

THE QUALITY FACTOR IN CONSUMERS' PREFERENCE OF TEXTILE FABRICS: A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR DOMESTIC AND IMPORTED TEXTILE FABRICS (WRAPPERS) IN ABAKALIKI, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to determine if there is any significant difference between domestic and imported textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to design, colourfastness and durability attributes and in terms of overall quality. Exploratory and descriptive research designs were adopted in the study. Primary data were collected from 312 female respondents in nine zones within Abakaliki Urban, with the use of questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies, percentages and means, while Kruskal-Wallis rank test and Z-test were used to test the hypotheses. From data analysis, these findings became evident: Imported wrappers possess higher quality than domestic wrappers; domestic wrappers have attribute weakness in durability, colourfastness, texture, fabric strength and weight. There were brands of domestic wrappers (Nichem Wax and Nigerian Wax) identified as possessing high quality, while other brands (Super Print, Top Wax, Ankara, Veritable Real Wax) were indicated as washing off colour. The implication of the findings is that domestic textile firms must re-engineer their marketing strategies and programmes. Based on the findings the researchers recommended that domestic textile firms should embark on product modification; entrench product innovation in their strategic plans; collect vital customer information through monitoring research and be abreast with current developments in the textile market and industry under study.

Keywords: Quality, Preference, Textile fabrics, Textile fabric attributes.

1.0 Introduction

A very important dimension of consumer behaviour is the exhibition of his preference. Whereas one consumer may derive much utility from a particular brand of product, another may not derive as much utility from that brand of product (Ekerete 1996). Marketers, therefore, try to determine why consumers prefer one brand of product to another.

Consumer preference is used primarily to mean an option that has the greatest anticipated value among a number of options. It could be conceived of as an individual's attitude toward a set of objects, typically reflected in an explicit decision-making process (Lichtenstein and Slovic, 2006). Alternatively, one could interpret the term "preference" to mean evaluative judgment in the sense of liking or disliking an object (Scherer, 2005). This is regarded as the most typical definition employed in psychology.

Past research studies (Kalu and Ikwuegbu, 2000; Okpara, 2007; Ogunnaike, 2010) have established that there is strong consumer preference for foreign products in African countries and especially in Nigeria. Okechukwu and Onyemah (1999), in a study found that the Nigerian consumers' obsession with foreign-made goods had had a detrimental effect on the domestic manufacturing industry. Sagagi (2010 a) points out that in terms of textile products, there is a deep rooted belief among consumers in Nigeria that foreign fabrics are superior in quality. This preference for foreign products is one of the factors that have been advanced for the collapse of the textile companies in Nigeria. The import policy of the government in the 1980s and 1990s favoured wholesome importation of manufactured products. This brought about mass importation of finished products into the country (Okoroanyanwu, 2007). As the economy became increasingly opened, Nigerian manufacturers continued to face serious difficulties in surviving foreign competition. By 1998, the textile industry in Nigeria in general began to experience downturn in their fortunes and this spread through to the year 2000 which coincided with when Nigeria joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Ogunwusi, 2010). One of the requirements was that the country should open its door to manufacturers of goods from countries that are members of WTO.

Today, with current import policy of the Federal Government, the Nigerian textile market is filled with foreign textile products of different varieties. Locally manufactured fabrics have to contend with the influx of foreign products in terms of price, quality and otherwise. The High Performing Asian Economies (HPAE) which include China, India, Malaysia, and South Korea among others have succeeded in offering Nigerian buyers with their brands of textile products, which tend to dominate the domestic textile markets (Sagagi, 2010 b; Uzor, 2010).

From the foregoing scenario, the consumers' preference of imported fabrics (wrappers) over domestic brands seems obvious, what is not very clear is the basis of the comparison and preference especially by users in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State and hence, the need to undertake the study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The situation in Nigeria over the years has been that consumers perceive foreign-made products differently from domestic or locally-made products (Kalu and Ikwuegbu, 2000;

Ogunnaike, 2010). They ascribe higher quality and value to foreign-made products than domestic brands. Their perception and attitude towards domestic products have been generally unfavourable or negative when compared to imported brands. Because of these perceptual and attitudinal differences, which ascribe positive image or evaluations to foreign-made products, consumers end up preferring and buying more of the imported products (Sagagi, 2010a).

The situation became worst, when, despite the protest of the Textile Manufacturers Association, the Federal Government went ahead to lift the ban on the importation of textile products (Uzor, 2010). This reversal of policy compounded the problem of producers and marketers of textile fabrics (wrappers). The dismal situation is that the Nigerian market is filled with variety of brands of imported textile fabrics (wrappers) and the implication is that the domestic brands are now facing fierce competitive marketing battle with imported brands.

