PERCEPTION AND PATRONAGE OF FOREIGN PRODUCTS BY CONSUMERS IN ENUGU, NIGERIA

Ifediora, Chuka Uzoma ✉

Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Nigeria

chuka.ifediora@unn.edu.ng

Ugwuanyi, Chidera Christian

Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Nigeria

chidera.ugwuanyi@unn.edu.ng

Ifediora, Raluchukwu Ifeoma

Department of Educational Foundations (Administration and Planning)

Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

raluchukwul@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper investigated into perception and patronage of foreign products. The specific objectives were: to ascertain if perceived risk level influences patronage of foreign goods; to determine if perceived value influences the patronage of foreign goods, and; to find out if the country of origin is a major consideration when purchasing foreign products. The study population was all adults (18 years and above) in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria out of which study sampled 400 consumers. The hypotheses were tested using Spearman's Correlation Coefficient. The findings show that there is a relationship between perceived risk and patronage of foreign products. Also, there is a positive relationship between perceived value and patronage of foreign products. Finally, country of origin was found to be a major consideration in the patronage of foreign products. The study concludes that perceived risk and country of origin affect Nigerian consumers' purchase of foreign products. Nigerian consumers tend to view foreign products as being superior to local products. The study recommends that local manufacturers should be quality conscious and consumer focused, to compete effectively with imported products.

Keywords: Perception, Country of Origin, Consumer Ethnocentrism, Perceived Risk, Perceived Value

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has liberalized trade among nations and changed the tide of events in the way, and manner businesses are conducted; thus, turning the world into a global village, with free flow of goods, services, ideas, persons, information, among others, across nations. The product choice of most consumers in Nigeria, similar to others from developing economies tilts towards foreign products especially those products from more technologically advanced countries (Agbonifoh and Elimimian, 1999). It is the view of Okechukwu and Onyema (1999) that Nigerian consumers have a special preference for foreign products, especially from technologically and more advanced countries. This problem has been known to be culturally, economically, technologically, politically and grossly psychologically motivated.

Nigerian consumers' preference for foreign products increases despite the availability and high technical quality of some categories of locally produced substitutes. The preference for foreign products indicates a biased perception in favor of the foreign goods. The perceived value configuration of the average consumer in Nigeria is positively skewed to foreign goods with little or no attention to made-in-Nigeria products which appear to have a less credible image. The consequence is that Nigerian market is dominated by brands from technologically more advanced countries with cheaper production costs and more competitive prices.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian industrial sector, today, is seen to be operating below average capacity due to a catalog of challenges which negate the growth and development of industry and Nigeria as a whole. The challenges facing the sector as Olutayo and Akanle (2009) observe, include: "high production cost, energy crises, weak exchange rates and very low patronage." Others include poor quality domestic production, smuggling and the Nigerian consumers' obsession with imported products.

The materialistic view of the society has led people to give meaning to their consumption thereby desiring to consume brands that add value to the product (Kapferer, 2008), most of these preferred brands are imported. The situation is very unhealthy for industrial development, employment and indeed economic development in Nigeria, and as such calls for the concern of all stakeholders.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between perception and patronage of foreign goods. Specifically, this study attempts to investigate the following:

a. To ascertain if perceived risk level influences patronage of foreign goods.

b. To determine if perceived value influences the patronage foreign goods.

c. To find out if the country of origin is a major consideration when purchasing foreign products.

Hypotheses Formulation

For this research, the following research hypotheses (null) were formulated. They include:

a. Perceived risk level does not affect the patronage of foreign goods.

b. There is no relationship between perceived value and patronage of foreign goods.

c. Country of origin is not a major consideration when buying products.

Motivations for the study

The researchers cannot pinpoint any previous study that seeks to ascertain consumers' perceptions and patronage of foreign products in the study area. The present study will add to the literature in this field, as it gives an insight into the nature of the relationship existing between these two variables, in the study area.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section aims at understanding the different perspectives of various researchers on issues bothering on the topic under discussion. These reviews were aligned to the objectives of the study, thus exposing the knowledge gap.

