THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF IMPORTED USED ELECTRONICS MERCHANDISE IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Lord God Almighty for his benevolence, inspiration, love and faithfulness towards me from the commencement and completion of this work.

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ABSTRACT

Imported Used Electronics (IUEs) are officially conceived in research oriented policy as potential and actual toxic "solid waste", yet Nigeria remains a high consumer demand economy for them. IUEs include electronic monitors, digital devices, docking stations, cell phones, hand-held diagnostics, screening tools, television sets among others. Nigerian economy has evolved a socially constructed merchandise structure, which sustains IUEs trade. Literature, however limits IUEs discourses to pure-scientific framing of toxicology and dump in the Third World countries. This study, therefore, examined the subjective meanings that sustain the demand and merchandise of IUEs against official prohibition.

Social action theory guided the study. The research design was exploratory. The qualitative research method was used. Data were generated from both primary and secondary sources. The research area was Lagos, and data were collected from Ikeja Computer Village, Westminster Used Electronics Market, Alaba International Market, Apapa Customs Office (ACO) and National Environmental Standards and Regulatory Enforcement Agency (NESREA). Participants were selected through purposive and snow-balling techniques. Non-participant observation for 15 months, In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were held with 22 IUE consumers and 22 market-actors. A total of 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were held with ACO officers (three), Association Heads of the three markets (eight) and veteran market actors (four). Six FGDs were conducted with IUEs consumers and market-actors, while five case studies were carried out on large scale consumers and market actors with at least 10 years working experience in IUEs merchandizing. Secondary data were sourced from NESREA and Basel Convention Coordinating Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for African Region, Ibadan. Data obtained were content analyzed.

Demand for IUEs was hinged on peculiar social relations of consumption and merchandising which rationalized and constructed IUEs as desirable and affordable modern material objects. This relations involved processes of upgrading "solid waste" into tradable commodities infused with deluxe values and potentialities for leveling class. Artful transactions involved offer of disused electronics to market-actors in exchange for upgraded IUEs at a little token. A structure of interdependent actors sustained the IUEs merchandise. It included official gatekeepers such as Customs and NESREA, whose variable roles sustained entry of solid wastes into the market as IUEs; and administrators, merchants and interlinks-security who provided administrative, economic and coercive functions respectively. Furthermore, resuscitators upgrade otherwise wastes into merchandisable goods. Scavengers-collectors extract the irredeemable from merchants, to scrap-collectors who trade them to bulk-scrap-buyers. Bulk-buyers in turn, trade the scraps to domestic iron-smelting companies and/or illegally export them. In essence, IUEs remained tradable even in their end-of-life stages. Thus, local meanings of utility of IUEs and of employment potentialities were constructed against official policy perception of them as solid waste.

Through a structured system of market interactions, actor-merchants contrived utility for Imported Used Electronics in the process of merchandise and consumption. Government should therefore accommodate local realities in order to proffer inclusive and robust IUEs policy.

Keywords: Imported used electronics, End-of-life utility, Consumers, Actor-merchants

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Used electrical electronics are electronic products bought and used by the buyer, or the results of technological modifications to the real products designed to enhance the lifespan of the products in the market. They are usually older versions of electronic products corrected to become useable for a longer while rather than being discarded and thrown away. They are presumed by clients to be technologically inferior to the latest version; hence, the parts must be replaced with items from current technology (Herat, 2010). Those discarded have a tendency to pose threats to both humans and the environment. The used discarded electronics are termed electronics wastes (e-wastes) (BANTSVC, 2002; Onwughara, Nnorom, Kanno and Chockwuma, 2010), particularly in pure-scientific literature. The transition of used electronics into electronic wastes is the transition into the 'dark side' of technology (BAN, 2002). The pure-scientific conception of used electronics equipment as wastes (e-wastes) however suffers a 'definitional ambiguity' when it comes to enforcement of emergent policy regimes set against their problematic cross border movement from developed to developing nations (Robinson, 2009; SBC, 2011; Herat and Paratiamby, 2012; Khan, 2014). This ambiguity stems from the general categorization of nearly all used electronics as e-wastes with the presupposition of an 'end-of-life' (EOL) of the product (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007). It is argued in this work that this is not necessarily so.

