

Social Classes and Pattern of Purchase Behavior in Nigeria: A Study of Delta State

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Abstract

This research looked at consumers in Delta State, Nigeria, and how their socioeconomic status affects their buying habits. Its overarching goal is to deduce from a cross-class comparison of customer preferences, brand loyalty, and spending habits how various socioeconomic groups fare. Books, journals, newspapers, websites, and social media were all used as secondary sources of information because the study was qualitative. Content and thematic analysis of the collected data led to a conclusion and a recommendation. The results show that factors including wealth, education, and occupation have a substantial impact on purchasing behaviour, product choice, and consumption habits. People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more concerned with practicality and price sensitivity, whereas those from better socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be brand loyal and to prefer imported goods. The study found that socioeconomic class is still a major factor in Nigerian consumer behaviour, with implications for policymaking, market segmentation, and product placement. According to the research, governments should work towards reducing income inequality in order to boost consumer welfare and encourage economic involvement.

Keywords: Social class, consumer behavior, purchase pattern, socioeconomic status, Delta State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Consumer behaviour reveals the intricate web of social, cultural, and psychological elements impacting buying choices. As a developing nation with wide economic inequality, Nigeria is a prime example of how social class influences consumer behaviour. The socioeconomic dynamics are best illustrated by the Delta state in the Niger Delta, which is known for its urban centres, wealth caused by oil, and rural misery. The impact of different socioeconomic groups in Delta State on spending habits, consumption choices, and brand loyalty are the main areas of focus in this research.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian customers' purchase decisions are heavily impacted by several socioeconomic and cultural factors, with social class being one of the most prominent. Income, way of life, education, occupation, and spending habits are all impacted by one's social status. Although there is acknowledgement of socioeconomic stratification in Nigerian society, there has been a dearth of research into how different classes influence consumer behaviour, especially in a diverse and economically dynamic location like Delta State. Rising urbanisation, wealth inequality, and changing consumer markets are some of the current trends in Delta State. These changes make us wonder how much of an impact people's socioeconomic status has on their decision-making, brand loyalty, and purchasing habits. Without a thorough grasp of how class identity impacts purchase motivations, politicians and marketers frequently make assumptions about customer segmentation. Without hard data, companies can't create effective marketing campaigns, and policymakers can't address consumption and welfare disparities. Since different socioeconomic groups in Delta State exhibit different patterns of consumption, it is crucial to investigate these discrepancies, as well as their causes and their consequences for advertising and economic development.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between social classes and patterns of purchase behavior in Delta State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the major social classes that exist within Delta State and their demographic characteristics.
2. Examine how income, education, and occupation influence consumer purchasing behavior across these social classes.
3. Determine the differences in product preference, brand choice, and spending patterns among various social classes.
4. Assess the impact of social mobility on changes in purchasing behavior over time.
5. Provide recommendations for marketers and policymakers on how to tailor marketing strategies to different social classes.

Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the major social classes present in Delta State, and what are their defining characteristics?
2. How do income, education, and occupation influence consumer purchase behavior across social classes?
3. In what ways do product preferences, brand loyalty, and spending habits differ among the various social classes?
4. How does social mobility affect changes in purchasing patterns in Delta State?
5. What strategies can marketers and policymakers adopt to effectively target consumers in different social classes?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways:

For Marketers: It will offer insights into consumer segmentation, assisting businesses in formulating marketing strategies, advertising messages, and product offerings that correspond with the interests of distinct social classes.

For Policymakers: The findings will assist policymakers in comprehending the impact of social class discrepancies on consumption and welfare, hence facilitating the development of inclusive economic policies.

For Academics and Researchers: The research will enhance the current literature on consumer behaviour and socioeconomic stratification in Nigeria, providing empirical evidence from Delta State.

For Businesses: Product positioning, pricing, and promotional tactics can be fine-tuned to appeal to different income brackets using the findings.

For Society: The study, by emphasising consumption disparities, may guide social actions aimed at fostering equitable access to goods and services.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Social Class

Social class is a hierarchical divide within a society that is both highly uniform and persistent, characterised by people who share similar values, interests, and behaviours. According to previous research (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Schiffman, Kanuk & Das, 2006), society is structured hierarchically, with different classes having varying degrees of prestige. Theoretically, people of the same social class are likely to exhibit shared characteristics in areas such as income, values, location, attitude, communication style, level of education, and the likelihood of moving up or down the social ladder (Allen, 2002; Gherasim, 2013; Williams, 2002). Finally, according to Kraus, Piff, and Mendoza-Denton (2012), one's social class is affected by their material assets and how they view their position in society. A society's social classes are the hierarchical groups that exist within it according to factors like income, education level, occupation, and way of life. Karl Marx and Max Weber, two prominent figures in traditional sociology, argued that social class influences people's ability to acquire material commodities and services.