Perceived Risk

Risk refers to the uncertainty of an event occurring. Consumers are exposed to risk when buying items, mostly those that are particularly expensive, for example, cars, houses, and computers. Tzeng, Yeh and Ma (2005) conceptualized perceived risk as the uncertainty and consequences associated with consumer actions, the result of which may lead to post-purchase dissonance or consonance. This definition highlights two critical dimensions of perceived risk: uncertainty and consequences. Batra and Sinha (2000) assert that when a consumer makes a purchase decision, 'risk' refers to 'high consequences of making a mistake' and 'degree of inconvenience of making a mistake.' According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), perceived risk will more often than not influence early stages of consumer buying process. Additionally, Dowling and Staelin (1994) define risk as a consumer feeling of doubt and the adverse effect of engaging in an activity.

The risk may occur in a variety of ways such as the fear that a product may not possess desirable attributes, doubt about product performance or a sense that the purchase of a

particular brand may give rise to social disapproval (Richardson, Jain & Dick, 1996). Although risk can include many types (i.e., performance, financial, social, time and safety), Dunn, Murphy and Skelly (1986) found that performance and financial risks were the most closely related to the purchase decision. Ahmed, Johnson, Chew and Tan (2002) opined that consumers infer product features and performance based on country standards and experiences with a product from the country. Consumers may perceive lesser risk in buying products from countries with a high reputation for quality.
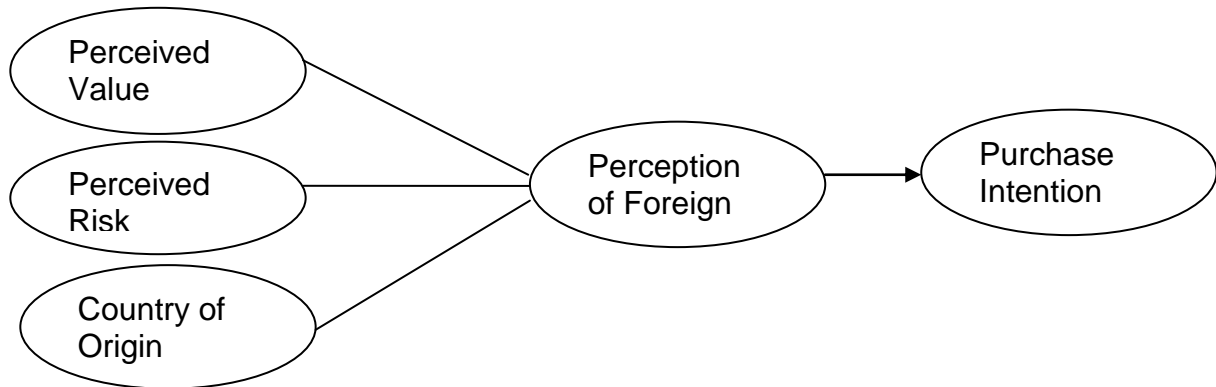
Each time a consumer considers purchasing a product, the consumer has certain doubts about the product, especially if the product being considered has a high price. The amount of perceived risk varies with the sum of money at stake, the amount of attribute uncertainty, and the amount of consumer self-confidence. Consumers develop routines for reducing risks, such as decision avoidance, information gathering from friends, and preference for national brand names and warranties.

Perceived Value

Perceived value is defined as consumer's total assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received(utility) and what is given(cost) (Zeithaml, 1988). Customer delivered value can be seen as the total value offered to a customer less the total cost to the customer (Grönroos, 1997; Oliver, 1999). Similarly, Holbrook (1999) describes value as a "trade-off" between benefits and sacrifices. Banu (2015) opines that customer's perceived value can be measured from the perspectives of money, quality, benefit, and social psychology. Customer Perceived Value (CPV) refers to the difference between the potential customer's evaluation of all the advantages and all the expenses of an offering and the perceived alternatives. A consumer's perceived value of a product affects the price the customer is willing to pay. While actual value points to the true costs of production plus the expenses linked with the product's sale, perceived value is based on customer opinion. Perceived value reflects the value of a product as assigned by the consumer above, which may have little to do with the actual monetary value of the product. Customers place value based on the product's anticipated ability to fulfill a need and provide satisfaction, also referred to as utility.

