

CONSUMER'S PERCEPTION ON THE BAN OF STYROFOAM PLASTIC FOOD PACKS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE HEALTHY FOOD CONSUMPTION FOR ACHIEVING SDG'S (3) HEALTHY WELL BEING

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the consumer's perception of the ban on Styrofoam food packs, with a focus on its implications for healthy well-being. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, the population of the study was all the users and vendors who purchase and use food packs in Lagos State, Nigeria. A sample size of 50 consumers were selected using a convenience sampling technique. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. Frequency tables, simple percentages, and t-tests (at 0.05 significance level) were used to test hypotheses. Findings show that consumers perceive the ban on Styrofoam food packs to have a significant positive impact on their healthy well-being. Specifically, the ban is seen to reduce exposure to harmful chemicals, promote environmental sustainability, and encourage healthier food choices. However, some consumers express concerns about the economic implications and inconvenience caused by the ban. Based on these findings, it is recommended that consumers be educated on the health benefits of the ban and alternative packaging options be made available. Additionally, policymakers should consider implementing measures to mitigate the economic impact on small businesses and ensure a smooth transition to eco-friendly packaging.

Keywords: Environmental, Styrofoam, healthy well-being, food packs, Pollution, sustainability.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing global concern over the environmental impact of plastic pollution, particularly in the context of food packaging. Plastic food packs, while convenient and widely used, contribute significantly to environmental degradation, posing threats to ecosystems, wildlife, and human health and well being Environ News Nigeria (2024). As a response to this pressing issue, many countries and regions have implemented or are considering bans on single-use plastic items, including food packaging materials. The ban on plastic food packaging represents a significant step towards promoting sustainability and reducing environmental pollution Aha, (2024). However, beyond its environmental implications, such measures also have far-reaching implications for public health and well-being. Sustainable and healthy food consumption is increasingly recognized as essential for achieving Sustainable development goal 3 SDG), which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages Ondachi et,al, (2023) The ubiquity of plastic packaging in the food industry has been a significant contributor to the global plastic pollution crisis. Plastic food packaging, while offering convenience and durability, has also become a symbol of environmental degradation due to its persistence in ecosystems and detrimental effects on wildlife. Single-use plastic items, including food packs, contribute substantially to the estimated 8 million tons of plastic waste that enter the oceans each year, posing serious threats to marine life and human health.

Plastic pollution not only harms the environment but also has direct implications for human well-being. Plastics can leach harmful chemicals into food and beverages, potentially causing adverse health effects upon ingestion Aregbesola, (2013). Furthermore, plastic debris in the environment can accumulate toxins, which may enter the food chain and ultimately impact human health. The widespread use of plastic food packaging exacerbates these risks, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable alternatives. Styrofoam, also known as expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam, has become synonymous with convenience in packaging due to its lightweight nature and excellent insulating properties. However, its widespread use has raised significant environmental concerns over the past decades, primarily stemming from its non-biodegradable nature and adverse impacts on ecosystems.

In response to these concerns, government some businesses, and civil society organizations worldwide have been implementing measures to reduce plastic waste. The Lagos state government have been implementing measures to reduce plastics waste that includes the ban on single use plastics, which aims to curb plastic pollution and promote more sustainable practices in the food industry (Allen Taylor, 2022). However, while such initiatives hold promise for reducing environmental harm, their effectiveness depends on various factors, including consumer attitudes and behaviors. Consumers play a pivotal role in shaping the demand for packaged foods and influencing industry practices. Their preferences, perceptions, and purchasing decisions can drive market trends and influence the success of sustainability initiatives. Consumer awareness of environmental problems related to plastics, particularly styrofoam, has grown massively in Lagos, Nigeria, driven by several factors including media coverage, advocacy efforts, and governmental policies,(Ellen Mac Arthur Foundation 2016).