Consumer Behavior and Social Stratification

Previous study has shown that shoppers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds behave differently (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2015). The lower class is price sensitive and motivated by need, the middle class places a higher value on quality and social mobility, and the upper class frequently engages in conspicuous consumption.

Social Class Categories

There are numerous factors that can be used to categorise social status. Affluence, education, geography, family history, and income are all part of this category (Allen, 2002). Social class is defined by Kraus, Piff, and Keltner (2011) along three lines: income, education, and occupation. Boyce, Brown, and Moore (2010) state that people's perceptions of these standards are impacted by their local context, which includes the people they hold in high regard. This suggests that people who are economically well-off may attribute different social statuses to themselves depending on how they measure wealth. Thus, one's perception of one's own social class in relation to others in the community, in addition to one's actual financial wealth, determines one's social class (Cohen

et al., 2008). Social class shapes consumer attitudes and lifestyles, according to Mihic and Gordana (2006), who argue that families and people across different socioeconomic strata exhibit comparable behavioural patterns. As per their claim, "buyers' behaviour can be more influenced by their personal values and attitudes than by the amount of money they have access to." People from different socioeconomic origins may have distinct attitudes and preferences when it comes to allocating their resources, even though they have identical earnings. There is a sizable consumer base whose wealth falls short of what is considered affluent in today's culture; this group deserves attention when discussing values. However, they strive to get only the best, therefore they acquire premium products sparingly and in small amounts.

There are seven distinct social class levels, according to Kotler and Keller (2012): working class, lower-uppers, upper-middles, middle class, lower-uppers, and upper-uppers. Country and geographic characteristics determine the variation in these categories. Monthly incomes for middle-class Nigerians range from 75,000 to 100,000 Naira, according to the 2014 Philips Consulting Survey Report. Those in the lower socioeconomic class would be defined as those earning less than 75,000 per month, while those in the upper socioeconomic class would be defined as those earning more than 100,000 per month.

Social Mobility

The transition between social class categories is a compelling aspect of social stratification (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006). They identified three distinct modes of social class mobility: horizontal, upward, and downward. As an individual's prestige enhances over time, they may ascend the social hierarchy. When an individual's standing declines, they may encounter downward mobility, leading to more severe living conditions that were once considered acceptable.

Measuring Social Class

Several reputational, subjective, and objective metrics have been proposed for assessing social class (Schiffman, Kanuk & Das, 2006). According to Adler et al. (2000), Kraus et al. (2012), and Mahalingam (1998), there are three types of social class assessments: subjective, reputational, and objective. Respondents to the former are asked to rate their own social class, while those to the latter are asked to rate the social class affiliations of others in the community. This study's modality is one of the latter.

Purchase (Buying) Behaviour

According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2010), marketing relies on the concept of consumer behaviour, which includes all the choices people make about the purchase, use, and eventual disposal of products, services, time, ideas, and experiences. "Consumer buying behaviour" refers to the final choice made by people and families who purchase goods and services for their own use (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). The purchasing behaviour of consumers is the main focus of this research. A wide variety of media can be used to showcase a product or service. Anyone can buy a garment—in an internet store, a physical store, a showroom, or even a flea market. Several factors greatly affect people's decisions to buy products, and this study aims to determine how much social class affects consumer buying decisions. In most cases, people choose where to buy certain goods either directly or indirectly. Nigerian shoppers have a plethora of options, according to Oghojafor, Ladipo, and Nwagwu (2012). These include traditional markets, modern malls, outdoor markets, seasonal markets, online marketplaces, and mobile market places.

Traditional Shopping

Many Nigerians frequent shopping malls, supermarkets, open markets, and street sellers (Philips Consulting Limited, 2014). According to reports, this practice is driven by consumers' desire to feel things before making a purchase rather than relying solely on information from online merchants.