The noticeable transboundary trade of used and legislatively tagged waste electronics, today, reflects man's quest to own the latest electronic gadgetry (Greenpeace report, 2010). The archetypically used electronics that are tagged wastes include outmoded and redundant electronic items or those lying fallow due to non-usage, such as monitors, keyboards, personal computers, central processing units, printers, scanners, work-stations, personal digital assistants, docking stations, cell phones, hand-held diagnostics, screening tools, television sets, video machines, DVD players, mobile phones, among many other items. There are others such as servers, fax machines, copiers, scanners, tape drives, backup drives and typewriters (Collins 2007; Umesi and Onyia 2008; Cornell 2009; Osuagwu and Ikerionwu, 2010). These products, like automobiles and other imported goods are consumed within developing economies (Omobowale, 2009), because they are given a difficult label of 'consumable second-hand goods' in such

countries as Ghana (Ababio, 2012) and Nigeria where they are popularly known as *Tokunbo* electronics (Omobowale, 2013 a & b).

This study's focus is on imported used electronics considering the transfer and demand in Lagos, Nigeria. The aim is to uncover how these imported used electronics merchandise are socially organized in view of social relations sustaining the demand in Lagos, Nigeria despite storied potentially debilitating effect of these electronics in Nigeria. The principal research attention of this work is on the social relations of demand and merchandise side of imported used electronics. Nascent studies reveal that in spite of the potentially toxic metals in the imported used electronics, a large number of people living in developing countries construe them as profitable, tradable and socio-economic resources that could serve as means of livelihood (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007; Ababio, 2009; SBC, 2011; Manhart, Osibanjo, Aderinto, and Prakash, 2011; Herat and Paratiamby, 2012). The consumer demand and trade in used electronics have however become major factors behind the swelling municipal solid waste streams in cities particularly. So this study investigates the reason for continuation of the demand-supply syndrome in spite of the danger to life and to the environment.

A significant step forward, towards the relevance of the research development process is that literature have shown that used objects possess further usefulness or utility values within the context of social relational constructions of meanings (Appadurai, 1986; Setiffi, 2011; Evans, 2012; Ture, 2013). In these social relations, it has been suggested that used objects can possess a 'social life' of a kind and also have 'tournaments of values' (Appadurai, 1986) creeping into 'cultural biographies' of the self-contingent upon human meanings (Kopytoff, 1986). Thus, used items have been considered to be *artful* and useful in second-hand consumer culture (Crewe, Gregson and Brook, 2009; Setiffi, 2011) in which materials can and do acquire 'transitional lives' through meanings which are creatively ascribed to the 'material' and 'non-material' forms (Woodward, 2011). Indeed as Omobowale (2013a) shows, used electronics have also become potential and actual consumer goods because of subjective interpretations usually assigned to their use among consumers who formulate the reuse values for them. Consequently, from Gregson, Metcalfe and Crewe's (2007) study, we realize that the lifespan of used things do not always end up as a discard, rather they can be born-again and sold-on, stored or handed down.

Our interest then is to explore further the kind of meanings and types of activities that continue to make the materials useful for consumption in spite of the dangers they pose.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Used electronics in many pure-scientific literature are termed as e-wastes based on the 'toxicological' and 'technological' threats they pose for human and environmental conditions (Puckett et al, 2002, 2005; Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007; Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2008; Robinson, 2009 and Onwughara et al, 2010). On the contrary, recent studies challenge the reference to used electronics as e-wastes (Unep/UNU, 2014). Tereda (2012) equally challenges the orthodox position arguing that far from being a technological problem, the problem of e-waste is a sociological one. What is therefore important is to understand what roles human actors, human actions, social meanings and interpretations, play in the storied dimensions of used electronics that have sustained interest in their consumption and merchandise. In other words, we have to move away from the likelihood for 'technological determinism' ideology rooted in the 'manufacture occasioned –planned-product-obsolescence' to the sociological explanations that undergird the flow and movement of used electronics into developing countries like Nigeria and Ghana (SBC, 2011; Ababio, 2012; Omobowale, 2013). The tendency in research and policy to emphasize 'technology' and 'toxicology' dimensions has only informed a generalized conception of demand and merchandise as 'unsustainable and unhealthy human practices' and nothing else (Toxic Link, 2003; Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007; Robinson, 2009).