Basically, consumers' preference for textile fabrics (wrappers) is invariably, influenced by the interplay of some factors or attributes. The attributes include: quality, design, colour attraction, colour-fastness, durability, texture, fashion, price, weight and strength of fabric (wrapper) (Yates, 2002; Brannon, 2005; Yoo, 2003; Ozo, 2002; Iwarere, 2009). Addressing and analyzing the impact of these factors on consumers' purchase decisions is very crucial. This is because not much is known on how these factors affect purchase decisions in terms of wrappers. Past studies were undertaken generally on textile fabrics but not specifically on wrappers. It is now very critical to measure how consumers perceive the locally-made textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of possessing or lacking in the requisite intrinsic and extrinsic attributes. What are the domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) lacking in terms of quality that makes them averse to consumers' acceptance and preference over imported brands?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- (1) To determine if there is any significant difference between domestic and imported brands of textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to design attribute.
- (2) To ascertain if there is any significant difference between domestic and imported brands of textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to colour-fastness attribute.
- (3) To find out if there is any significant difference between domestic and imported textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to durability attribute.
- (4) To determine which of the two brands-domestic or imported-textile fabrics (wrappers) consumers rate higher in terms of overall quality.

1.4 Statement of Hypotheses

- (1) H_{01} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to design attribute.
- (2) H_{02} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to colour-fastness attribute
- (3) H_{03} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to durability attribute

- (4) Ho₄: There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of overall quality.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Preference

Consumer preference is used primarily to mean an option that has the greatest anticipated value among a number of options. Accordingly, preference refers to some desired state and implies that more than one state is possible and that there are some options. It could be conceived of as an individual's attitude toward a set of objects, typically reflected in an explicit decision-making process (Lichtenstein and Slovic, 2006).

Scherer (2005) interprets the term "preference" to mean evaluative judgment in the sense of liking or disliking an object. This is regarded as the most typical definition employed in psychology. Sharot, De Martino and Dolan, (2009) point out that preference is necessarily stable overtime. Preference can be notably modified by decision-making process, such as choices, even in an unconscious way.

Preference is the power or ability to choose one thing over another with the anticipation that the choice will result in greater satisfaction, greater capability or improved performance (Kotler, 2003). Brand preference means that target customers usually choose one brand over other competing brands perhaps because of product performance, positive word-of-mouth, emotions, customer experience, customer value or customer habits (McCarthy, 1981).

Once a company defines its target market, it must learn about their needs, preferences and habits. Not understanding one's customers' motivations, needs and preference can hurt. Hence marketers collect precise information about the preferences and behaviour of individual customers; they enable the companies to secure customer patronage and customer loyalty as never before (Kotler, 2003).

Apicerno (2013) points out that preference for a product can make or break a company. According to him, if consumers generally like a product, it can stay around for years and sell millions of the product. However, if consumers do not like the product, it could disappear very quickly if the company cannot figure out how to fix the problem. He further adds that companies routinely study the market to find out what customers like and dislike about their products as well as competitors' products. This is usually done by an internal marketing department or outsourced to a market research firm. Phone, surveys, electronic survey, focus groups and consumer samplings are common methods for gathering information in terms of consumer preference.

2.2 Factors Influencing Brand Preference

Brand adoption and preference have been receiving increased attention by academics and researchers. Cooper (1993) noted that most new products or innovations come with high risks as most of them fail in the marketplace, thus creating the need for marketers to have a clear understanding of success factors in brand adoption and preference. Theories of adoption have often been used to explain how consumers form preferences for various goods and services (Rogers, 1995; Mason, 1990).

Some of the important product decisions in any marketing context are product, variety, product performance, product features, product design, product presentation, sizes and others (Doyle, 2002). Consumer surveys often reveal that quality is one of the most important decision factors for consumers, if not the most important (Keller, 2000). Product quality stands for the ability of a product to perform its functions (Kotler, 2003). Richards (2013) observes that analyzing factors that determine consumer preferences helps businesses target their products toward specific consumer groups, develop new products and identify why some products are more successful than others.

2.3 Quality

Boone and Kurtz (1995) define quality as “the degree of excellence or superiority that an organization’s product possesses.” Other experts have defined quality as “fitness for use” “conformance to requirements” “freedom from variation” (Juran, Crosby and Taguda, 1990 cited in Kotler, 2003: 84). The American Society for Quality Control defines quality as “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs (Miller, 1993 cited in Kotler, 2003:84). This definition is considered as a customer-centered definition.