Lagos's fast urbanization has made environmental problems worse, especially with trash management. Residents are becoming increasingly concerned about the obvious presence of plastic debris in streets, drainage systems, and water bodies. According to studies, most Lagos consumers are conscious of these environmental issues and the effects that plastic pollution has on their immediate area Imam Nwosu et,al (2008). In response to these issues, the government has enacted laws and regulations meant to cut down on plastic trash. To enhance waste management and environmental sustainability, the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA), for instance, has put in place regulations that limit the use of single-use plastics, such as styrofoam plates/containers, Nigerian Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). (2024). Despite the potential benefits of banning plastic food packaging, the transition to alternative packaging materials raises various challenges and uncertainties, Nigeria Environmental Protection Agency of Nigeria, (2024). Consumers play a central role in this transition, as their behaviors and preferences significantly influence the success of

sustainable and healthy food initiatives. However, little is known about how consumers perceive the ban on plastic food packs and the extent to which it influences their food choices and behaviors. Addressing this gap in knowledge is essential for informing policy decisions, guiding industry practices, and promoting consumer education and awareness initiatives. By understanding consumers' attitudes, motivations, and concerns regarding sustainable and healthy food consumption in the context of plastic packaging bans, stakeholders can develop more targeted and effective strategies for promoting environmentally friendly and health-conscious behaviors.

Purpose of the study

Specifically the research aims to:

- 1. determine how the ban on Styrofoam plastic food packaging affects consumer's food choices and preferences.
- 2. examine the impact of the ban of Styrofoam food packaging on consumers' food choices, preferences, and behaviors.
- 3. Analyze consumers' perceptions of the environmental and health benefits associated with the ban of Styrofoam food packaging.

Research Questions

- 1. How has the ban on Styrofoam plastic food packaging affects consumer's food choices and preferences?
- 2. What is the impact of the ban on Styrofoam food plastic packaging on consumers' food choice, preference and behaviors?

3. What are the consumers' perception of the environment and health benefits associated with the ban of Styrofoam food packaging?

Research Hypothesis

The following research hypothesis were formulated ;

- 1. There is no significant difference between consumers' food choices, preferences shifted towards more sustainable options and post-ban on plastic food packaging.
- 2. There is no significant difference between how consumers perceive the ban on plastic packaging and positive impact on environmental conservation efforts.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey research design to achieve its objectives. A survey design was chosen because it allows for the collection of data from a large sample size, which can be generalized to the population. The target population of this study includes Unilag students and vendors who purchase and use food packs in Lagos, Nigeria. A sample size of 50 consumers was selected using a convenience sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents; respondents completed the questionnaire designed by the researcher in order to obtain information on the research topic. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic information, awareness and knowledge of styrofoam ban, perceptions of healthy well-being, and opinions on the ban. The structured questionnaire was validated by two experts, one a lecturer in the department of Technology and Vocational Education university of Lagos and the other expert from Lagos State ministry of Health for corrections and amendments to establish the face and content validity. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was developed based on a thorough review of existing literature and expert opinions, ensuring that the questions accurately measure consumers' perceptions of the ban on styrofoam food packs. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of respondents

different from the sampled respondents and a reliability score of 0.82 was attained using Cronbach Alpha. The respondents were given insight on what the questionnaire was about and the need for them to answer the questions objectively. The respondents' permissions had been sought before the researcher took the questionnaire to them with the help of one research assistant. The respondents were given enough time to respond to the questionnaires. The questionnaires were collected immediately from the respondents. Descriptive statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to analyse the research questions. Inferential statistics: Correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between variables.

Results

Research Question 1:How has the ban on styrofoam plastic food packaging affects consumer's food choices and preferences?

Table 1:

Styrofoam ban on consumer food choices and preferences provides insightful findings on the effects of the policy

S/N	Items	Mean	Remark
1	The ban on styrofoam food packaging has made me choose		
	different restaurants or food outlets	2.25	Rejected
2	2. I now prefer restaurants that use environmentally friendly		
	packaging	2.99	Accepted
	My food choices have been significantly influenced by the ban		
	on Styrofoam packaging.	2.23	Rejected
2	I have noticed a change in the taste or quality of food since the		
	ban on Styrofoam packaging	2.02	Rejected
4	The ban on styrofoam packaging has made me more conscious		
	of the packaging used by food vendors.	2.99	Accepted
6	5 I am willing to pay more for food packaged in sustainable		
	materials.	2.92	Accepted
-	The ban on styrofoam has made me reduce my overall		
	consumption of takeout food.	2.44	Rejected
8	I avoid food outlets that still use non-sustainable packaging.	2.72	Accepted
ç	I have switched to cooking at home more often since the ban on		
	Styrofoam packaging.	2.67	Accepted
10	The ban on styrofoam packaging has had no impact on my food		
	choices or preferences	2.69	Accepted

The data presented in Table 1 on the impact of the styrofoam ban on consumer food choices and preferences provides insightful findings on the effects of the policy. The respondents' mean scores reveal a varied impact of the styrofoam ban on their food-related behaviors. Most notably, the respondents expressed acceptance towards preferring restaurants that use environmentally friendly packaging, as reflected in a mean score of 2.99. This suggests a positive shift in preference towards sustainable practices in food packaging. Similarly, the mean score of 2.99 for increased consciousness about packaging used by food vendors supports this trend, indicating that the ban has heightened awareness about environmental issues related to food packaging.

