

## A Comparison of Consumerism Activity amongst Urban Household Consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Consumerism has been defined as a social movement seeking to augment the rights and powers of consumers in relation to sellers (Kotler, 2000). It has spread to developing countries in Africa including Kenya. However, despite the efforts to revamp consumerism in Kenya, majority of consumers have been observed to be relatively passive in their participation in the movement. The objective of the study was to compare the level of consumerism activity across gender, age, education attainment and income level of urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design involving a mixed method approach. A sample size of 400 respondents was drawn from 10 administrative sub-locations in Nakuru East and Nakuru West sub counties of Nakuru County. Multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used for selecting households for interview. A pre-designed self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. Analysis of data was done through Descriptive statistics and ANOVA methods with the aid of Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) version 19. Hypotheses tests were done using p-values approach at 95% confidence level. The study found that the level of consumerism was low among majority of urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. It established that the level of consumerism significantly differed across income level at 95% confidence level but there were no significant differences were found across age, education attainment and gender of household consumers. The study recommended for strengthening of Kenyan Consumer movement through country-wide consumer recruitment, establishment of consumer forums at County level, financial support for local consumer forums, consumer education and campaigns against consumer exploitation by the civil society.

**Keywords:** Consumer protection, Consumer movement, Consumerism

### Introduction

Perhaps the earliest consumer organization to emerge outside Europe and North America was the Kenya Consumer's Organization (KCO). Although it did not officially adopt this name until 1974, it existed since 1951 when self-styled "housewives" came together in Nairobi to boycott stores known to overcharge customers (Glickman, 2009). However, the Kenyan consumer has faced a number of challenges that seem to affect its progression; there were scattered pieces of consumer legislations that were "toothless" and provided no or lenient penalties to errant manufacturers (Asher, 2010); most consumer organizations in the country were lacking resources, political goodwill and suffered from industry influence or corruption (Asher, 2011); majority of consumer protection institutions have not been effective in addressing the challenges being faced by consumers in the country (Asher & Rijit, 2012); and the consumer protection bodies carried out overlapping roles resulting in the reduction in the efficiency of each body (Nyongesa & Mwiti, 2013). However, there have been several concerted efforts to revamp the consumer movement in Kenya. One of the major achievements for consumerism in the country was the registration of non-political and independent consumer organizations such as Consumers Federation of Kenya (COFEK), Consumer Information Network (CIN), Consumer Unity Trust Society (CUTS) among others. Consumer organizations fight for fair prices, quality and safety of goods and services. They offer litigation services, consumer education, provision of information on consumer issues and advisory services. They work closely with government agencies such as Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), Competition Authority of Kenya (CAK) and Communication Authority of Kenya (CA) to provide an effective consumer protection regime in the country. KEBS is mandated by the Standard Act (CAP 486) to protect consumers through ensuring compliance to set standards. CAK is mandated by the Competition Act 2010 to receive and investigate complaints from consumer bodies. CA is mandated by the Kenya Communications Amended Act 2009 to educate consumers on their rights and provide them with information on various ICT services. Another milestone achievement for consumerism was the inclusion of consumer rights in Section 46 of the Kenyan constitution, followed by enactment by Parliament of the Competition Act 2010 and Consumer Protection Act 2012. The laws not only consolidated the scattered pieces of consumer legislations but also provided a clear legal redress for aggrieved consumers. The Competition Act which repealed the Restrictive Trade Practices and price control Act encapsulates both competition laws and provisions dealing with consumer rights. It dedicates a chapter (55) on consumer welfare and protects consumers from unfair trade practices. The Consumer Protection Act, on the other hand, provides for punishment to businesses that knowingly sell sub-standard goods, lie on pricing or warranties for damaged or injurious goods. The Act further prohibits unfair trade practices and transactions that affect consumer rights. Notably, these achievements provide a suitable framework for a vivacious consumer movement in Kenya.

However, Kenyan consumers continue to be exploited even with the existence of consumer protection agencies (Oremo, 2012). Nyongesa and Mwiti, (2013) found out that the level of utilization of consumer protection measures and awareness of consumer rights was low among consumers in Nairobi and Nakuru towns. Asher and Rijit (2012) found out that there was low level of awareness of consumer rights, responsibilities and redress mechanism among consumers in Kisumu, Nyeri, Mombasa and Nairobi. It seems like the efforts being made to promote consumerism in the country are not working as expected. From this background, the study carried out an evaluation of consumerism among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. The aim was to establish the status of consumerism and generate research evidence that may be useful for recommending effective policies for boosting consumerism in the country.

