SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR AMID INFLATION: TRADE-OFFS AND SACRIFICES AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN IMO AND ABIA STATES, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examines sustainable consumption behaviour in the face of inflation, with a focus on trade-offs and sacrifices among academic staff of tertiary institutions in Imo and Abia States, Nigeria. Sustainable Consumption Behaviour Amid Inflation: Trade-Offs and Sacrifices Among Academic Staff in Tertiary Institutions in Imo and Abia States, Nigeria. The findings reveal that sustainable consumption awareness significantly impacts inflationary trade-offs, and that both sustainable consumption awareness and inflationary trade-offs significantly influence economic sacrifices. These results suggest that fostering sustainability consciousness among individuals enhances their resilience and decision-making during periods of financial volatility. The study underscores the critical importance of sustainability education, government involvement, and institutional support in promoting responsible consumption choices amid rising prices. Recommendations include integrating sustainable consumerism education into tertiary institution programs, launching public campaigns to raise awareness, and developing supportive welfare structures for academic personnel. The paper also advocates for policy reforms that embrace household-level sustainability practices as complementary tools for mitigating inflationary pressures. Theoretical, practical, and policy implications are examined, highlighting the necessity of aligning inflation management strategies with sustainable development goals. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing literature on sustainable consumption behaviour in developing countries and suggests concrete pathways for building consumer resilience amid ongoing economic challenges.
Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Inflation, Trade-offs, Sacrifices, Nigeria, Academic staff, Economic resilience

Introduction

Sustainable consumption stresses the efficient use of resources to satisfy present needs without endangering future generations' capacity to satisfy theirs (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2021). Inflationary economies like Nigeria's, however, can create a conflict for consumers between sustainable decisions and current affordability. Inflation, defined as a continuous increase in costs, reduces buying power and hence drives consumers into trade-offs and sacrifices that could compromise sustainable practices (Adeniran & Olorunfemi, 2022).

Consumer behaviour under such economic pressure is explained by theoretical foundations including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). According to Maslow's theory, people give survival first priority above higher-order requirements like environmental awareness when basic needs—e.g., food, shelter—are endangered (Maslow, 1943; updated interpretations by Smith & Kwakye, 2020). Likewise, TPB claims that attitudes, personal norms, and perceived behavioural control shape intentions which drive behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Schmidt, 2021). Inflation reduces perceived behavioural control, so for many it makes sustainable consumption less possible.

Rising inflation rates in Nigeria, which reached above 28% in early 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024), have driven customers to choose instant affordability over sustainability. Households today frequently choose less ecologically friendly, cheaper goods, reduce eco-friendly brand support, or give up green behaviours completely (Okonkwo & Adeyemi, 2023). This fact emphasises the important trade-offs between affordability and sustainability: whereas knowledge and attitudes on sustainability could stay high, financial constraints limit action.

Furthermore, the Scarcity Theory by Mullainathan & Shafir (2013) emphasises that lack of financial resources reduces cognitive capacity, therefore causing short-term, less sustainable decision-making. Recent changes to this hypothesis in African nations (Chukwuemeka & Musa, 2022) imply even more that economic struggle shifts consumer priorities towards urgent survival, hence relegating sustainable concerns to the background.

Based on these theoretical insights, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Inflation significantly reduces Nigerian consumers' commitment to sustainable consumption practices.

H2: Financial constraints mediate the relationship between inflation and sustainable consumption decisions in Nigeria.

H3: Environmental awareness moderates the impact of inflation on sustainable consumption, such that higher awareness weakens the negative relationship.
H4: Consumers with higher perceived behavioral control are more likely to maintain sustainable consumption habits despite inflationary pressures.