Quality encompasses both the tangible and intangible aspects of a firm’s products. In a technical sense quality can refer to physical traits such as features, performance, reliability, durability, aesthetics, serviceability and conformance to specification. Although quality can be evaluated from many perspectives, the customer is the key perceiver of quality because his purchase decision determines the success of the organization’s product and often the fate of the organization itself.

Quality has become an important dimension for differentiation of products as companies adopt a value model and provide higher quality for less money. Quality is the best assurance of customer allegiance, the strongest defense against (foreign) competition and the only path to sustained growth and earnings (Kotler and Keller, 2009).

Kotler (2003) avers that the seller has delivered quality whenever his product service meets or exceeds the customer’s expectations. A company that satisfies most of the customers’ needs most of the time is called a quality company. However, Kotler points out that it is important to distinguish between conformance quality and performance quality. When the product conforms with predetermined specifications it is said to have conformance quality, while it has performance quality if it performs as expected in meeting the needs of the consumers.

2.4 Empirical Review

Kalu and Ikwuegbu (2000) undertook a study on “Consumer’s Perception of Locally-Made-Goods in Nigeria, the Experience of Selected Firms in Textiles Industry in Institutions of Higher Learning in Rivers State. The study established that foreign textiles were perceived as of very high quality while local ones were of moderate quality. The local textiles were perceived as marginally durable unlike the foreign brands that were seen as more durable. Both brands were perceived to be readily available in the market and pose no convenience problem in times of need or purchase. It was also found that consumers

perceived the foreign textiles to be costly while the local textiles were seen as moderately priced.

Njoku's (2004) study on the "Marketability of Made-in-Nigeria Textiles Materials", carried out in Lagos, found that overall attitude of consumers in Nigeria had relatively improved when compared to the position of previous studies (Aire, 1973; Okechukwu and Onyema, 1999). Evidence from their data analysis showed that generally, Nigerians were becoming supportive of made-in-Nigeria textile goods and appear to have optimistic view of their quality.

Ogunnaike (2010) carried out a study titled "Perception of Locally Made Products: A Study on Textile Fabrics in Kaduna State". The study was undertaken due to the preference among Nigerians for foreign-made goods which was considered both alarming and disturbing especially when considered in the light of its effects on local industries. The study found that most of the respondents preferred foreign-made textiles to locally-made textiles. It was also found that motivation is an influencing factor in consumer's product purchase and preference. The consumers were motivated by such variables as quality, colour, past experience, price and product package. Oladele and Arongundade (2011) in their research titled "Attitudes of University Students Towards Made-in-Nigeria Textile Products", examined the problems and prospects inherent in marketing home-made goods in Nigeria. From the study, it was established that majority of the respondents preferred imported to locally produced goods and they were usually guided by quality and trend for not patronizing made-in-Nigeria goods. However, majority of the respondents agreed that in some cases, locally produced goods might offer better value than the imported ones.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This research was anchored on the utility theory. The utility theory provides a methodological framework for the evaluation of alternative choices made by consumers. This theory was propounded by Marcel Richter in 1966. He defined consumer preference as "the subjective (individual) tastes, as measured by utility of various bundles of goods". They permit the consumer to rank these bundles of goods according to the level of utility they give the consumer (Marcel, 1966: 635-645).

Utility is a measure of relative satisfaction. In other words, it is a term referring to the total satisfaction received by a consumer from consuming a good or service. It is the satisfaction that each choice provides to the consumer decision maker. Thus, utility theory assumes that any decision is made on the basis of the utility maximization principle, according to which the best choice is the one that provides the highest utility (satisfaction) to the decision maker ([www.reference for business.com; www.fullcol.edu/chan/...utility_maximization](http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/www.fullcol.edu/chan/...utility_maximization))

3.0 Methodology

The researchers adopted exploratory and descriptive research designs in the study. The exploratory design was initially used to collect preliminary information (consumers' textile ranking criteria) to help plan and structure the main study, while descriptive design was adopted to describe the behaviour of consumers in terms of their preference of textile fabrics.