Challenging the reference to used electronics as 'wastes', Khetriwal, Luepschen and Kuehr (2013) highlight the need for 'second party' meanings which may not necessarily construe them as wastes. On the assumption that used electronics are e-wastes moved from developed to developing countries (BAN, 2005) under capitalists camouflage as 'donor missions', to 'bridge digital divide' between the developing (Achankeng, 2003) nations, scholars have argued that e-wastes, used electronics generate 'e-waste magic' in developing countries such as provision of development through ICT (Vallauri, 2009). Contrary to the notion that their cross-border movement to developing countries is predicated on unequal power relations between the rich and poor countries, Lepawsky and McNabb (2010) note that used electronics have undergone the 'processes of value' and 'creations of value' in developing countries, thus stressing their own

capability. In general, theoretical studies on electronics suggest that electronics have a 'social life of their own' within tournaments of value (Appadurai, 1986) and a cultural biography (kopytoff, 1986) which makes them 'transitional' (Woodward, 2011) within the social relational contexts of the marketplace (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Setiffi, 2011). In fact they are of economic importance to a category of people.

Previous research on market relations have emphasized the possibility of durable goods to be sustained by second-hand cultures and practices (Princen and Clapp, 2001; Pelletiere and Reinert, 2002; Kumar, 2002; Clerides and Hadjiyiannis, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Setiffi, 2011; Woodward, 2011). In general, emphasis has been on durables such as automobiles, textiles (Omobowale, 2009) and 'e-waste in places like Nigeria (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2008; Manhart et al, 2011; Omobowale, 2013 a & b). However, the context of inter-actor meanings and market relations sustaining the influx of imported used electronics in Nigeria has received far less attention. More attention therefore needs to be devoted to the interpretive world and social relational context of imported used electronics demand in Nigeria, particularly with a view to understanding the larger social organization of the merchandise, and how moments of interactor exchanges are enjoined in the market. It is in the embedded nature of practices, meanings and interpretations that actors in a developing country like Nigeria appreciate the value of used electronics and are willing to stake their capital on them. In this regard, this research uncovers the everyday taken-for-granted meanings and nuances which have sustained the merchandise of used electronics (e-waste).

1.3 Research Question

This research attempts to provide answers to the following research questions.

1. How has legislative rational governance constructed the used electronics importation and what is the nature of the relationship of the traders to the restrictive electronics conventions being enforced?
2. What social relations inform consumer demand for imported used electronics?
3. What possible social relations exist around the used electronics end-of-life?
4. What are the roles of gatekeepers in used electronics merchandise?
5. How are imported used electronics merchandise socially organized (for trade)?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

This study aims at investigating the social relations of imported used electronics merchandise in Lagos, Nigeria. The following are the objectives that will help in achieving this aim.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The study objectives aim to:

2. understand the legal rational governance and local construction of used electronics restrictive conventions,
3. understand the social relations of consumer demands for imported used electronics,
4. uncover possible social relations sustaining used electronics end-of-life merchandise,
5. uncover the roles of gatekeepers in used electronics merchandise (trade), and
6. probe the social organization of imported used electronics merchandise.

1.5 Significance of Study

The study improved on earlier literature by unveiling the 'meaningful and social relational contexts of merchandise which have been previously ignored' (Setiffi, 2011). Secondly, the understanding of the social organization of the influx of used electronics in Nigeria, from an interpretive perspective was a major contribution against the popular belief of the toxic nature of used electronics (See for example Toxic Link, 2003; Puckett et al, 2005). Thirdly, the study bridged the literature gap springing from elaborate macro framing of used electronics realities (such as those on transboundary flow based on globalization and capitalism – See for example Achankeng, 2003; Schmidt, 2006; Jeffries, 2006; Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007) at the expense of micro-realities. The study's engagement with systematic social relations sustaining merchandise of imported used electronics in Nigeria provided a narrative of how Nigerians involved socially frame, construct and negotiate what they subjectively construe as development.