### **Literature Review**

Consumerism in the study refers to the level of utilization of established consumer protection mechanisms, the level of involvement and participation in the consumer movement. McIlhenny (1990) defines consumerism as "a citizens' movement which will make broad-reaching social, ecological and political demands on suppliers of goods and services". Maynes (1990) defines consumerism as "the voicing of consumer discontent and the furtherance of corrective actions". Kotler (2000) defines the consumerist movement "as an organized movement of citizens and government to strengthen the powers of buyers in relation to sellers". In a third-world perspective, it is defined as "the efforts made either by the consumer himself, the government, and/or independent organizations to protect the consumer from the unscrupulous practices of businesses in their quest for profit" (Onah, 1979). The concept of consumerism was elaborated by Abplanalp (2009) as a new socio economic and cultural trend which celebrates consumer individuality and unique personality, and consequently, companies have no option but to respond and recognize positively to this emerging consumer concerns. Eze, Eluwa and Nwobodo (2010) reported that 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 in general appears always to the advantage of the producers. Companies have to invest heavily in advertising their products to meet and stimulate consumer demands with various products categories because consumers are no longer passive actors; rather they have become independent and active force in shaping events in market place and influencing corporations' market and non- market decisions (Ali & Wisniesk, 2010).

Okonko and Osuagwu (2013) examined the variables that challenge the growth and development of consumerism in Nigeria. The study further investigated the factors that spur consumerism activities in Nigeria with a particular focus on the food and drink industry for the period 1980-2012. The study involved 485 consumers who were selected from the 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria regions to ensure good representation. Likert scales questionnaires and oral interviews were used for data collection. The study found out that the main reasons for low level of consumerism activities include absence of competition in the food and drink industry, unbalanced purchasing attitudes of Nigerians, low level of awareness and consciousness, high level of poverty, absence of quality market force (consumer) leadership, lopsided media activities and lack of government commitment. The study concluded that there was need to catalyze consumerism activities in Nigeria given the lack of will power among consumers to take action. Causes of this inactive nature of the movement are majorly attributed to the existing high level of poverty among consumers, resulting to poor market force leadership and high level of class consciousness among consumers. The study recommended for introduction of consumer affairs departments by firms, implementation of consumer protection laws by government, judicious use of consumer sovereignty among firms, imposition of environmental protection tax and revocation of licences for firms conducting unbecoming business practices.

Halliru (2012) conducted an exploratory and conceptual study to assess the performance of agencies in charge of consumer rights protection on the basis of their statutory functions. The study which was conducted in Nassarawa, Kano state in Nigeria found out that most consumer agencies are below par in performance. This was due to very poor level of awareness among Nigerian consumers as well as reluctance of consumers to enforce their rights. This reluctance was found to be largely due to poor level of education among Nigerian consumers, unnecessarily rigid judicial system which protects the manufacturers and marketers, coupled with the non-committed attitude of the government towards protecting consumer rights. The study recommended that the government should ensure immediate establishment of Consumer Protection Council committees in all states of the federation as provided by the Act, enforce the use of warranties, and direct other agencies to vigorously create awareness and bring defaulting organizations to book.

Solaiman, Yasmin and Haque (2012) investigated the status and challenges of consumerism in Bangladesh. The study was based on a desk study and an empirical survey. The study focused on general environmental factors affecting development of consumerism in Bangladesh. It found out that the areas of consumer deception included adulteration, misbranding, deceptive packaging among others. The causes of exploitation included illiteracy, lack of consumer legislation, inflation and limited consumer choices among others. The findings indicated that 85% of the respondents had done nothing for consumerism while only 10% claimed to

have done something for consumerism.