Going by the review thus far the conceptual framework of this study is shown in figure 1. Figure 1 shows the relationships existing between the dependent and independent variables. Perceived value, perceived risk and country of origin are shown to influence consumers' perceptions of foreign products and in turn purchase intentions.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Country of Origin (COO) Effect

A key determinant of consumers' perceptions, evaluations, and purchase intentions for consumer goods is the concept of Country-of-Origin (COO). The concept of country of origin, according to Usunier (2006), has become one of the most researched international aspects of consumer behavior.

In years past, attempts have been made to examine the effect of COO in various spheres of life. Hamzaoui and Merunka (2006) observe that the kind of beliefs that consumers have and how they perceive different countries affects their purchase evaluations.Results of studies by Agbonifoh and Elimimian (1999) and Olaleke (2010) in Nigeria as well as Opoku and Akorli (2009) in Ghana, show that products from technologically advanced countries were viewed more positively by consumers of developing countries than their counterparts in the advanced economies.

Opoku and Akoril (2009), Olaleke (2010) and Saffu and Walker (2006), in examining the impact of COO on consumers' attitudes towards buying local campaign initiatives, found that the attitudes of consumers can be seen as protectionist, nationalistic and of self-interest. The above empirical evidence, though not exhaustive, suggests that consumers in developing economies, of which Nigeria is one, view products from developed countries more favorably than products from their own country. However, the direction of this influence needs to be verified in Nigeria in the area of patronage of consumer goods, hence the need for this study.

Consumer Ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism (CE) refers to an incidence of consumer preference for domestic products, or discrimination against imports (Levine & Campbell, 1972). The term consumer ethnocentricity was introduced by Shimp and Sharma (1987) as a unique economic type of

ethnocentrism which is domain-specific for the field of consumer behavior and has marketing implications. It is seen to signify the beliefs held by consumers about the suitability, indeed morality, of acquiring foreign-made products instead of locally-made products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). In functional terms, Shimp and Sharma (1987) state that CE provides the consumer a feeling of identity, sense of belongingness, and an appreciation of what purchase is acceptable or unacceptable to the in-group (those with which an individual identifies).

Some scholars suggest that ethnocentrism is a part of human nature (Herche 1992; Kucukemiroglu, 1999) and claim that it is a trait-like property of one's personality (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Accordingly, it can be said that ethnocentric behaviors are indeed a separate matter from quality evaluations or experience with the product (Herche, 1994). Consumers with high ethnocentric tendencies are usually most prone to partial judgments, by easily adopting the positive aspects of locally-made products to discredit the merits of foreign products.

From the perspective of ethnocentric consumers, purchasing imports are wrong because it is not only immoral and unpatriotic but also injurious to the domestic economy and results in loss of jobs in industries threatened by imports (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Consumers, therefore, tend to purchase local products, even if the quality is subordinate to imported products (Wall & Heslop, 1986) and the price is above that of the imported products (Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, Mueller & Melewar, 2001). Additionally, highly ethnocentric individuals take pride in their values, symbols and people, and view domestic products as objects of pride and identity as opposed to those from other countries (Kinra 2006; Upadhyay & Singh, 2006).

From the above, it could be concluded that the more ethnocentric a country is, the less favorable consumers' attitudes and the less likely consumers will hold preferences and purchase intentions toward foreign products (O'Cass, 2002). Besides, since the implication is that choosing a foreign product can threaten the domestic industry, ethnocentrism is likely to have a boost when the economy has a downturn (Ueltschy, 1998). In contrast to ethnocentric consumers, non-ethnocentric consumers believe that foreign products should be evaluated on their merit and the basis of the value and utility consumers derive from them without consideration for where they are manufactured (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

Additionally, Kaynak and Kara (2002) posit that the strength, intensity and magnitude of CE differ from country to country and culture-to-culture. According to Klein, Ettenson, and Krishnan (2006) and Wang and Chen (2004), it is still vague how CE in developing economies manifests itself since little research has been conducted in such countries. Likewise, Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp and Ramachader (2000) observe that there is a particular lack of research on the variables which may moderate the relationship between CE and willingness to purchase locally-made products in developing countries. Hamin and Elliott (2006), opine that

there is mounting evidence for the view that it is important for less-developed countries to be more aware of the issues of Country of origin (COO) and the concept of CE.