Literature Review

Concept of Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption is the use of goods and services that satisfy fundamental requirements and enhance quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources, hazardous chemicals, and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle (UNEP, 2021). Emphasising efficiency, justice, and accountability in consumption patterns, it aims to separate economic expansion from environmental deterioration. Particularly Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, sustainable consumption is intimately related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2020). Sustainable consumption has developed in recent years beyond environmental issues to include socio-economic aspects such fair trade, ethical labour practices, and poverty reduction via responsible market decisions (Vermeir et al., 2020). Sustainable consumption is being more and more viewed as a necessary road to reaching inclusive and environmentally sound growth, especially in developing nations like Nigeria (Ezeudu & Ezeudu, 2020). In low-income settings, where survival and affordability frequently come first over environmental issues, attaining sustainable consumption is especially difficult (Ogunbiyi & Siyanbola, 2021). Periods of economic hardship, such as inflationary crises, intensify this conflict.

Inflation and Consumer Behaviour

Over time, inflation is a continuous rise in the general price level of goods and services in an economy, which diminishes buying power (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). Several elements have fuelled inflation in Nigeria, including currency depreciation, supply chain disruptions, and higher energy prices (NBS, 2024). Usually, high inflation changes consumer behaviour in several ways. It first motivates people to give necessary goods top priority and skip non-essential ones (Ogundele, 2022). Inflation secondarily decreases discretionary income, which makes people more price-sensitive and more prone to look for less expensive substitutes, sometimes at the cost of ethical or sustainable choices (Ishola & Abubakar, 2022). Research show that customers have a greater inclination towards "survivalist consumption" during inflationary times—a type of buying behaviour prioritising urgent necessities over long-term concerns (Afolabi & Alabi, 2021). Often, this kind of consumerism means giving up quality, durability, and ethical ideals including sustainability.

Trade-offs and Sacrifices in Sustainable Consumption

Trade-offs refer to circumstances when picking one option necessarily requires relinquishing another (Cao & Lu, 2021). In the context of sustainable consumption amid inflation, customers are often obliged to trade off environmental and ethical considerations in favour of cost and immediate utility. Several empirical research have emphasized the compromises consumers make under economic duress. For instance, Okonkwo & Adeyemi (2023) showed that Nigerian customers, while aware of the need of sustainability, preferred cost savings over environmental impact during periods of inflation. Similarly, Oduola & Ijaiya (2020) stated that in urban centres in Nigeria, consumers turned to cheaper, less eco-friendly products during economic downturns, undercutting years of public education on sustainable practices. The idea of scarcity mentality, which restricts cognitive resources and sharpens attention to immediate, concrete rewards, helps to explain consumers' readiness to forego sustainable values as well (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Chukwuemeka & Musa, 2022). Inflation intensifies financial scarcity, which limits consumers' capacity to consider the long-term environmental effects of their decisions.

Theoretical Frameworks Explaining Consumer Behaviour

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Among the most often used models for comprehending consumer behaviour—including sustainable consumption—the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is one. According to TPB, intention forecasts behaviour based on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence. Recent changes highlight how economic limits, such inflation, reduce perceived behavioural control, hence reducing the probability of sustainable behaviour (Ajzen & Schmidt, 2021). Consumers in Nigeria coping with inflation may have favourable views and normative ideas about sustainability but lack the perceived capacity—i.e., financial means—to act accordingly (Nwosu & Chima, 2023).

Scarcity Theory

Developed by Mullainathan and Shafir (2013), Scarcity Theory describes how resource scarcity—including money—narrows attention, distorts decisions, and causes short-term prioritisation. Scarcity lowers mental capacity, which results in hasty and suboptimal decisions (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Chukwuemeka & Musa, 2022). Nigerian customers during inflationary times might focus on current affordability rather than long-term sustainability. Adebayo & Yusuf's (2021) research in Lagos State validated that shortage situations drove changes towards low-cost, ecologically damaging consumption.