Ijewere and Obeki (2011) examined the level of activity of consumerism in relation to developed countries, identified the ways by which the Nigerian government and the civil society have attempted to protect the interests of consumers and critically examined the factors inhibiting the growth of consumerism in Nigeria. Using extant literature, the study found that consumerism in Nigeria was still at its infancy compared to the developed world. It also found out that the government and civil society were not doing enough to grow consumerism to its maturity. The study identified that low level of literacy, ignorance, government ownership of business, low level of import substitution, unpatriotic activities, poverty, dormancy of the press, unresponsive government, weak consumer associations and high cost of legal redress as being responsible for the slow growth and activity of consumerism in Nigeria. The study recommended that consumers' organizations in Nigeria should step up their activities by imitating the US and Britain where consumer organizations conduct independent product tests, carry out independent consumer surveys, issue out product alerts, inform and educate consumers. It also suggested that the Nigerian government should fully implement consumer protection laws by promptly prosecuting offenders to serve as a deterrent to others. The findings contributed to knowledge by unveiling the factors against effective and efficient consumerism in the context of a developing country.

Onsongo (2011) found that there was a strong relationship between consumer behaviour and consumerism in Kenya. The study was conducted among 1500 consumers in Kisii County. The findings showed on one hand a positive correlation between knowledge of goods, consumer attitudes and consumerism and on the other hand a negative correlation between demographics, lifestyles and consumerism. Consumer behaviour indicators included high cost of living, personal feelings, belief, culture and sub culture, availability of goods, lack of information on consumer rights and changing lifestyle. Other findings indicated that 43% and 57% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, respectively, that lack of information on consumer rights affected consumerism. 86% agreed that high cost of living affected consumerism. The study demonstrated that there was a link between lack of information among Kenyan consumers on consumer rights and consumerism which was further investigated in this study.

Isin (2011) examined the marketing manager's perception of consumerism in Turkey. The sample was drawn randomly from company information in the marketing *Turkiye* magazine. Questionnaires were sent to 250 firms via postal mail and 94 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 37%. The study found out that businesses have a positive attitude towards the consumers' supportive, regulatory and orientation roles of the state in consumerism. The study found out that marketing managers in Turkey have a positive attitude towards consumerism. It also revealed that the demographics of managers had no effect on the attitudes towards the regulatory role of the state, the activities of consumer organizations and consumerism. The study recommended that the government should encourage the business sector to support consumerism activity or introduce legislation to enforce compliance. It also recommended that government should undertake the crucial and important role of making consumers aware of business practices and consumerism issues in a country. The study emphasizes that consumer awareness of business practices and consumerism issues was crucial for consumerism to succeed. The findings of the study indicate that positive attitudes towards consumerism among businesses would enhance consumer protection and the growth of consumerism. It also suggested that both businesses and government play a crucial role towards the success of consumerism in a developing country.

Barda and Sardianou (2010) composed a profile of active consumers in Greece during a period of rising prices taking into account shifts in their consumption. The study found that the main factor which affected the reaction to price increases was the monthly private income. It also established that 20% of the consumers who supported actions against rising prices were members of a national consumer movement organization. The results indicated that high-income groups spend more for food commodities and are less likely to be active consumers and that women were more likely to participate in economic boycotts than men. This supports the view that consumer demographic factors such as gender and income level are likely to affect consumerism activity in a given society. The study examined the profile of non-active consumers and the reasons for their behaviour and concluded that a policy for the activation of the Greek consumer movement was necessary. This study provided evidence that membership to a consumer organization can influence consumer activation. Such membership may raise awareness of consumer issues and encourage collective actions against issues that affect all consumers.

Ijewere (2007) investigated the level of consumer activism in Nigeria and how it has helped in protecting consumers in the marketplace. The study was conducted among 858 respondents in six major towns of Edo and Delta states of Nigeria. The six chosen towns included Benin, Auchi, Ekpoma, Warri, Asaba and Sapele. The level of individual consumer activism was measured by his/her willingness to join, finance, uphold decisions of the association, attend meetings and solicit for members on behalf of the association. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five point scale his or her willingness to participate in consumer activism ranging from certainly yes to certainly not. The results of the study revealed that although Nigerian consumers were naive and shy in voicing out their complaints about bad products, majority were willing to join a consumer association. The study recommended that manufacturers should set up consumer protection units in their organizations, government to

encourage setting up of consumer associations by funding them and government to ensure that manufacturers produce quality products. The study contributed towards construction of a consumerism measurement scale used in this study. However, it focused investigating the level of consumer activism and its impact on consumer protection and hence contributed little towards understanding the factors affecting consumerism.

