold the leadership accountable. If these issues are on ground or persist, it could terminate the fragile Nigeria democracy by way of military coup. But when these issues affecting consumers are properly tackled by democratic leadership, it will sustain the fragile Nigeria democracy (Ameh, 2012).

Consumer education exposes the consumers to ideal democratic values. That is, what they should expect from democratic rule and what they can also contribute to sustenance of democracy. A consumer with desirable democratic values is always concerned with promoting understanding of the ideals of democracy. Consumers of any society are potential force to reckon with in any democratic society, Nigeria not

exempted. The consumers constitute a large chunk of the decision-making groups in a civilized democratic society. Consumers are involved in democratic process as voters during election. Reason consumer education is the driving force behind democracy as consumers' participation is not limited to elections only, but a continuing engagement with the process of democratic governance.

Ukpore (2010) argues that consumer education helps to improve interpersonal relationship especially among family members. In current Nigeria democracy, family relationships are affected by inflation. This is because it creates' so many tensions in working life, the home and shopping situation. For instance, in Nigeria, the prices of goods and services especially food and fuel have arisen astronomically beyond the reach of average families. Thus, families need help on how to cope with inflationary pressure in order to be happy. A little knowledge of consumer education is virtually a sine qua non for every consumer; as such knowledge goes a long way in rationalizing the consumer behaviour. The consumer behaviour includes coping, questioning, planning, purchasing, conserving, participating and influencing. When consumers or families are able to cope or adjust with the prevailing economic hardship through the knowledge of consumer education, it will go a long way in sustaining Nigeria democracy because protest against harsh economic conditions will reduce.

Consumer education helps consumers to be aware of laws, which gives them right and responsibilities to obtain help if they meet dishonest practices (Ukpore, 2006). These rights are the rights to basic needs, healthy environment, consumer education, redress, safety, information, choice, and representation (or the right to be heard). Consumer education covers awareness on the rights and responsibilities of consumers, available laws and judicial systems to protect the consumers, how, when and where one can complain against various consumer exploitations, especially the one that relates to fake drugs and other adulterated products that are detrimental to peoples' health and well-being. When consumers are aware that the democratic government cares for them and are willing to protect their rights within and outside the country, the consumers will work towards ensuring the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

### **Suggestions**

To sustain Nigeria democracy through the consumer education, the following suggestions are made:

- Government should finance research in consumer education in view of its relevance in informing the citizens about ideal democratic values that can sustain democracy.
- Similarly, government should make more funds available for training and retraining of consumer education professionals at all levels of educational system. The idea is to make the implementation of consumer education programmes functional and pragmatic for the citizens.
- Consumer education curriculum contents should be constantly reviewed to reflect the current needs of the nation values such as transparency, honesty among consumer goods manufacturers and marketers, due process, one-man-one vote etc. These values need to as a matter of urgency be introduced into consumer education curriculum.

- Consumer education professionals, civil society groups and Non-Governmental Organizations should as a matter of national importance be seriously involved to help create the awareness, understanding and internalization of democratic tenets in Nigerian youths and political parties through workshops, seminars and public rallies.
- Consumer education professionals should partner with civil society groups to champion the course of making political elective offices less attractive in term of salary package and other allowances. The highest paid political office holders should be at par with Permanent secretaries in the federal ministries. This will draw technocrats and professionals who are willing to serve the country selflessly into political arena.
- Consumer education professionals, consumers and government at all levels must resolve that Nigeria democracy must work irrespective of challenges the country might be passing through for now.

### **Conclusion**

Lack of democratic values is one major obstacle that has mar the consolidation of democratic in Nigeria. It is the obstacle to consumers' positive participation in democracy. Both the political leadership and the average citizens have surprisingly shown weak commitment to basic symbols and values of democracy. Hence, there is serious manifestation of greed, inordinate ambition to win power, thuggery, dishonesty, personalization of political/public offices, insincerity, disrespects for others, intolerance, electoral rigging; kidnapping/killing, etc. in our national polity. All these undemocratic behaviours could lead termination of Nigeria democracy. It is therefore concluded that consumer education could sustain Nigeria democracy because it develops an intelligent, responsible and self-directing citizen who are expected to take the lead in building a democratic and indissoluble Nigeria of our desire.

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