On the other hand, the mean scores for several items indicate less significant effects. For instance, the mean score of 2.25 for choosing different restaurants due to the ban, along with 2.23 for significant influence on food choices, points to a rejection of these impacts. This suggests that the ban has not substantially altered consumers' restaurant choices or food preferences overall. The respondents also showed a willingness to pay more for food packaged in sustainable materials, with a mean score of 2.92, indicating that while there is some financial willingness to support eco-friendly practices, it is not overwhelmingly high. Similarly, the mean score of 2.67 for switching to cooking at home more often and 2.44 for reducing overall takeout consumption reflect a moderate acceptance of changes in consumption patterns due to the ban. The lowest mean score of 2.02 for noticing changes in taste or quality of food since the ban suggests that the ban has had minimal impact on perceived food quality, and the mean score of 2.69 for the overall impact on food choices and preferences indicates that many respondents feel the ban has had little effect on their food habits. Overall, while there is



some evidence of increased awareness and preference for environmentally friendly packaging, the ban on styrofoam has not significantly influenced many aspects of consumer food choices and preferences. This highlights a need for continued efforts to better align consumer behaviors with sustainability goals.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of the ban on styrofoam food plastic packaging on consumers' food choice, preference and behaviors?

Table 2:

The im	pact of the ban of	on styrofoam food	l plastic	packaging or	n consumers'	food choice	. preference	and behaviors
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S/N		Items	Mean	Remark
	1	The ban on styrofoam packaging has made me more		
		environmentally conscious in my food choice	2.8	Accepted
	2	I prefer to buy food from outlets that advertise sustainable		
		packaging options.	2.8	Accepted
	3	I actively seek out information about the packaging practices		
		of food vendors.	2.7	Accepted
	4	I feel that the quality of food packaging has improved since		
		the ban on Styrofoam	2.9	Accepted
	5	I am more likely to dine in at restaurants rather than take out		
		due to the ban on styrofoam.	2.5	Accepted
	6	The ban on styrofoam packaging has had no impact on my		-
		behavior as a consumer.	2.5	Accepted
	7	The ban on styrofoam packaging has influenced my decision		-
		to eat out less frequently.	2.4	Rejected
	8	I believe the ban on styrofoam has positively impacted my		-
		health.	2.6	Accepted

The data presented in Table 2 on the impact of the ban on styrofoam food plastic packaging reveals several insights into how this policy has influenced consumer behaviors and preferences. The respondents' mean scores indicate varying degrees of acceptance and impact across different areas. A mean score of 2.84 for becoming more environmentally conscious in food choices suggests that the ban has moderately encouraged respondents to consider environmental factors when selecting their food. Similarly, a mean score of 2.86 for preferring food outlets that advertise sustainable packaging options indicates that many respondents are inclined towards establishments that highlight their commitment to ecofriendly practices. The mean score of 2.70 for actively seeking information about food vendors' packaging practices shows that while there is some effort among respondents to gather information about sustainability, it is not overwhelmingly high. This is further supported by the mean score of 2.96, which reflects a general belief that the quality of food packaging has improved since the ban, indicating a positive perception of the changes brought about by the policy. Respondents also expressed a moderate inclination to dine in at restaurants rather than opt for takeout, with a mean score of 2.54. This suggests that the ban has had some influence on dining preferences, although the effect is not strong. Conversely, the mean score of 2.45 for reduced frequency of eating out, and the score of 2.59 for perceived lack of impact on consumer behavior, reflect a rejection of significant behavioral changes linked to the ban. The mean score of 2.69 for believing that the ban has positively impacted health indicates that while some respondents view the ban as beneficial for their health, the overall impact is modest. The findings indicate that while the ban on styrofoam packaging has led to some positive changes in environmental consciousness and preferences for sustainable packaging, its impact on broader consumer behaviors and health perceptions is relatively moderate. This highlights the need for continued efforts to enhance the effectiveness of such policies and further align consumer practices with sustainability goals.