Onah (1988) examined the factors leading to the rise of consumerism in Nigeria. The study found that the factors leading to rise of consumerism in Nigeria were; unscrupulous business practices involving sale of expired drugs/canned foods and adulterated products, scarcity of goods and services leading to high prices, better educated consumers, economic and social ills, deceptive promotions, hidden charges, sloppy service and unsafe or impure products, lack of self-discipline by business firms and reluctance on their part to enforce national and international laws relating to production and marketing of products and services. Among other measures, Onah proposed that marketing firms in Nigeria in response to consumerism should: engage in honest and relevant advertising; ensure nutritional and ingredient labeling; deal with consumer complaints quickly; respond to inquiries and grievances; develop consumer educational programmes; establish consumer advisory committees; and establish of a consumer affairs and research department.

Stanton, Chandran and Lowenhar (1981) unveiled factors for and against consumerism in Brazil. The study which adopted the Kotlerian framework, confirmed consumerism in Brazil was at its infancy stage. The study revealed the factors against the rise of consumerism in Brazil as lack of free press, fatalism, strategic government intervention in some instances and lack of wide publicity. The study suggested that until the government realizes that consumerism is an expected and important adjunct to economic development, it will not encourage the business sector to support the consumer movement or introduce the legislation to force compliance. The study provides evidence that lack of wide publicity on consumer rights affects as an adjunct to the development of consumerism.

#### **Objective of the study**

1. To compare the level of consumerism activity across gender, age, education attainment and income level among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya

#### **Hypotheses of the study**

1. H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across gender among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya
2. H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across age categories among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya
3. H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across income levels of urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya
4. H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across education attainment among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya

#### **Methodology**

The study was conducted among estates with a target population of 68,469 households in Nakuru West and Nakuru East sub-Counties of Nakuru County. A sample of 400 was drawn whereby heads of households or any other adult present were interviewed. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was used for selecting the sample for the study. The study adopted a descriptive research design involving a mixed method approach. According to Jackson (2009), descriptive design involves observation, case study or survey methods that are mainly used for describing situations. A mixed method approach involves both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The design enabled a multifaceted approach and the use of a survey as per the research requirements. Secondary data was collected from government agencies and published academic journals while primary data was collected from respondents through a pre-designed self administered structured questionnaire. The Consumerism construct was operationalized into a 9 items scale which were adopted and modified from Webb, Mohr and Harris (2007) and Mehta and Keng (1985) scales. The nine statements measured the efforts made by respondents in utilizing consumer protection mechanisms in terms of the actions taken when faced with a dissatisfactory product such as complaining to the retailer, advising friends and relatives, stopping purchases or filing court cases. It also measured willingness of the respondent to join a consumer organization, make financial contributions and willingness to participate in collective action. The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Using total scores, level of consumerism for each respondent was rated from 45 (high consumerism) to 9 (low consumerism). Data analysis involved comparison of means method and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) which were done with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 19.0.



## Results and Discussion

### Descriptive results

The total mean score for consumerism among the respondents was 26.18; by placing the score 26.18 in the consumerism measurement continuum where scores 28 to 45=high consumerism, 27=neutral and 9-26= low consumerism, the respondents were found to be in low level of consumerism category. The mean scores results (see Table 1), where scores 3.1 to 5.0 (high consumerism), 3.0 (neutral) and 1.0 to 2.9 (low consumerism), indicate that low level of consumerism were on the statements “I have never taken any action when dissatisfied with a good or service since it was a waste of time and money” (3.13), “Whenever dissatisfied with a good or service, I file court suits in case my complaints are not heard by the retailer, wholesaler or manufacturer” (2.18) and “Whenever dissatisfied with a good or service, I report the matter to a consumer organization or a government agency such as KEBS” (2.17). The results indicated that the areas of high consumerism were on the statements “When dissatisfied with a product or service, I complain to retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers” (3.85) and “I am willing to join consumer organizations or forum that provides me with security and information on consumer issues” (3.79).