The study area was Abakaliki urban, which is the capital of Ebonyi State in Nigeria. The population of study comprised of all the female consumers of textile fabrics in Abakaliki Urban, from 18yrs and above. The sample size of 350 was determined using Topman Formula, since the total population of female textile consumers in Abakaliki Urban was unknown. The researchers collected primary data from the respondents using questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire type was a modified 5-Point Likert Scale. Convenience sampling technique was adopted in administering copies of questionnaire, in a face-to-face contact, to individual respondents. To analyze the data collected frequencies, percentages and means were used, while the hypotheses were tested using Kruskal-Wallis Rank test and Z-test.

4.0 Data Analysis

Table 1: Consumers’ Current Usage of Textile Fabrics (Wrappers)

Brand of Textile Fabric (Wrapper)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total
Domestic Wrappers	276(88.46)	36(11.54)	312(100)
Imported Wrappers	266(85.26)	46(14.74)	312(100)

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The researchers sought to determine if the respondents were currently using both domestic and imported brands of textile fabrics (wrappers). The result in table 1 shows that most of the respondents are currently using both brands.

Table 2: Consumers’ Ranking of Attributes Importance

S/N	Textile Fabric (Wrapper) Attributes	Approximated Weight (in%) from Consumers’ Responses
1	Durability	15
2	Colour-fastness	14
3	Design	13
4	Texture	12
5	Attractive colour	11
6	Strength	9
7	Price	8
8	Weight	7
9	Fashion	6
10	Availability	5
	Total	100

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The result in table 2, shows consumers’ ranking of attributes importance, which they use to evaluate and determine choice of textile fabric (wrapper) brand. From their responses the various attributes are arranged according to their importance to consumers.

Table 3: Consumers' Rating of Domestic Textile Fabrics'(Wrappers') Attributes

Attributes	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total	Mean
Design	73(23.4)	104(33.3)	104(33.3)	29(9.3)	2(0.6)	312(100)	3.7
Texture	13(4.2)	65(20.8)	141(45.2)	68(21.8)	25(8.0)	312(100)	2.9
Durability	22(7.1)	42(13.5)	95(30.4)	108(34.6)	45(14.4)	312(100)	2.6
Availability	127(40.7)	91(29.2)	62(19.9)	29(9.3)	3(1.0)	312(100)	4.0
Colour-fastness	21(6.7)	52(16.7)	79(25.3)	84(26.9)	76(24.4)	312(100)	2.5
Attractive colour	62(19.9)	108(34.6)	95(30.4)	36(11.5)	11(3.5)	312(100)	3.6
Fashion	49(15.7)	98(31.4)	107(34.3)	45(14.4)	13(4.2)	312(100)	3.4
Price	39(12.5)	83(26.6)	121(40.1)	52(16.7)	13(4.2)	312(100)	3.3
Strength	31(9.9)	39(12.5)	91(29.2)	101(32.4)	50(16.0)	312(100)	2.7
Weight	20(6.4)	44(14.1)	125(40.1)	79(25.3)	44(4.1)	312(100)	2.7
Mean							3.14

Source: Survey Data, 2014 The data in table3 reveal that consumers rated the quality of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of ten attributes. These are the attributes or criteria used by consumers in determining the preferred brand of textile fabrics (wrappers).

The ratings are presented in 5-Point Likert Scale, interpreted as follows:

1.00-1.99 = Poor; 2.00-2.99 = Fair; 3.00-3.99 = Good; 4.00-4.99 = Very Good; 5.00 = Excellent.

Table 4: Consumers' Rating of Imported Textile Fabrics' (Wrappers') Attributes

Attributes	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total	Mean
Design	131(42.0)	133(42.6)	39(12.5)	8(2.6)	1(0.3)	312(100)	4.1
Texture	120(38.5)	155(49.7)	35(11.2)	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	312(100)	4.3
Durability	187(59.9)	90(28.8)	34(10.9)	1(0.3)	0(0)	312(100)	4.5
Availability	23(7.4)	39(12.5)	129(41.3)	99(31.7)	22(7.1)	312(100)	2.8
Colour-fastness	122(39.1)	134(42.9)	44(14.1)	12(3.9)	0(0)	312(100)	4.2
Attractive Colour	78(25.0)	135(43.3)	78(25.0)	20(6.4)	1(0.3)	312(100)	3.9
Fashion	100(32.1)	118(37.8)	66(21.2)	21(6.7)	7(2.2)	312(100)	3.9
Price	62(19.9)	87(27.9)	88(28.2)	65(20.8)	10(3.2)	312(100)	3.4
Strength	95(30.4)	135(43.3)	79(25.3)	2(0.6)	1(0.3)	312(100)	4.0
Weight	82(26.3)	120(38.5)	94(30.1)	13(4.2)	3(1.0)	312(100)	3.8
Mean							3.9

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The data in table 4 above shows consumers rating of the quality of imported textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of ten attributes. These are the attributes used by consumers in determining the choice of textile fabric (wrapper) brand to purchase or use.