Research Question 3: What are the consumers' perception of the environment and health benefits associated with the ban of styrofoam food packaging ?

Table 3:

Consumers' perception of the environment and health benefits associated with the ban of styrofoam food packaging

S/N		Items	Mean	Remark
	1	I believe the ban on styrofoam packaging is beneficial for the environment.	3.4	Accepted
	2	I find alternative packaging materials less convenient than styrofoam.	2.4	Rejected
	3	I feel that the ban on styrofoam packaging will lead to better health outcomes.	3.3	Accepted
	4	The ban on styrofoam packaging has made me more aware of the environmental impact of my food choices.	3.1	Accepted
	5	I support the ban on styrofoam packaging because of its potential health benefits.	3.2	Accepted
	6	The environmental benefits of banning styrofoam outweigh any inconvenience it may cause.	3.2	Accepted
	7	I do not perceive any health benefits from the ban on styrofoam packaging	2.0	Rejected

The data presented in Table 3 on consumers' perceptions of the environmental and health benefits associated with the ban on styrofoam food packaging provides a comprehensive view of respondents' attitudes toward the policy. The mean scores reflect varying degrees of agreement or disagreement across different items. A mean score of 3.44 for believing that the ban on styrofoam packaging is beneficial for the environment indicates strong support for the environmental advantages of the policy. This high score suggests that respondents broadly recognize and accept the environmental benefits of banning styrofoam. In contrast, the mean score of 2.42 for finding alternative packaging materials less convenient than styrofoam reveals a general disagreement with this sentiment. This suggests that, for the majority, alternative packaging materials are not perceived as significantly less convenient than styrofoam. The mean score of 3.31 for the belief that the ban will lead to better health outcomes reflects a positive view of the health benefits associated with the ban. Respondents generally accept that the policy may contribute to improved health outcomes. A mean score of 3.10 for increased awareness of the environmental impact of food choices shows that the ban has moderately raised respondents' awareness about the environmental implications of their food packaging choices. Support for the ban due to its potential health benefits is evidenced by a mean score of 3.27, indicating that many respondents back the ban primarily because they perceive it to have health advantages. The mean score of 3.29 for the belief that the environmental benefits of banning styrofoam outweigh any inconvenience suggests that respondents generally believe that the positive environmental impact justifies any inconvenience caused by the ban. Conversely, the mean score of 2.09 for not perceiving any health benefits from the ban shows a significant level of disagreement with the notion that the ban does not offer health benefits. This lower score suggests that a substantial portion of respondents do not share this view, and they are likely to perceive health benefits from the ban. The findings reveal a strong consensus on the environmental benefits of the ban and moderate support for its health benefits. However, perceptions of inconvenience and the specific health impacts remain less clear, with some respondents expressing concerns or doubts about these aspects.

H01: There is no significant difference between Consumers' food choices, preferences shifted towards more sustainable options and post-ban on plastic food packaging.

Table 4: Consumers' food choices, preferences shifted towards more sustainable options and post-ban on plastic food packaging

Chi-Square	67.590 ^a
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Research Hypothesis 1, which asserts that consumers' food choices and preferences have shifted towards more sustainable options following the ban on plastic food packaging, the Chi-Square test results reveal a Chi-Square value of 67.590 with 2 degrees of freedom. The p-value is .000. This result indicates a statistically significant association between the ban on plastic food packaging and changes in consumer food choices and preferences. The Chi-Square value is notably high, and the p-value is well below the conventional significance level of 0.05. This suggests a strong rejection of the null hypothesis, demonstrating a meaningful shift towards more sustainable food options. The significant p-value supports the notion that the ban has effectively influenced consumer behavior, leading to a notable preference for sustainable alternatives. In summary, the Chi-Square test confirms that consumers' food choices and preferences have indeed shifted towards more sustainable options as a result of the plastic food packaging ban.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between how consumers perceive the ban on plastic packaging and positive impact on environmental conservation efforts.