Theoretically, the interpretive action perspective to conceptualizing the flow, consumer demand for and trade of used electronics in the context of a developing country like Nigeria, known to be a leading destination of used electronics in Africa, became a major contribution to knowledge.

This is because the social action theory examined the dynamics of values and meanings by which actors related with used electronics within the context of demand and merchandise.

The sociological significance of the work stemmed from how legislative governance and regulatory regimes, framed used electronics as potential wastes. With this study providing meanings and their implications in the context of social relations of merchandise, it highlighted major factors impeding the successful implementation.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Imported Used Electronics: These are electronics goods of more or less longer durability, products, used for data processing, telecommunications and entertainment in private households and businesses. Examples are computers, entertainment electronics, mobile phones and such items that can be used and discarded by their original users for various personal reasons. They may or may not have undergone further reengineering prior to their consumption in Nigeria. The use of the term often ranges in form, from the used electrical electronics equipments (UEEE), to second-hand electronics, to waste electrical electronics equipment (WEEE) and to electronic waste or e-wastes. In addition to lacking a standard or central definition in literature, the term also suffers from definitional ambiguity and inconsistency, in its application. In the context of this research, imported used electronics are identified in the context of subjective definitions and meanings developed by consumers and traders and other possible actors.

Merchandise: This refers to the imported used electronics among sellers and other actors who subjectively define them as marketable goods. Contextually, the term also refers to the trade of both imported used electronics and used electronics scraps.

Consumption: Is the activity or practice of purchasing and using imported used electronics. The practice is operationally defined in this study as a social relational act between the buyers and sellers of imported used electronics, for the acquisition of the electronics.

Social Relations: This refers to the dynamics of interactions between actors who are engaged in construction of meanings, to be attached to the used electronics as objects of exchange.

Social organization: This is the systematically organized form arising from chain of transaction and exchange and consumption of used electronics.

End-Of-Life (EOL): A purely scientific defined terminal often used to designate and mark the perceived or actual technologically programmed lifespan of used electronics.

Commodification: This is the assignment of economic value to objects which have been originally defined in research and literature as waste or toxic. It involves the interpretive infusion of utility value to an item which has initially been regarded as a waste.

Toxicology (Hazardous metals): In this study, toxicology denotes embedded heavy metals in technological products which pure-scientific research and researchers classify as used electronics or e-wastes. Such metals include lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium, selenium, hexavalent chromium, flame retardants among others. Toxicology is a reference to a chemical impact or potential chemical impact or human health and environmental threats which the listed metals pose.

Technological determinism: The term in this study describes the tendency in literature to construe used electronics as e-wastes due to their 'production-programmed-product obsolescence' (shortened production lifespan) that generates the problem of waste dumping and the swelling of global solid waste stream. The tendency in research and literature to see used electronics in this light ensures devotion to the material and technological production dimension of used electronics but hardly the dimension of demand and social relations.

E-waste: The term is customarily used in pure-scientific literature to refer to the obsolescing material attributes of (used) electronics.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This section presents a thematic discourse from the literatures reviewed on various topics related to the phenomenon of study –the social relations of imported used electronics merchandise. Critical attention is given to what has been done before in relation to selected issues such as: 'the lifespan of objects and the throwaway society', 'object relations and the dynamics of consumer culture', 'the context of secondhand trade and durable goods' and 'the dynamics and contradictions of "used" meanings'.