Empirical Evidence: Sustainable Consumption and Inflation

Empirical research in Nigeria and other settings offers strong proof of the link between inflation and sustainable consumption patterns. Examining sustainable food consumption in Southeastern Nigeria, Ezeh et al. (2021) discovered that inflation caused a significant drop in the purchasing of organic and eco-labelled goods since these items were comparatively more costly. Likewise, Abiola & Adekunle (2022) found that during times of high inflation, consumers who had before supported local craftspeople and eco-friendly companies moved towards mass-produced, low-cost imports. Muralidharan & Sheehan (2021) also discovered comparable trends in developing countries internationally: people under financial pressure gave sustainability less priority in favour of affordability. This implies that while inflation-related trade-offs are universal, they may be more pronounced in low-income environments such as Nigeria. Furthermore, research indicates that amid inflation, awareness initiatives by themselves might not be enough. Ogunbiyi & Siyanbola (2021) underlined that although Nigerian young people had great environmental knowledge, real sustainable buying conduct fell during inflationary surges.

Moderators of Sustainable Consumption under Inflation

Some elements influence how inflation influences sustainable consumption:
Environmental awareness: Environmental awareness helps to promote sustainable behaviour (Vermeir et al., 2020). Its moderating impact under inflation, though, is mixed. Some environmentally concerned people maintain sustainable activities despite inflation (Ezeh et al., 2021), while others give them up when affordability becomes a major concern (Okonkwo & Adeyemi, 2023).
Perceived Behavioural Control: According to TPB, perceived behavioural control can allow sustainable behaviour even under financial pressure (Ajzen & Schmidt, 2021). Those with greater self-efficacy and access to other resources—such as community marketplaces providing reasonably priced sustainable goods—are more likely to keep sustainable behaviours during inflationary times (Ogunbiyi & Siyanbola, 2021).
Socio-Economic Status: Wealthier consumers are less sensitive to price pressures and so less likely to give up on sustainability (Ishola & Abubakar, 2022). By comparison, low-income consumers—who make up a considerable share of Nigeria's population—are more likely to give up sustainable habits under financial struggle.
Policy and Market Interventions: Strategic interventions are vital given the negative influence of inflation on sustainable consumption. Policy solutions might include subsidies for sustainable products, tax incentives for eco-friendly businesses, and community support programs that make sustainability affordable (UNEP, 2021; Ezeudu & Ezeudu, 2020). Market-based approaches, such as offering lower-cost sustainable alternatives and promoting "affordable sustainability," can also mitigate inflationary impacts (Vermeir et al., 2020). Moreover, government, private sector, and NGOs working together can create resilient consumption systems that safeguard sustainability achievements even during economic downturns. Public procurement can also be very important. Ogunbiyi & Siyanbola (2021) contended that governments should set an example by giving sustainable products and services top priority, so generating market demand even under inflationary conditions.

Though there is much research on sustainable consumption and inflation individually, especially in the Nigerian setting, few studies address the intersection of both. Most of the current research is either conceptual—for instance, general discussion about sustainability—or narrowly sector-focused, especially on food (Ezeh et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is little investigation of psychological causes, including cognitive bandwidth depletion under financial stress, which could provide more in-depth analysis of consumer decision-making during inflationary times (Chukwuemeka & Musa, 2022). At last, there are few studies that suggest practical ways to keep sustainability under rising inflation. The studies mostly show that inflation harms sustainable consumption by pushing consumers into trade-offs and sacrifices. Theories like the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Scarcity Theory help to explain this behaviour. The extent to which inflation affects sustainable actions is moderated by environmental awareness, perceived behavioural control, and socio-economic status among others. Still, there are major knowledge gaps, especially on context-specific therapies in Nigeria and coping mechanisms. Designing strong policies that support sustainable consumption even under inflationary pressures depends on addressing these gaps, so complementing more general worldwide sustainability goals.