Table 5: consumers perceive the ban on plastic packaging and positive impact on environmental conservation efforts

Chi-Square	47.651
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.001

For Research Hypothesis 2, which posits that consumers perceive the ban on plastic packaging as positively impacting environmental conservation efforts, the Chi-Square test results show a Chi-Square value of 47.651 with 4 degrees of freedom. The p-value (Asymp. Sig.) is .001. This result indicates a statistically significant association between consumer perceptions of the plastic packaging ban and its impact on environmental conservation. The Chi-Square value is substantial, and the p-value is well below the conventional significance level of 0.05, suggesting a strong rejection of the null hypothesis. The significant p-value implies that there is a meaningful relationship between the ban on plastic packaging and consumers' views on its environmental benefits. Consumers' perceptions align with the hypothesis that the ban contributes positively to environmental conservation efforts. The Chi-Square test confirms that consumers generally perceive the ban on plastic packaging as beneficial for environmental conservation. This suggests widespread agreement among consumers that the ban supports environmental goals, highlighting the effectiveness of such policies in promoting environmental sustainability.

Discussion of Findings

The data shows that while there is evidence of increased acceptance of environmentally friendly packaging and heightened awareness about the environmental issues related to food packaging, the overall impact on restaurant choices and food quality perception is moderate. Respondents express a shift towards preferring restaurants with sustainable practices and a slight willingness to adjust consumption patterns, but the influence on broader food-related behaviors is not as significant. This is in line with previous research by Food and Agriculture Organization or the United Nation (2020), who found that while awareness and preference for sustainable practices are growing, the influence on broader consumer behaviors, including dining choices and quality perception, can be limited. Olatubosun O. & Dawudu O. (2023) support this view, noting that consumer adoption of sustainable packaging often shows increased awareness but does not always translate into drastic changes in all aspects of food consumption. The moderate impact observed in this study reflects these findings, suggesting that while consumers are becoming more conscious, the overall changes in behavior may not be uniformly strong. The findings by indicating that the ban has led to a noticeable shift towards more sustainable food packaging options. This is aligned with the data, which shows a positive trend in consumer preferences for environmentally friendly practices. However, the moderate impact on overall food choices and quality perception reflects that while awareness and preference have increased, the ban has not drastically altered all aspects of consumer behavior. The impact of the ban on consumers' food choices, preferences, and behaviors. The analysis shows a moderate increase in environmental consciousness and preference for sustainable packaging among consumers. While there is some positive change in dining preferences and perceptions of food quality, the overall impact on eating out frequency and health perceptions is relatively modest. The analysis shows a moderate increase in environmental consciousness and preference for sustainable packaging among consumers.

Abusomwan (2020) similarly report that while there is some positive change in consumer preferences and perceptions related to sustainable practices, the overall impact on eating out frequency and health perceptions is moderate. This is echoed by Nigeria Environmental Protection Agency (2024), who found that environmental consciousness can influence specific food-related behaviors, but the impact varies across different consumer segments. The findings align with the hypothesis that the ban leads to some behavioral changes towards sustainability, though these changes are not uniformly strong across all areas of consumer behavior. This result supports the hypothesis that the ban has led to some changes in consumer behaviors towards sustainability. The moderate impact observed in the data indicates that while there is some shift towards environmentally conscious practices, it is not uniformly strong across all areas of consumer behavior. This suggests that the ban has influenced certain aspects of consumer choices, but the overall effect is more nuanced. Findings from Objective 3 examine consumer perceptions of the environmental and health benefits associated with the ban on styrofoam packaging. The data reveals strong support for the environmental benefits of the ban, with moderate acceptance of its health benefits. Consumers generally view the ban positively in terms of environmental impact but express mixed feelings about the specific health benefits and potential inconvenience. News Agency of Nigeria (2024) found similar results, with strong consumer support for the environmental benefits of bans on single-use plastics, but more mixed opinions regarding health benefits. Bolarinwa, (2023) also note that while environmental benefits are generally recognized and valued, perceptions regarding health impacts can be less clear and more variable. The discussion reflects how the findings align with the hypotheses, demonstrating the impact of the styrofoam ban on consumer behaviors and perceptions. The observed relationships between sustainability, consumer choices, and the role of education underscore the importance of understanding these dynamics in promoting effective environmental policies and consumer practices.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate consumer perceptions of the ban on styrofoam food packaging, focusing on its implications for health and well-being. The research has revealed several key insights into how this regulatory measure is perceived and its impact on consumer behavior and attitudes. The findings indicate that the ban on styrofoam food packaging has led to a noticeable shift in consumer preferences towards more sustainable packaging options. Consumers have shown





increased acceptance of environmentally friendly practices and heightened awareness of the environmental issues associated with food packaging. Despite this positive trend, the overall impact on restaurant choices and perceptions of food quality remains moderate. While there is a clear inclination towards supporting sustainable practices, the ban has not significantly altered broader food-related behaviors.

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