Table 5: Consumers’ Use of Domestic Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) Possessing High Quality

Index	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	S/F
Strongly Agree	5	90	28.8	450
Agree	4	170	54.5	680
Disagree	3	21	6.7	63
Strongly disagree	2	18	5.8	36
I don’t know	1	13	4.2	13
Total		312	100	1242
Mean				4.0

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The researchers sought to determine if consumers have experienced or used any domestic wrapper possessing high quality. The result in table 5 shows that a majority of the respondents, constituting 170 (54.5%) gave a positive response to this question by agreeing; the mean-value response is 4.0, showing high positive agreement by consumers.

Table 6: Brand Names of Domestic Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) Possessing High Quality

S/N	Index	Frequency	Percentage
1	Nichem Wax	204	65.4
2	Nigerian Wax	186	59.6
3	UNTL Wax	12	3.8
4	Super Print Block Wax	6	1.9
5	Veritable Wax	6	1.9
6	Super Wax	4	1.3
7	GCM Superior Print	3	1.0
8	ABC Wax	2	0.6
9	Nigerian Block Wax	2	0.6

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The researchers sought to know the brands of domestic wrappers having high quality. The result in table 6 reveals two domestic brands possessing high quality; 204 (65.4%) of the consumers indicated that Nichem Wax has high quality while; 186 (59.6%) of the consumers agreed that Nigerian Wax has high quality.

Table 7: Consumers' Experience of Using Imported Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) Possessing Low Quality

Index	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	S/F
Strongly Agree	5	22	7.1	225
Agree	4	45	14.4	368
Disagree	3	81	26.0	153
Strongly Disagree	2	90	28.8	100
I don't know	1	74	23.7	74
Total		312	100	920
Mean				2.9

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The result in table 7 above shows that there were minimal number of consumers who have had experience of using imported textile fabrics (wrappers) possessing low or unsatisfactory quality; 22 (7.1%) of the consumers strongly agreed to this effect, while 45 (14.48%) agreed. The mean-value response is 2.9 showing low positive experience of consumers with imported textile wrappers possessing low or unsatisfactory quality.

Table 8: Brand Names of Imported Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) Possessing Low or Unsatisfactory Quality (Attributes)

S/N	Brand Name	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Hollandis Wax	15	4.8
2.	London Wax	10	3.2
3.	High Target	9	2.9
4.	English Wax	8	2.6
5.	Ghana Wax	7	2.2
6.	ValiscoHollandis	5	1.6
7.	AkosoNbo Wax	4	1.2
8.	Ankara	3	1.0
9.	Java Gold	2	0.6
10.	Cote Divore Wax	1	0.3
11.	Dubai, wax	1	0.3
12.	SosoHollandis	1	0.3
13.	Cotounu Wax	1	0.3

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The result in table 8, shows that incidence of consumers' experience of low quality imported textile fabrics (wrappers) is very low.

Table 9: Consumers Who have Experienced Domestic Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) that Wash Off Colour

Index	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	S/F
Strongly Agree	5	203	65.1	1015
Agree	4	82	26.3	328
Disagree	3	3	0.9	9
Strongly Disagree	2	4	1.3	8
I don't know	1	20	6.4	20
Total		312	100	1380
Mean				4.42

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The result in table 9 shows that most of the respondents have experienced domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) that wash off colour, 203 (65.1%) strongly agreed, while 82 (26.3%) agreed to this effect. The mean value response is 4.42, giving a very strong indication or evidence of the existence of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) that wash off colour.

Table 10: Brand Names of Domestic Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) that Wash off Colour

S/N	Brand Name	Frequency	Percentage
1	Super Print	219	70.2
2	Top Wax	213	68.3
3	Ankara	203	65.1
4	UNTL Real Wax	195	62.3
5	Veritable Real Wax	189	60.5
6	Nigerian Wax	39	12.5
7	Nichem Wax	12	3.8

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The researchers sought to determine the incidence of colourfastness of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers). The result in table 10 above shows five brands where the incidence of washing off colour is high. The brands are Super Print (70.2%), Top Wax (68.3%), Ankara (65.1%), UNTL Real Wax (62.3%) and Veritable Real Wax (60.5%) of the respondents.