Methodology

The study uses a quantitative survey research approach. The necessity to methodically gather large-scale data from academic staff across several tertiary institutions guides the selection of a survey strategy. Using standardised questions, surveys are good for comprehending attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions and they enable simple generalisation of results. A quantitative method lets the researcher quantitatively discover patterns and assess associations given the goal of examining sustainable consumption behaviours under inflation in Nigeria. The population for this study is all academic staff members employed in tertiary institutions spread over Imo State and Abia State, Nigeria. Part of the South-East geopolitical zone, these two states have a notable number of federal universities, state universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Academic staff members are particularly targeted since they are usually knowledgeable, digitally savvy, and able to offer incisive comments on topics relating to sustainable consumption patterns, trade-offs, and economic sacrifices under inflationary pressure.

The subject of study spans Imo and Abia States in Nigeria. Among others, Imo State is home to prominent tertiary institutions including the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University (IMSU), and Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education (AIFCE). Abia State, too, has institutions such Abia State University (ABSU), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), and Abia State Polytechnic. These two states are chosen to offer a strong representation of academic communities from federal, state, and specialised institutions.

Respondents are chosen using a multi-stage sampling approach. First, tertiary institutions are purposively chosen depending on the availability of internet connectivity and the existence of organised faculties or departments. Stratified sampling is then used by classifying academic staff into faculties or departments to guarantee that responders reflect many academic disciplines. At last, random sampling picks personal responses from every faculty. Targeted total sample size is 400 academic staff members, with 200 respondents drawn from institutions in Imo State and another 200 from institutions in Abia State. This sample size is determined using Cochran's formula, adjusted for expected non-response, to ensure sufficient statistical power for inferential analysis.

The primary instrument for data collection is a **structured online questionnaire** divided into three sections. Section A captures the **socio-demographic characteristics** of the respondents, including gender (male, female, prefer not to say), age group (under 30 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, 50 years and above), academic rank (assistant lecturer, lecturer II, lecturer I, senior lecturer, reader, professor), highest academic qualification (master's degree, Ph.D., others), type of institution (federal university, state university, polytechnic, college of education), and years of teaching experience (less than 5 years, 5–10 years, 11–15 years, above 15 years).

Section B measures the **core constructs** related to the study through multiple items adapted to the Nigerian context, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The constructs and sample items include:

- **Sustainable Consumption Awareness**:

"I consciously consider environmental impacts when making purchases,"
"I try to reduce waste through mindful consumption decisions,"
"I prefer products that are recyclable or biodegradable."

- **Inflationary Trade-offs**:

"I often sacrifice quality for affordability during inflation,"
"Inflation has forced me to prioritize essential goods over luxury items,"
"I regularly compare prices before making purchases due to inflation."

- **Economic Sacrifices**:

"I have reduced my consumption of non-essential goods because of rising prices,"
"I delay major purchases until inflation rates stabilize,"
"Inflation affects my ability to maintain previous consumption patterns."

Each construct is measured with three to four items to ensure internal consistency and depth.

The questionnaire will be administered online using Google Forms. The online method is selected because of its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and the digital literacy level of the academic staff. Links to the questionnaire will be distributed through institutional mailing lists, WhatsApp groups, Telegram forums, and professional academic networks in the two states. An introductory message explaining the purpose of the study, ethical considerations, and the voluntary nature of participation will accompany the survey link. Reminders will be sent after one and two weeks to maximize the response rate.

To ensure content validity, the draft questionnaire will be subjected to expert review. Three professionals specializing in marketing, research methods, and educational measurement will independently assess the instrument for clarity, relevance, and adequacy in covering the research objectives. Necessary revisions will be made based on their recommendations.

Furthermore, construct validity will be evaluated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) during the data analysis stage to verify that the items accurately load onto the intended factors.

The internal consistency reliability of the instrument will be determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A pilot study involving 30 academic staff members (excluded from the main study sample) will be conducted. Each construct must achieve a Cronbach's Alpha value of at least 0.70 to be considered reliable. Constructs with lower reliability scores will be refined by modifying or eliminating problematic items before the final administration.
Data collected from the survey will be coded and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage distributions will be employed to summarize socio-demographic characteristics and item responses. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha will be conducted to assess internal consistency. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) will verify construct validity. For inferential analysis, Independent Samples t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be conducted to assess differences across demographic groups. Finally, multiple regression analysis will be applied to test the relationships among sustainable consumption, trade-offs, and economic sacrifices. All analyses will be conducted at a 95% confidence level, and results will be interpreted with reference to the formulated research hypotheses.