Social Classes in Nigeria

Nigeria Societies are usually stratified into the following six folds classification:

- (1) **The Upper Upper Class:** Includes about less than one percent of the total population. This class consists of socially prominent wealthy families. This class is dedicated to upholding family traditions, living in a very refined life and rendering community and government service. Entry into this class is generally through birth or marriage.
- (2) **The Lower Upper Class:** Include probably two percent of families in our society and consist of people who are quite wealthy but have not been fully accepted into the highest echelon of the social structure. Senior executives and very successful professional people are typical of this class. Their value system is highly one of adapting themselves in so far as they are able to adapt to the style of living of the upper upper class.
- (3) **The Upper Middle Class:** Include successful professional people, owners of medium size organizations, managers and junior executives. About ten percent of the population belongs to this class. Families in this group are usually very status minded and strive hard to achieve. Most people in this group are university educated and tend to cultivate a broad range of creative interests.
- (4) **The Lower Middle Class:** Comprises about thirty to thirty five percent of the population, clerical workers, owners of small business and conventional white-collar workers belong to this class. Members of this group are generally eager to be respected and devote much attention to maintaining a home, buying good cloths, saving for a university education and living in a good neighborhood.
- (5) **The Upper Lower Class:** Perhaps more than any other group, consists of the average or ordinary citizens. It is usually the largest class accounting for about forty percent of all families, semi-skilled workers and employees of small service establishment are representatives of this class. The upper lower class tends to place a premium on living as well as possible today rather than saving for the future.
- (6) **The Lower Lower Class:** Consists of unskilled workers, and many of the unemployed, between ten and fifteen percent of our population. Its members are frequently apathetic and show little concern for self-betterment. This class had relatively little motivation and is concerned mainly with its own day to day existence. Income is not the only determinant of a social economic class. The source of income, occupation and housing help in determining an individual's position on the social ladder, more recently sociologist have tended to replace question about a person's neighborhood with questions about educational achievement. Education is now considered to be more important than income in determining a person's class. It sometimes happens, for example, that a family with all the characteristics of the lower middle class earns as much as a family in the

upper middle class. Because of its different educational level, attitudes and general life circle, however, its consumption pattern may differ greatly from those of upper middle-class family. The various social classes typically exhibit different behavioural patterns and more important for marketers, different consumption pattern. For example, a member of the upper upper class often drives an expensive car such as Rolls Royce or Mercedes Benz, consumption behavior certainly not common to the lower lower class invariably, social class affects not only the type, quality and quantity of goods consumed but also the shopping patterns and stores patronized.

The Relevance of Social Classes to Marketing Strategies

Social classes are important to the marketers since consumers in the same class exhibit similar patterns in what they buy where they live from where they shop and what they read. Social class characteristics can be related to every aspect of marketing strategy as demonstrated below: -

(1) **Market Segmentation:** Since each social class is homogenous hems of attitudes, values, believes and behaviour. could be used as the bases for segmenting a market such that each social class become a market target to be reached with distinct marketing mix. The product quality that may appeal to people in the lower social class may be unacceptable to people in the supper class. A price that could be affordable to people in the upper class could be out of reach for people in the lower class. Product targeted to any social class has to be distributed through outlet normally patronize by people of that social class for example, a consumer in the upper class will more likely go to a department store or super market to buy some convenience goods such as tooth paste, toilet soap, perfume and likewise the consumer in the lower class may go to the road side kiosk and open market to pick a similar product.

(2) **Advertising:** - social class characteristics can give direction similar product. to advertising. The language and symbols used in advertising must be understood by the social class to which the advertising is directed. Advertising in Pidgin English and ethnic language is usually beamed to consumers in the lower middle and lower classes. Advertisement couched in well-modulated voice and impeccable English is targeted to consumers in the upper middle and upper class.

Different norms and values between social groups also means that certain advertising symbols may be relevant to one group and totally meaningless to another. It has been observed that lower class consumers are more receptive to advertising that is strongly visual in character that shows activity, ongoing work and life, impression of energy, and solutions to practical problems in daily requirements. In contrast, upper class consumers are more open to subtle symbolisms that connote high status. Media choice is important in reaching the different social groups. Middle class and upper-class consumers are more likely to read nationals newspaper and prestigious news magazine such as news watch, Tell and West Africa than the lower-class consumers. Lower class consumer may be reached more effectively through advertisement in soft sell human interest magazine such as Prime People, Vintage People, Fun Times, Ikebe Super and the like. Advertisement on radio will be more effective in reaching the lower-class group than the people in upper class except advert run during the news Prime Time. TV advertisements are also selective in reaching various segment of the social class. Advertisements during prime time such as during the national news or during an intellectual discussion on TV are more likely to catch the attention of upper class and middle-class people than lower class consumers. Advertisement runs on TV during popular shows as the new Masquerade, Village Headmaster and Samanja will reach greater percentage of lower middle class and lower-class groups than upper class people.