Evidence abounds to show that consumers from more developed countries seem most likely to prefer their locally made products. However, for consumers from less-developed countries, there are contrary expectations. On one part, the COO effect will lead the consumers to a preference for foreign products from more developed countries. CE, on the other hand, will result in preference for domestic products.

From the foregoing, the COO effect and CE provide mixed signals for consumers. It, therefore, seems harder to predict preferences and choices of consumers from less developed countries (Hamin & Elliott, 2006).

EMPIRICAL REVIEWS

In the study by Nyarunda (2016) on consumer perception, attitude and patronage towards the purchase of imported versus locally-produced apparel in Nairobi County, Kenya, it was revealed that there is no significant difference in the perception of consumers in Kenya towards locally-produced and imported apparels. According to the findings, both locally produced apparel and imported clothing are perceived in more or less the same standards. Interestingly, in comparison to other apparel attributes a product's country of origin was generally of low importance in consumer decision-making. For consumer ethnocentrism, the results showed that there was a positive correlation between consumer ethnocentrism and attitude towards domestically-produced apparel. However, there was no negative correlation between consumer ethnocentrism and attitude towards imported apparel. In a related study by Olaleke (2010) in Kakuri, Kaduna state Nigeria, it was shown that consumers have preference for foreign made textiles as opposed to locally made ones.

Omotayo (2009) also found out from a study on the analysis of Nigerian consumers' perception of foreign products that ''Nigerian consumers perceive foreign made products as more reliable, technologically advanced, stylish and competitively priced than the Nigerian products''. Similarly, Yee, San and Khoon (2010) found a significant association to exist between perceived quality, perceived value, perceived risk and purchase decision of automobile in Malaysia.

The gap noted in the literature which this present study tries to fill includes that no research of this nature has been carried out in South East Nigeria and also the effect of this psychographic variable, perception, on the patronage of foreign products in the study area has not been assessed.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study is the survey design (descriptive method). This method was chosen for the researcher to have the opportunity to describe systematically, the facts, qualities and characteristics of the given population as factual and accurately as possible.

This study was conducted in Enugu South Local Government of Enugu State, Nigeria and the population of the study consist of all adults (ages 18 and above) living and operating within the area. From 2006 population figures, the population of the Local Government Area is 198,723. From the extrapolation of the population figure, at annual growth rate of 2.5%, we have 254,383 as the study population.

A sample size of 400 was chosen from this population. Convenience sampling technique was applied due to the vast area covered and large sample size. A self-designed questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The personal characteristics of the respondents were analyzed using statistical tools like tables, percentages and frequency distribution. Spearman's Correlation was applied in testing the three hypotheses.

ANALYSIS

The purpose of this section is to present and analyze the data gathered from the questionnaire administered, as well as test the formulated hypotheses. Four hundred copies of the questionnaire were prepared and administered on the consumers in Enugu South Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. 373 (93.25%) copies were returned while 27 copies (6.75%) were lost. This study analyzed only the returned questionnaire. The demographic variables of the respondents are presented in the Appendix.

Test of Hypotheses

Decision rule: Reject H_1 if P value> 0.05, do not reject if otherwise.

Hypothesis one:

H_o: Perceived risk level does not affect the patronage of foreign goods.

H_1: Perceived risk level affects the patronage of foreign goods.

Table 1 below shows the Spearman's correlation matrix of preferred product origin and perceived risk (functional and social risks). The correlation coefficient between preferred product origin and functional risk and social risk at 0.082 and 0.175 respectively shows the fragile positive relationship. At r=.082 and .175, p=0.01, this result indicates that there is a positive correlation between preferred product origin and perceived risk; hence the null hypothesis which says perceived risk level does not affect the patronage of foreign goods is rejected.