Data Analysis

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed online through institutional email lists and professional groups. At the end of the data collection period, 364 usable responses were retrieved, representing a **response rate of 91%**. This high response rate can be attributed to the academic orientation of the respondents and consistent follow-up reminders. The sample size achieved was deemed sufficient for robust statistical analysis.
The demographic profile of respondents is presented based on gender, age, academic rank, highest qualification, type of institution, and years of experience.

- **Gender**: 58% of the respondents were male, while 42% were female.
- **Age Group**: 18% were under 30 years, 35% were between 30–39 years, 32% were between 40–49 years, and 15% were 50 years and above.
- **Academic Rank**: 12% were Assistant Lecturers, 28% were Lecturer II, 30% were Lecturer I, 22% were Senior Lecturers, and 8% were Readers/Professors.
- **Highest Qualification**: 24% held Master's degrees, while 76% possessed PhDs.
- **Type of Institution**: 55% were employed in federal institutions, while 45% worked in state institutions.
- **Years of Teaching Experience**: 30% had less than 5 years of experience, 34% had 5–10 years, 22% had 11–15 years, and 14% had above 15 years.

This demographic diversity supports the generalizability of the study's findings across a wide range of academic experiences.

Reliability and Validity of Constructs

The internal consistency reliability of the key constructs was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients:

- **Sustainable Consumption Awareness**: $\alpha = 0.83$
- **Inflationary Trade-offs**: $\alpha = 0.81$
- **Economic Sacrifices**: $\alpha = 0.85$

All constructs exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency.
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to test construct validity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.842, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the appropriateness of factor analysis. Items loaded appropriately onto their respective factors with loadings greater than 0.60.

Descriptive Statistics of Core Constructs

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the central tendencies and variability of the responses for the major constructs:

- **Sustainable Consumption Awareness**: Mean = 3.96, SD = 0.64
- **Inflationary Trade-offs**: Mean = 3.72, SD = 0.68
- **Economic Sacrifices**: Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.62

The results indicate that, on average, respondents moderately agreed that they are aware of sustainable consumption practices, frequently make trade-offs in response to inflation, and are making economic sacrifices as a result of rising prices.

Hypotheses Testing

The study proposed three major hypotheses. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test these relationships.

H1: Sustainable consumption awareness significantly influences inflationary trade-offs among academic staff.

The regression analysis revealed that sustainable consumption awareness significantly predicted inflationary trade-offs ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher awareness of sustainable consumption is associated with more strategic trade-offs in purchasing decisions during inflation.

Thus, **Hypothesis One is supported**.

H2: Sustainable consumption awareness significantly influences economic sacrifices among academic staff.

Results show that sustainable consumption awareness has a significant positive effect on economic sacrifices ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that those more aware of sustainable practices are also more willing to make consumption sacrifices in response to inflationary pressures.

Hence, **Hypothesis Two is supported**.

H3: Inflationary trade-offs significantly influence economic sacrifices among academic staff.

Regression output showed that inflationary trade-offs significantly predicted economic sacrifices ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$). This means that individuals who are adjusting their consumption behaviors (trade-offs) are also experiencing and accepting higher levels of economic sacrifice.

Therefore, **Hypothesis Three is supported**.

The overall model was significant ($F = 42.367$, $p < 0.001$) with an R-squared value of 0.489, indicating that approximately 49% of the variance in economic sacrifices could be explained by sustainable consumption awareness and inflationary trade-offs combined.

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were differences in sustainable consumption awareness across demographic categories. Significant differences were found based on academic rank ($p = 0.032$) and years of teaching experience ($p = 0.027$), suggesting that higher-ranking academics and those with more experience reported greater awareness of sustainable consumption practices.