Table 11: Consumers Who have Experienced Imported Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) that Wash Off Colour

Index	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	S/F
Strongly Agree	5	47	15.0	235
Agree	4	79	25.3	316
Disagree	3	52	16.7	156
Strongly Disagree	2	32	10.3	64
I don't know	1	102	32.7	102
Total		312	100	803
Mean				2.57

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The result in the table above, shows that forty-seven (47) consumers, representing 15.0% strongly agree to having experienced imported wrappers that wash off colour; seventy-nine (79) giving 25.3% agreed. The mean value response is 2.57 which indicates that the incidence of imported textile fabrics (wrappers) washing off color is low.

Table 12: Brand Names of Imported Textile Fabrics (Wrappers) that Wash off Colour

S/N	Brand Name	Frequency	Percentage
1.	London Wax	16	5.1
2.	Hollandis Wax	16	5.1
3.	High Target	10	3.2
4.	English Wax	5	1.6
5.	Akosoibo Wax	4	1.3
6.	Ghana Wax	2	0.6
7.	Princess Wax	2	0.6
8.	Dubai, Wax	1	0.3
9.	Togotex Wax	1	0.3

Source: Survey Data, 2014

The result in table 12 indicates only minimal incidence of imported textile fabrics (wrappers) brands that wash off colour.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

1. H_{01} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to design attribute.
 H_{A1} : There is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to design attribute.
2. The critical value is $Z_{0.05} = 1.64$
3. Computed test statistic is $Z = 5.71$
 $5.71 > 1.64$
4. Decision: The value of the test statistic is greater than the critical value. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The conclusion is that there is significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to design attribute.

Hypothesis 2

1. H_{02} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to colour-fastness attribute.
 H_{A2} : There is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to colour-fastness attribute
2. The critical value is $Z_{0.05} = 1.64$
3. Computed test statistic is $Z = 21.3$
 $21.3 > 1.64$
4. Decision: The value of the test statistic is greater than the critical value. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The conclusion is that there is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to colour-fastness attribute

Hypothesis 3

1. H_{03} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to durability attribute.
 H_{A3} : There is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to durability attribute.
2. The critical value is $Z_{0.05} = 1.64$
3. Computed test statistic is $Z = 23.8$
 $23.8 > 1.64$
4. Decision: The value of the test statistic is greater than the critical value. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The conclusion is that there is significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) with respect to durability attribute.

Hypothesis 4

1. H_{04} : There is no significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of overall quality.

H_{A4} : There is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of overall quality

2. The critical value at $\alpha = 0.05$ and 1 d.f is $\chi^2 = 3.84$

3. Computed test statistic is $K = 70.3$

$70.3 > 3.84$

4. **Decision:** The value of the test statistic is greater than the critical value. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The conclusion is that there is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of overall quality.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Attributes' Strengths and Weaknesses of Domestic Wrappers

From consumers' rating, the areas of weakness of domestic wrappers' attributes include: durability, colour-fastness, texture, fabric strength and weight. The durability is rated with a low mean-value of 2.6, while that of imported wrappers has a mean-value of 4.5, which indicates very good rating. Another area of weakness is in colour-fastness or colour retention attribute, where domestic wrappers scored a fair mean-value rating of 2.5, compared to imported brands with very good mean-value rating of 4.2; the texture attribute of domestic wrapper is weak with consumers' fair mean-value rating of 2.9, imported wrappers' texture has an advantage in this area, with very good mean-value rating of 4.3. Another area where domestic wrappers have attribute weakness when compared with imported wrappers is in terms of fabric strength. Here, domestic wrappers have a fair mean-value rating of 2.7, while imported wrappers have very good mean-value rating of 4.0. Domestic wrappers are also weak in the weight attribute with a fair mean-value rating of 2.7, while imported wrappers' weight is relatively better with good mean-value rating of 3.8.

One of these areas of weakness is in harmony with the finding of previous researchers. Kalu and Ikwuegbu (2000) found in their study on consumers' perception of locally-made and foreign textiles in Rivers State that local textiles were perceived as marginally durable, while foreign brands were perceived as being more durable.

The hypotheses tested on three of the above attributes of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers), rated by respondents to be weak, also further confirmed this fact, since all the alternate hypotheses were accepted, and the conclusion arrived at by the researchers is that there is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of quality with respect to design, colour-fastness and durability attributes.