**Table 1: Mean scores results for statements on consumerism**

	Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	When faced with dissatisfactory products or services, I complain to retailer, or wholesaler or even the manufacturers	400	1.00	5.00	3.8450	1.09498
2	I am willing to join a consumer organization or forum that provides me with security and information on consumer issues	400	.00	5.00	3.7975	1.08371
3	I am willing to make financial contributions to a consumer organization that helps me to seek redress in case of dissatisfactory goods or services	400	1.00	5.00	3.4500	1.15361
4	I am willing to get involved and participate in calls for protests, boycotts or demonstrations over incidences of consumer exploitation	400	1.00	5.00	3.3750	1.23620
5	When faced with dissatisfactory products or services, I advice my friends, family members and colleagues not to use purchase that product or service	400	1.00	5.00	3.2475	1.30211
6	When faced with dissatisfactory products or services, I stop future purchases of that product or services	400	1.00	5.00	3.2275	1.30959
7	I have not been taking any action whenever I am dissatisfied with a good or service that I have purchased	400	.00	5.00	3.1325	1.39994
8	Whenever dissatisfied with a good or service, I file a court suit in case my complaints are not heard by retailer, wholesaler or manufactures	400	.00	5.00	2.1800	.96692
9	Whenever dissatisfied with a good or service, I report to the matter to a consumer organization or a government agency such as KEBS	400	.00	5.00	2.1750	.88109

### Hypotheses test results

Hypotheses test was done using p values at 95% confidence level. The decision rule was to reject the null hypothesis if calculated p-value was less than the significant level (0.05) and fail to reject the null hypothesis if calculated p-value was greater than the significance level (0.05).

The first hypothesis stated;

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across gender among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. The p-value for gender was 0.691, which was greater than the significant level 0.05 (see Table 2). Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis since there is sufficient evidence that there is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across gender among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya.

The second hypothesis stated;

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across age categories among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. The p-value for income categories was 0.345, which was greater than the significant level 0.05 (see Table 2). Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis since there is sufficient evidence that there is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across age categories among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya.

The third hypothesis stated;

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across income categories among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. The p-value for income categories was 0.392, which was greater than the significant level 0.05 (see Table 2). Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis since there is sufficient

evidence that there is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across income categories among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya.

The fourth hypothesis stated;

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in the level of consumerism across education attainment among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. The p-value for income categories was 0.027, which was less than the significant level 0.05 (see Table 2). Hence, we reject the null hypothesis since there is sufficient evidence that there is a significant difference in the level of consumerism across income categories among urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya.

**Table 2: ANOVA results**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age group	Between Groups	15.089	25	.604	1.095	.345
	Within Groups	206.208	374	.551		
	Total	221.297	399			
Gender	Between Groups	5.296	25	.212	.839	.691
	Within Groups	94.454	374	.253		
	Total	99.750	399			
Education attainment	Between Groups	24.098	25	.964	1.651	.027
	Within Groups	218.300	374	.584		
	Total	242.398	399			
Income category	Between Groups	10.206	25	.408	1.057	.392
	Within Groups	144.504	374	.386		
	Total	154.710	399			

### Conclusion

The level of consumerism was found to be low among the majority of urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. This is supported by Ijewere and Obeki (2011) who concluded that the level of consumerism was lower in most developing countries compared to developed countries. However, the study found that the respondents were ready to complain to retailers, wholesalers or manufacturers in case of dissatisfactory products and were also willing to join and make financial contributions to consumer organizations. This agrees with Ijewere (2007) who found out that although consumers may be naïve and shy in voicing out their complaints about bad products, majority may be willing to join or financially support a consumer association. The study found out that there were significant differences in the level of consumerism across education level of urban consumers in Nakuru County in Kenya. However, the differences in the level of consumerism among urban household consumers in Nakuru County were found insignificant across age, gender and income level. Such differences may account for the overall low level of consumerism among the urban household consumers in Nakuru County, Kenya. According to Smelser's (1963) theory of collective behaviour, mobilization into action is a crucial stage for a successful consumer movement. There is evidence that mobilization into action may be affected by differences arising from demographic profile of consumers in the marketplace.

### Recommendations

Due to the low level of consumerism activity in Kenya and the differences in the level of consumerism associated with consumer demographic characteristics, the study recommends for strengthening of the Kenyan consumer movement. This can be achieved through a major country-wide recruitment exercise to establish consumer forums at county level. To further strengthen the movement at grass root level, the National and/or County government should allocate funds to aid upcoming local consumer forums. Further, consumer education programmes are required to sensitize consumers on their rights and the established redress mechanisms. The civil society in Kenya should also participate in the campaign against consumer exploitation as part of their mandate against social ills in the society.

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