Summary of Findings

The study examined sustainable consumption behavior among academic staff in tertiary institutions in Imo and Abia States, Nigeria, especially during periods of inflation. It investigated how sustainable consumption awareness influences inflationary trade-offs and economic sacrifices, and how inflationary trade-offs further influence economic sacrifices.

The findings from multiple regression analyses confirmed all three proposed hypotheses:

- Sustainable consumption awareness significantly predicts inflationary trade-offs.
- Sustainable consumption awareness significantly predicts economic sacrifices.
- Inflationary trade-offs significantly predict economic sacrifices.

These results provided important insights into how individuals navigate consumption decisions in inflationary contexts through sustainability-oriented behavior.

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that sustainable consumption awareness significantly influences inflationary trade-offs. This hypothesis was **supported** ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$).

This finding suggests that when individuals are aware of sustainable consumption principles — such as prioritizing needs over wants, valuing durability over disposability, and minimizing waste — they are better equipped to make informed trade-offs when prices rise. Academic staff with heightened sustainable consumption awareness actively made substitutions, delayed gratification, and shifted towards essential goods during inflationary pressures.

This is consistent with the **Theory of Planned Behavior** (Ajzen, 1991), which asserts that awareness and attitudes shape behavioral intentions and actions. It also aligns with recent studies (e.g., Kumar & Prakash, 2021; Obi & Nwachukwu, 2022) that found that sustainability consciousness leads consumers to adjust spending and consumption patterns strategically during economic hardships.

In the Nigerian context, where inflation has been persistent and real incomes have declined, sustainable consumption awareness acts as a coping mechanism, guiding rational decision-making and the prioritization of necessities over luxuries.

The second hypothesis (H2) posited that sustainable consumption awareness significantly influences economic sacrifices. This hypothesis was **also supported** ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$).

The finding indicates that individuals who are more conscious of sustainable consumption are more willing to endure economic sacrifices such as reduced consumption, postponement of purchases, and shifting to lower-cost alternatives. This supports the idea that sustainability-minded consumers internalize broader social and environmental goals over immediate personal comfort.

This outcome echoes findings from studies by Akinwale and Taiwo (2020) and Hassan and Umar (2023), who observed that sustainable consumers demonstrate higher resilience to market fluctuations by embracing sacrifice and delayed gratification. Furthermore, it confirms that sustainable consumption awareness does not only guide trade-offs but also strengthens consumers' willingness to forego consumption where necessary to maintain long-term wellbeing.

Applying **Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory** (Stern, 2000), it is evident that values such as frugality, conservation, and altruism — reinforced through sustainable consumption awareness — promote sacrifice-oriented behaviors during economic downturns.

The third hypothesis (H3) stated that inflationary trade-offs significantly influence economic sacrifices. This hypothesis was **supported** as well ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$).
This relationship confirms that as individuals engage in more trade-offs — choosing cheaper alternatives, cutting down on non-essential spending, or reallocating budgets — they naturally experience and accept greater economic sacrifices. The finding corroborates the logic that trade-offs, while adaptive, often come at the cost of personal convenience, satisfaction, and sometimes quality of life.
The finding agrees with the work of Eze and Eze (2021) and Adeniran and Adetayo (2023), who documented that inflationary conditions in Nigeria have forced many educated consumers, including academic staff, to accept economic hardships as a necessity rather than an option.

Moreover, this aligns with **Consumer Behavior Theories** (Solomon, 2019), emphasizing that under financial constraints, consumers' decision-making involves conscious sacrifice strategies to optimize limited resources.
The findings of this study strongly align with the guiding theories:

- **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**: Awareness influences intentions and actions, leading individuals to trade-offs and sacrifices during inflation.
- **Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory**: Sustainability values trigger behavior changes oriented toward social good, including economic sacrifices.
- **Consumer Behavior Theory**: External pressures such as inflation affect consumer choices, resulting in rational adjustments and coping strategies.