In the area of strength for domestic wrappers' attributes, the only attribute revealed through data analysis is availability, where the mean-value consumers rating is 4.0, which depicts very good rating, while imported wrappers have mean-value rating of 2.8, which show fair consumers' rating. However, with the change in the import policy of the Federal

Government, this can no more be regarded as a strength. The lifting of the ban placed on the importation of foreign-made textile fabrics (wrappers) (Uzor, 2010) has brought about the availability and flooding of the local markets with imported or foreign-made brands. Thus, the competitive position of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) has become more precarious now.

There are areas where domestic wrappers' attributes were rated at par with imported wrappers. These attributes include attractive colour, fashion and price, which all have good mean-value rating by consumers. In terms of design of domestic and imported wrappers, the difference in consumers' rating is slight or marginal; while imported wrappers have mean-value rating of 4.1, domestic wrappers have 3.7 mean-value consumers' rating. However, the domestic textile firms should try to bridge this slight gap or advantage which imported wrappers have in the design attribute. This is because, as Nussbaum (2004) and Kotler (1984) point out, design is the factor that will often give a company its competitive edge. They maintain that as competition intensifies, design offers a potent way to differentiate and position a company's product. Design can shift consumers' perceptions to make brand experience more rewarding. A bad design can ruin a product's prospects.

5.2 Attributes' Strengths of Imported Wrappers

Evidence from data analysis reveals that imported wrappers have attributes' strength advantage over domestic wrappers in some areas. The durability of imported wrappers is rated by consumers to have mean-value of 4.5, which represents very good rating. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Kalu and Ikwuegbu (2000) in a study on Consumers' Perception of Locally-made Goods in Nigeria, in which they expressly stated that local textiles are perceived as marginally durable unlike the foreign counterparts that are seen as more durable. Another area of attribute strength for imported wrappers is colour-fastness or colour retention. This was given very good mean-value rating of 4.2. The textile fabric (wrapper) strength of imported wrappers was also rated very good with a mean value of 4.0, which gives it an advantage over domestic wrapper with mean value of 2.7, which depicts fair rating.

It has to be noted that consumers attach much importance to durability, colour-fastness and texture of wrappers. Durability was ranked 1st, colour-fastness 2nd and texture 4th. The implication is that these areas of strength when taken together, ultimately accord imported wrappers high overall rating by consumers. Therefore, the domestic textile fabric firms must take steps to ensure that their wrappers measure or rate at par on these attributes with those of imported wrappers.

5.3 Measurement of Overall Quality of Domestic and Imported Textile Fabrics (Wrappers)

In this study, a composite of eight (8) intrinsic attributes which constitute consumers' evaluation criteria were used to measure the overall quality of domestic and imported wrappers, and test the hypothesis formulated in this respect. This agrees with the observation of Schiffman and Kanuk (2008) who stated that consumers judge the quality of a product on the basis of a variety of informational cues that they associate with the

product. Some of these cues are said to be intrinsic to the product, while others are extrinsic. Such cues provide the basis for perceptions of product quality. In this respect, Zeithaml (1988) points out that a top priority for marketers is to find out which of the many extrinsic and intrinsic cues consumers use to signal quality.

Thus, the hypothesis on determining the overall quality position of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) vis-à-vis imported brands was subjected to test using Kruskal-Wallis Rank Test. The result was that at 95% level of significance and 1 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The conclusion from the test is that there is a significant difference between imported and domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) in terms of overall quality with respect to all the intrinsic attributes determining quality. The hypotheses tested on design, colour-fastness, and durability attributes, also showed that there is a significant difference between imported and domestic wrappers with respect to each of these attributes.

The finding on quality conforms with that made by Kalu and Ikwuegbu (2000) in their study pertaining to consumers' perception of locally-made goods in Rivers State with reference to textile products. The result of their study was that foreign textiles were perceived by consumers as of very high quality, while local brands were perceived as possessing moderate quality. In a similar finding with respect to the attitude of students towards made-in-Nigeria textiles products Oladele and Arogundade (2011) indicated that consumers' preference for foreign goods was largely caused by the poor quality of locally produced goods in Nigeria.

5.4 Domestic Wrappers Rated High on Quality

Evidence from data analysis reveals that there are brands of domestic wrappers respondents agreed as possessing satisfactory or high quality. The mean value agreement by respondents to this effect is 4.0, which depicts high positive agreement. The implication of this positive agreement is that not all textile fabrics (wrappers) produced in Nigeria have low or unsatisfactory quality. The domestic wrappers indicated as possessing high quality are: (1) Nichem Wax (65.4% of the consumers' responded positively to this effect) (2) Nigerian Wax (59.6% of the respondents were positive of this fact). However, there are no past studies that validate this finding. The only finding which is close to this, but not very specific, is that made by Oladele and Arogundade (2011) who undertook a study titled "Attitudes of University Students Toward Made-in-Nigeria Textile Products". One of their findings was that majority of the respondents agreed that in some cases, locally produced goods might offer better value than the imported ones.