3. **Product Development:** Social classes may react differently to product characteristics and styles. People higher up on the social ladder are more likely to go for high quality high priced products while those on the lower range of social ladder are more of likely to go for high quality high priced products while those on the lower range of the social ladder will make do with inferior and cheaper version of the same product. Manufacturers of textile materials in Nigeria appear to pay more attention to producing ant qualities that appeal to lower class consumers than the middle class and upper-class consumers. It is perhaps possible to argue that the quality of textile material produced in Nigeria is not necessary a deliberate marketing strategy to satisfy the need of the lower-class consumer. The poor quality of the textile material is attributable to the low level of textile technology which cannot yet produce high quality materials to match those of "Hollandis" and "Intorica" brands imported materials from abroad.

In the area of shoe manufacturing, our two major shoe manufacturing companies Bata and Lernard, made strategic use of quality differentiation to meet the needs of the different social class. The qualities range from pure leather shoes for the upper, middle and upper classes to synthetic leather for the lower middle and lower classes. Plastic shoes are targeted to the lower-class consumers.

4. **Purchase Behaviour:** Substantial differences exist between social classes in the purchaser of clothing, furniture, leisure, goods and food product.

a. **Clothing:** Upper class and middle-class consumers are most style conscious and interested in fashion. Lower class consumers are most likely to dress for comfort than fashion

b. **Furniture:** Furniture has a symbolic function for consumers who are higher on the social scale, whereas it has utilitarian function for those lower on the social scale. Lower classes are likely to emphasize sturdiness, comfort and maintenance in furniture.

c. **Leisure Goods:** Consumers high on the social scale are likely to engage in sport such as tennis, squash, golf and swimming. Lower class consumers are likely to spend their feel leisure time hunting, fishing and playing draught. Observers feel that the upper class activities may be compensation for a more sedentary existence since they involve active movement. Individual in the lower classes do not require the same level of activities since they are likely to be in physically active occupations.

d. **Food Products:** Those on the higher end of the social scale are most likely to purchase food items such as rice, beans and salt in bags at a time. Those on the lower end of social scale are most likely to buy those same food items in smaller measures such as in cups or mudus (in the north) or things (in Lagos). A family may slaughter a cow all alone or share a full cow with another family. The meat is preserved in the deep freezer until the stock is exhausted. In summary, it means that those on the higher end of the social class buy food items in large quantity while those on the lower level tend to buy food items in small quantities. Because of this pattern of purchase behaviour, lower class consumers buy food items more frequently than those in the middle and upper class.

Theoretical Review

The study's foundation is the Psychographic Segmentation Theory, which divides customers into groups according to lifestyle factors and psychological characteristics (Plummer, 1974). It makes the assumption that people who have similar interests and values will make similar purchases.