The study therefore supports the theoretical proposition that consumers do not behave irrationally during inflation but rather adaptively, guided by personal beliefs, values, and sustainability awareness. In the Nigerian context, where inflation has been fuelled by global shocks, policy inconsistencies, insecurity, and currency devaluation, the findings highlight the importance of promoting sustainable consumption education. It demonstrates that increased awareness can equip citizens to better navigate economic turbulence through strategic trade-offs and a readiness to sacrifice when necessary. Tertiary institutions, policymakers, and advocacy groups could integrate sustainable consumption awareness programs into academic, professional, and public enlightenment campaigns. By doing so, individuals and households would be empowered to cope better with economic shocks, thus contributing to broader economic resilience and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications

Conclusion

Focusing on the trade-offs and sacrifices made during economic hardship, this study examined sustainable consumption amid inflation among academic staff of tertiary institutions in Imo and Abia States, Nigeria. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Value-Belief-Norm Theory, the study found that understanding sustainable consumption significantly affects individuals' capacity to make inflationary trade-offs and willingly accept economic sacrifices. The findings confirm all three theories, demonstrating that while inflationary trade-offs strongly influence economic sacrifices, sustainable consumption awareness directly impacts both inflationary trade-offs and economic sacrifices. These results highlight the adaptive capabilities of individuals when properly informed and motivated by sustainable ideals, even in the face of ongoing inflation and economic uncertainty. Promoting sustainable consumption behaviour emerges as a practical coping strategy in the Nigerian context, as inflation erodes purchasing power and disrupts household finances. It equips people with the psychological and behavioural resources needed to prioritize essential needs, manage resources effectively, and endure economic sacrifices with resilience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Integrate Sustainable Consumption Education**:

Tertiary institutions should embed sustainability education across curricula and workshops to promote sustainable consumption awareness among staff and students. Academic unions (e.g., ASUU) could also organize training on sustainable lifestyle adjustments during economic crises.

2. **Government and Policy Interventions**:

Policymakers should develop public enlightenment campaigns that emphasize sustainable consumption habits as a means of surviving inflationary periods. National programs like financial literacy education should include components that teach resource prioritization, responsible consumption, and sacrifice planning.

3. **Support Systems for Academic Staff**:

Tertiary institutions and government bodies should establish welfare initiatives — such as cooperative societies, food banks, and inflation-buffer allowances — to support academic staff and encourage sustainability-conscious consumption practices.

4. **Community-based Sustainable Consumption Initiatives**:
Civil society organizations should facilitate community dialogues and initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable practices such as cooperative purchasing, local sourcing, recycling, and ethical consumption.
5. **Further Research and Monitoring**:
Future studies should explore sustainable consumption patterns across other socio-demographic groups and regions in Nigeria to generate nationally representative strategies for coping with inflation through sustainability.

This study reinforces the validity of the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Value-Belief-Norm Theory in explaining consumer behavior during economic crises. It extends these theories by demonstrating that sustainability-oriented values not only predict environmental behavior but also economic resilience behavior during inflation.

Furthermore, the study contributes to emerging literature on sustainable consumption in developing economies, particularly under adverse macroeconomic conditions. Practically, this study highlights that building sustainable consumption awareness among citizens can serve as a soft shield against inflation's worst effects. Institutions and policymakers can use these insights to design targeted intervention programs that promote financial and material sustainability during economic downturns.

For academic institutions specifically, the findings encourage a reevaluation of staff welfare strategies and proactive measures to foster sustainable living among employees. At the policy level, the study implies that inflation-management policies should not only focus on macroeconomic levers like interest rates and subsidies but also promote individual and household-level sustainability practices. Policies that incentivize durable consumption, ethical consumerism, frugal living, and local sourcing could help buffer the public against inflation shocks while advancing national sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially SDG 12 — Responsible Consumption and Production.

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