The implication of the above finding is that the textile fabrics firms producing domestic wrappers which have consumers' high rating on quality should sustain the high quality and then further enhance the quality by embarking on product innovation. Another implication is that if Nigerian textile firms can improve their production technologies and undertake new product development, they will definitely produce what can compete favourably with foreign-made textile fabrics (wrappers).

5.5 Domestic Wrappers Deficient in Colour-fastness

There are domestic wrappers which fall short of consumers' rating as high quality brands. These brands are lacking with respect to colour-fastness attribute, which is one of the criteria that determine high quality textile fabrics (wrappers). The attribute of colour-fastness is a vital factor which textile wrappers should possess. Consumers are particularly averse to textile fabrics (wrappers) that wash off colour. Such domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) have been identified in this study. Evidence from data analysis indicates that the following domestic wrappers wash off colour: (1) Super Print (70.2% of the respondents agreed) (2) Top Wax (68.3%) (3) Ankara (65.1%) (4) UNTL Real Wax (62.3%) (5) Veritable Real Wax (60.5%) (6) Nigerian Wax (12.5%) and Nichem Wax (3.8%). The incidence of washing off colour in the last two brands is minimal. However, there are no past research findings that specifically identified the domestic wrappers that are deficient in colour-fastness.

The implication of this finding is that those textile firms producing domestic wrappers that wash off colour should undertake new product development to modify their poorly rated products by consumers. Another implication is that those textile firms involved should undertake in-depth study of the foreign firms that are best performance firms in producing high-quality colourfast textile fabrics (wrappers). This is very crucial and pertinent in this era of globalization and Nigeria's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO). We have to recall the condition required of Nigeria in becoming a member of WTO in 1997 was to open its borders to other members of the organisation to export and market their products in the country (Nigerian Textile Industry Chance for the Survival Remains Bleak, 2006).

6.0 Conclusion

The researchers with the appropriate research design set out to do a comparative evaluation of consumer preference for domestic and imported textile fabrics (wrappers) in Abakaliki Urban, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Female respondents from eighteen (18) years and above were sampled in the study, who used ten attributes constituting consumer evaluation criteria to rate the attributes and quality of domestic and imported wrappers. Hypotheses were tested with respect to the products' attributes and quality. From the result and findings, the researchers conclude that there is a significant difference between imported and domestic wrappers with respect to quality. Imported wrappers were rated higher in terms of three critical attributes (durability, colour-fastness and texture) that determine quality.

7.0 Recommendations

To ensure effective marketing operations of domestic textile fabrics (wrappers) firms, the following are recommended to be done:

- (i) Textile firms in Nigeria should include product innovation in their strategic plans and should adopt the correct sequence in new product development and management. They should develop and test new textile fabric concepts as a way of ensuring effectiveness and success in product innovation. The voice of the consumers should be built into their product innovation programmes.

- (ii) Domestic textile firms should undertake indepth studies of foreign best performance companies (BPC) noted for producing superior quality textile fabrics (wrappers). They should adopt or adapt the strategies utilized by the BPC.
- (iii) Textile firms in Nigeria should undertake continuous and monitoring research to update their knowledge with respect to new developments in the textile market and to ascertain consumers' changing needs and preferences in terms of design, fashion and other important variables.
- (iv) In this era of computer and internet technology, Nigerian textile firms should utilize computer-aided design to come up with designs and patterns which are unique, attractive, appealing and ultimately acceptable to consumers. Every new design should be followed up with test of the concept with a sample of consumers, before such designs are mass produced and marketed.
- (v) Textile firms in Nigeria must take steps to eliminate product defects and weaknesses. Those identified wrappers weaknesses such as lack of durability, bad texture, poor colour retention, poor fabric strength and unsatisfactory weight should be eliminated or solved.
- (vi) Textile firms producing domestic wrappers that wash off colour should embark on product innovation to modify their poorly rated products by consumers. Colour-fastness is a very vital attribute which makes imported textile fabrics (wrappers) to occupy an advantageous comparative position. Imported wrappers are noted to be more colour-fast than Nigerian-made wrappers.
- (vii) The domestic textile firms should improve on the quality of their textile fabrics (wrappers), so that they can market their wrappers at high prices like those of foreign firms, thereby leading to enhanced profits.

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