2.1.1 Lifespan of objects and the throwaway society

Lifespan literature on consumer objects reveal that objects have an end-of-life (EOL) that follows from manufacture-programmed technical lifespans of such commodities (Grower, 2010). In essence, the depreciating and naturally obsolescing physical manufacture attributes of consumer objects is central to the thesis on product EOL (UNEP, 2013). Because of the pluralizing emphasis on the determining role of the materiality of products on products' EOL, scant attention is devoted to how an object possibly acquires new values and further utility through subjective social construction of them by different actors (Omobowale, 2009, 2013). This narrowed focus on the materiality of products has also informed the supposition and postulate that the lifespan of things is terminal in nature. As to what exactly inaugurates objects' EOL, some have argued that "discard" and "disposition" of products by their initial users are core practices that precipitate, define and shape a product's EOL (UNEP, 2013, Ture, 2013). A wider dimension of discard and disposition of used objects by initial users manifests in cross-border movement and transfer of used objects such as used electrical electronics, from developed countries of the global north to developing countries in the global south (Puckett et al, 2002, SBC, 2011; Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2009). Notwithstanding the broad emphases on materiality, some literature have disdained discard and disposition as "a site of residual value," "end of consumption and objects" life (end-of-life) and as a space marking the "physical/psychological separation of humans from possessions" (Evans, 2012).

With the existence of products' EOL characterized by increased tendency for premature discard and disposition of objects, some scholars argue that we live in a modern society known as the "throwaway society" (Grower, 2010; Cooper, 2012). For a number of reasons, they argue that people discard things well before they have reached the end of their "technical lifespan" –the maximum length of time for which the product could function (Grower, 2010). Some key premises underlying the proposed throwaway society thesis can be inferred. They include: the obsolescent materiality of things –terminal lifespan of things, the tendency for premature product discard by initial users, a prefigured, predictable and identifiable lifespan of things based on predetermined design criterion (SBC, 2011, Grower, 2010). Theoretically too, the tendency to depend more on the "materiality of things" (UNEP, 2013) and less on the social construction of objects has shaped how and what human patterns towards objects are discussed. The same tendency has largely also influenced what forms of explanations have been advanced for the existing modern society (Evans, 2012) in which things are generally associated with less durable actual and use lives.

Owing to the tendency for EOL to occasion throwaway society, and to orchestrate product discard which in turn encourages waste generate and swelling of solid waste streams (Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2009), throwaway objects, the throwaway actors and the practice of throwaway in general have come under criticisms. For instance, some argue that most scholars associate throwing away and trashing with value destruction, wasting, and unsustainability (Ture, 2013:14). As Evans (2012) argues, consumer behavior and consumption of objects such as used electronics have been disparaged as unsustainable human patterns. Both consumption and trading of potentially hazardous used electrical electronics are framed as risky as they expose humans to the potentially harmful heavy metal substances embedded in these electronics (Akancheng, 2003, SBC, 2011).

United Nations' advocacy for globally sustainable production and consumption has also strengthened ongoing processes that castigate production and consumption and, sometimes too, the cross-border movement and transfer of the so-called throwaway objects as illegal, unhealthy, vulnerable, unsound and unsustainable pathways to development (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007).

Evans (2012) argues that wastefulness in consumption has uncritically positioned so-called consumer cultures as "throwaway societies."

The throwaway thesis portrays current volumes of waste generation as incontrovertible evidence of excessive, wanton nature of contemporary consumerism as compared to an earlier time in which thrifty forebears were imagined to be far less wasteful. These propositions substantiate the moral critique of consumer behaviour (Evans, 2012). One can argue that what the EOL and throwaway society thesis clearly ignores is the post-consumer experiences of things which unfold in light of subjective meanings and subject-object relations.

Contrary to the notions that object EOL exists and that it orchestrates a throwaway society, some scholars argue that the life of things is not terminal. Instead, what exists is a "social life of things" expressed within "tournaments of value" (Appadurai, 1986). Tobin substantiates the position of Appadurai in 'Social Life of Things' when he argues that meanings and values of objects emerge in movements. To define commodity appropriately would therefore necessitate study of commodity in motion. Objects can begin their existence as commodities; they can become something else, including a gift, an heirloom, a museum piece. As such, these objects can be described as having been diverted from the "commodity phase" into another phase through the various procedures involving enclaving and removal from circulation. Hence, rather than depict an object, the term commodity becomes a stage through which an object can pass during its social life**.** Whereas discard remains central to EOL narratives and the throwaway society debates, debates upholding social life of things argue that, even during discard, used objects can acquire new lives made possible by values assigned to them by human subjects (Ture 2014). In essence, objects can witness "cultural biographies" (Kopytoff, 1986) and "moral economies of value" (Gibson, 2010) even during and after their supposed EOL. In their mobility through "social life and social death," objects such as food can witness mediated encounters and experiences through subjective human practices which protract and reinvent their lives. As they transit from social life to social death (waste), life of an object can be mediated by routines of "household food provisioning and contingencies of everyday life", "social relation predicated in enduring family convention of family meal" and; "socio-temporal context of food practices." Rather than outright disposal, households foods could move through multistage "holding