Table 1: Correlation Between Preferred Product Origin And Functional And Social Risk

			Preferred Product Origin	Purchase of Foreign Products due to fear of Local Products' nonperformance	Purchase of Local Product Detrimental to Social Status
Spearman's Rho	Preferred Product Origin	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.082	.175**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.112	.001
		N	373	373	373
	Purchase of Foreign Products due to fear of Local Product nonperformance	Correlation Coefficient	.082	1.000	.019
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.112	.	.721
		N	373	373	373
	Purchase of Local Product Detrimental to Social Status	Correlation Coefficient	.175**	.019	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.721	.
		N	373	373	373

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Two:

H_o: There is no significant relationship between perceived value and patronage of foreign goods.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between perceived value and patronage of foreign goods.

Table 2: Correlation Between Purchase of Foreign Products and Perceived Value

			Purchase of Foreign Products	Perceived Value of Foreign Products match Actual Value
Spearman's Rho	Purchase of foreign products	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.813**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	373	373
	Perceived Value of Foreign Product match Actual Value	Correlation Coefficient	.813**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	373	373

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 above is a correlation between the purchase of foreign products and perceived value of foreign products showing the correlation coefficient, significance values and the number of cases. The correlation coefficient is 0.813. This value indicates the correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed) and implies that there is a strong positive relationship between the purchase of foreign products and the perceived value of foreign products. At r=0.813 and p<0.01, we reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between perceived value and patronage of foreign goods.

Hypothesis Three:

H_o: Country of origin is not a major consideration when buying products.

H_1: Country of origin is a major consideration when buying products.

Table 3: Correlation Between Purchase of Foreign Products and Place of Product Manufacture

			Purchase of Foreign Products	Concerned about Place of Manufacture
Spearman's Rho	Purchase of foreign products	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.115[*]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.026
		N	373	373
	Concerned about Place of Manufacture	Correlation Coefficient	.115[*]	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.
		N	373	373

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 above shows the correlation between the purchase of foreign products and place of manufacture of products showing the correlation coefficient, significance values and the number of cases. The correlation coefficient is 0.115. This value indicates the correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed) and implies that there is a weak positive relationship between the purchase of foreign products and the perceived value of foreign products. At r=0.115 and p<0.01, we reject null hypothesis which states that country of origin is not a major consideration when buying products.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. There is a significant relationship between perceived risk level and patronage of foreign goods. The perceived risk on the foreign product is lesser thereby influencing consumers' choice for them. Saffu and Walker (2006) that consumers in developing

countries tend to perceive domestic products (with higher risks) as inferior to imported products (with lower risks) and therefore prefer imported products. The finding also collaborates that of Yee et al. (2010) who found a significant association to exist between perceived risk and purchase decision of automobile in Malaysia.

2. There is a significant positive relationship existing between perceived value and patronage of foreign goods. This finding is in line with that of Yee et al.(2010) who found a significant association to exist between perceived value and purchase decision of automobile in Malaysia.

3. Country of origin or manufacture of products is a major consideration in the purchase of some consumer goods. This finding agrees with the findings of Olaleke (2010) and Apoku and Akorli (2009) which revealed that products from technologically advanced countries are viewed more positively by consumers in developing countries. This finding is also consistent with that of Hamzaoui and Merunka (2006) who observe that the kind of beliefs that consumers have and how they perceive various countries affects their purchase evaluations.

4. People with higher educational qualifications seem to purchase more of foreign goods.

5. Higher income earners purchase more foreign products than lower income earners.

6. Sex and marital status are not factors influencing patronage of foreign products.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that perception of foreign products is a major determinant of the level of purchase it enjoys in Nigeria. Nigerian consumers have been found to perceive foreign products as being more reliable and possessing more value. It has also been found that consumers look out for the country of origin of the products they purchase in a bid to reduce the risk of buying from countries seen as not technologically advanced. The relationship between perceived risk and purchase is an opposite one as an increase in perceived risk will result in a decrease in purchase whereas there is a direct correlation between perceived value and acquisition of foreign products.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the study findings and conclusion, the following are recommended:

1. Emphasis on Quality: Since home-made products are perceived to be of low quality, local manufacturers should ensure their products are of accepted quality levels.