Empirical Review

Much empirical study has been spurred by the existing literature, which suggests that social class is vital for understanding consumer purchasing behaviours. Several empirical research on different aspects of consumer shopping behaviour, especially in developing nations, are reviewed in this section. The impact of consumers' socioeconomic status and income on their purchasing behaviour was studied by Mihic and Gordana (2006). The income levels, vocations, and educational attainment of customers were documented using data collected from 270 respondents in Croatia's two biggest cities. Consumers' decisions on the acquisition and consumption of a wider variety of goods are more impacted by social class than by wealth, according to the findings. The influence of cultural elements on customer purchasing decisions was investigated by Durmaz, Celik, and Oruc (2011). Results from the survey of 1,286 people show that customers' values, customs, and beliefs are the most important aspects of their shopping habits. A cross-sectional survey was conducted by Oghojafor and Nwagwu (2013) with the aim of identifying the socioeconomic factors that impact the shopping habits of consumers in emerging nations. A total of 275 women residing in Lagos State, Nigeria, were surveyed for the study using closed-ended, multiple-choice questions. The study found that Nigerian women's grocery store patronage is unaffected by socioeconomic variables like income, educational attainment, occupation, marital status, and family size. According to the research, retailers shouldn't put too much stock in these factors since they won't have much of an impact on marketing campaigns. Income, occupation, and education were some of the demographic factors that Alooma and Lawan (2013) looked at as they related to consumers' clothing buying decisions in Borno State, Nigeria. These characteristics have a substantial impact on consumers' choice to buy, according to a set of structured surveys filled out by 174 people. Market segmentation according to social class, especially income, was suggested as a way to improve the marketing strategy' effectiveness. Ohen, Umeze, and Inyang (2014) also analysed the buying habits of several consumer categories in Nigeria's Akwa-Ibom State for certain agricultural products to determine how certain economic factors affect customer preferences and behaviours. Income was found to have a substantial effect on consumers' purchasing habits, whereas educational attainment was found to have no discernible effect. Also taking a number of socioeconomic factors into account, Oghojafor and Nwagwu (2013) assessed customer selection of retail firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. A convenience sample method was used to select respondents from the sampling frame. After they completed the surveys, they were asked to return them and evaluate the data. There was no correlation between consumers' choice of local retailers and socioeconomic factors like income, education level, or occupation, according to the statistics. In addition, research by Okpara (2019) and Adeyemi (2020) shows that consumers' socioeconomic level has a major impact on their spending habits, how they perceive brands, and how loyal they are to certain brands. There has been a dearth of studies that concentrate only on Delta State, thus this one aims to fill that void.

Gap in Literature

A lack of literature on the topic suggests that Delta State has not made an effort to address the challenge of assessing social class, especially in regard to objective measurements. Most studies on this subject have come from other parts of the world, specifically the North, South, and West. In an attempt to bridge that divide, this study is being carried out in the state of Delta.

Methodology

This article relies solely on secondary sources to support its claims and suggestions because of the qualitative nature of the research it presents. It can be inferred from this that the study originated from discussions on theoretical research conducted by researchers from diverse philosophical backgrounds. The sources utilised for information gathering included books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and a range of online media. Following a content analysis on the data obtained from various sources, conclusions and suggestions were formulated.

Findings

The analysis indicates that:

- Income level significantly influences product choice and purchase frequency.
- Educational attainment correlates with brand preference and awareness.
- Occupational status determines access to luxury and imported goods.
- Lower-class consumers prioritize affordability, while upper-class consumers value prestige and quality.
- These findings underscore the stratified nature of consumer markets in Delta State.

Discussion

The results align with global theories of consumer segmentation and support existing literature emphasizing the role of social stratification in consumption. In Delta State, where oil wealth and uneven development coexist, consumer behavior reflects economic disparity. The findings suggest that marketing strategies should be tailored to the cultural and socioeconomic realities of distinct social classes to maximize product acceptance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that social class remains a dominant factor shaping consumer purchase behavior in Delta State, Nigeria. The implications are twofold:

1. For marketers: Product positioning and pricing strategies should reflect the consumption capacities of various social strata.
2. For policymakers: Efforts should be made to reduce income inequality to enhance consumer welfare and stimulate economic participation.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study will make several important contributions to the existing body of knowledge on consumer behavior and social stratification in Nigeria, specifically within the context of Delta State:

Empirical Insight into Class-Based Consumption Patterns: Delta State doesn't have a lot of academic data, so this project will provide real-world proof about how socioeconomic class affects how people buy things. This will help us understand how people from different social classes buy things in developing economies better.

Contextualization of Social Class Theory in a Nigerian Setting: This study aims to broaden the applicability of consumer behaviour and social class theories to African contexts by applying them to the socioeconomic and cultural environment of Nigeria. These theories have been extensively examined in Western countries.

Identification of Key Determinants of Purchase Behavior: The study will improve the theoretical knowledge of how socioeconomic factors impact market behaviour by identifying and analysing the roles of employment, income, and education as predictors of consumer decisions.

Model for Market Segmentation in Developing Economies: The study's conclusions will offer a framework for marketers to accurately segment and target Nigerian consumers based on social class characteristics, serving as a model for analogous marketplaces across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Policy-Relevant Insights: Policymakers will benefit from the research's data-driven insights on consumption gaps, which will help them develop policies that promote inclusive growth and fair access to goods and services.

Academic Contribution: Future research on consumer behaviour, social mobility, and market expansion in Nigeria will greatly benefit from this study because it will fill a research gap by combining sociology and marketing to analyse purchasing activities.

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