2. Reorientation of Nigerians: Most Nigerians believe that made in Nigeria products are inferior; giving it names like 'Taiwan,' 'aba-made' among others; all depicting poor

quality. It is important that Nigerians be made to know that some local products are of acceptable standards.

3. Governments at all levels should be actively involved in putting in place policies that will emphasize zero tolerance for poor quality products.

4. Establishment of proper complaint handling systems to allay fears of consumers on the purchase of local products.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Arising from the present study, it may be necessary in future to investigate into the category of foreign products for which Nigerian consumers emphasize country of origin or whether the country of origin effect differs among product groups.

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APPENDICES

Questionnaire

Instructions: please tick (√) the appropriate option and fill the spaces provided where necessary.

Personal Data:

1. Sex: Male [   ] Female [   ]
2. Marital status: Single [ ] Married [   ] Divorced [   ] Widowed [   ]
3. Age: Less than 20years[   ] 20-35yrs [   ] 36-50yrs [   ] above 50yrs[   ]
4. Educational qualification: O'LEVEL [ ] OND/NCE/DIP [ ] HND/B.Sc. [   ] MSC/MBA/PhD [   ]
5. Income level per month: Less than N50,000 [   ] N50,000-N150,000 [   ] N150,001-N350,000 [   ] above N350,000 [   ]

Subject Matter Data:

1. I usually purchase foreign brands
    a. Yes [   ] b. No [   ]
2. I usually purchase foreign brands in the following product categories.
    a. Electronics/electrical [   ] b. Clothing [   ] c. Food and Beverages [   ]
    b. d. academic materials [ ] e. Cosmetics [   ]

3. I usually purchase locally made brands in the following product categories.
   c. Electronics/electrical [   ] b. Clothing [   ] c. Food and Beverages [   ]
   d. d. Academic materials [   ] e. Cosmetics [   ]
4. I always check the place of manufacture of the products I purchase?
   a. strongly agree [   ] b. agree [   ] c. undecided[   ] d. disagree[   ] e. strongly disagree[   ]
5. Preferred product origin
   a. Foreign [   ] b. Local [   ]
6. Fear of non performance of local products prompts my purchase of foreign brands
   a. strongly agree [   ] b. agree [   ] c. undecided [   ] d. disagree [   ] e. strongly disagree [   ]
7. I feel a risk that the purchase of local products will be detrimental to my social status
   a. strongly agree [   ] b. agree [   ] c. undecided[   ] d. disagree[   ] e. strongly disagree[   ]
8. Nutritional claims of foreign food products are more believable
   a. strongly agree [   ] b. agree [   ] c. undecided[   ] d. disagree[   ] e. strongly disagree[   ]
9. The perceived quality of foreign goods I buy match the actual quality
   a. strongly agree [   ] b. agree [   ] c. undecided[   ] d. disagree[   ] e. strongly disagree[   ]
10. The perceived quality of local goods I buy match the actual quality
    a. strongly agree [   ] b. agree [   ] c. undecided[   ] d. disagree[   ] e. strongly disagree[   ]

Cross Tabulations

Educational Qualification of Respondents vs. Purchase of foreign products

Count

		Purchase of foreign products		
		Yes	No	Total
Educational Qualification of Respondents	O LEVEL	21	10	31
	NCE/OND/DIP	65	22	87
	BSC/HND	141	56	197
	MSC/MBA/PHD	43	15	58
Total		270	103	373

Income Distribution of Respondents vs. Purchase of foreign products

Count

		Purchase of foreign products		
		Yes	No	Total
Income Distribution of Respondents	LESS THAN 50,000	102	38	140
	50,000-150,000	150	59	209
	150,001-350,000	12	5	17
Total		264	102	366

Sex Distribution of Respondents vs Purchase of foreign products

Count

		Purchase of foreign products		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	MALE	143	57	200
	FEMALE	127	46	173
Total		270	103	373

Marital Status of Respondents vs. Purchase of Foreign Products

Count

		Purchase of foreign products		Total
		Yes	No	
Marital Status	SINGLE	107	23	130
	MARRIED	144	73	217
	DIVORCED	8	3	11
Total		259	99	358