processes." Even when social death of food is assured, a process of disposition is moralized through the process of "refrigeration." Hence, it is possible to defer the disposal of certain foodstuffs.

Gibson (2010) challenges the throwaway thesis, arguing that discarding is not an arbitrary action indicating careless disregard for object –food waste/wasting. On the contrary, the very act of discarding among humans is anxiety laden, and this explains refrigeration. It is consequently important to recognize and to understand the "social and material contexts of food practices." The social context will expose research to discussions of "time, tastes, conventions, family relations and domestic divisions of labor" (Evans, 2012:46). Evans (2012) suggests that the disposal (and wasting) is a necessary moment in the competent enactment of domestic practice.

Palmer and Clark (2005) corroborate the counter-EOL debates by establishing in the study of second hand consumption that EOL, and in this case, rubbish, is a prerequisite for entrance of commodities into new values. To this end, they argue that the export of used clothing from the First World to the Second or Third Worlds is not simply a representation of the dying breath of colonialism as some argue. Rather, going by the thesis of "rubbish theory," for objects to move from the transient category of depreciating value to the durable category of accumulating value, they must pass through the covert category of "rubbish" to enable their value to be radically reassigned. This suggests that the essence of commodities is not inherent in the process of production nor are they fixed. Instead, new meanings are assigned to things relative to the consumer interpretations. In their study of second-hand trade, Stobart and Van Damme (2010) show that household possessions were redistributed and reused from generation to generation; new purchases were worn-out, patched up and refashioned; all sorts of products circulated between social ranks and provided alternative currencies and employment in different segments of the market.

Implicitly, the lifespan of objects scarcely terminates in EOL as throwaway society thesis proposes. Alluding to an existing throwaway society based on discard of commodity by their initial users is far too inadequate for designating and defining modernity (Evans, 2012). Hence, the assumption that EOL necessarily precipitates discard, or the supposition that discard signifies EOL is brought to question. Beyond hinging designation of EOL on the "materiality" of things,

and rather than defining and proposing modernity as a throwaway society by reliance on discard by previous users, research must begin to examine the "socio-materiality" of things. Socio-materiality describes the actual and potential meanings and interpretations which "latter users" and "second parties" assign to used objects (UNEP, 2013). With socio-materiality, it would be possible to understand how the context of "reuse" shapes and molds the fate of things.

Gibson (2010) draws insight from the life of humans to illustrate the life of things. He argues that used objects carry subjective values and status, depending on where they move or indeed if they move from the private to the marketplace. Emotional and memorial values, for instance, can be assigned to objects within the context of death and bereavement. Modern technology, for instance, makes it possible through organ donation, for the body at its end-of-life in one person, to reinstall and guarantee another person's continued existence. Hence, death in its literal sense scarcely marks or depicts an EOL. Instead, death, as a representation of the 'abject' state of the used object (human) marks an inauguration into a new and sacred immortal life. In the moral economy of religion, therefore, death as a symbol of redemption ushers the un-decaying spirit of humans into the sacred order. Thus, the supposed waste, and in this case, the body in immortality, returns as sacred and is redeemed in the "Christian economy of resurrection and salvation" (Gibson 2010:56). This explains why in some societies, materiality of EOL, the "white bones" of a corpse, upon putrefaction of its flesh, is elevated into the sacred object of ancestor worship. Gibson portrays materiality of EOL abjection as movement, trace and the sign of mortal life, and as a necessary precondition for the production of the sacred immortal life. "Waste" (death) therefore paves way for the next life (Gibson, 2010). Gibson opines that objects, like human subjects, also share the attribute of an afterlife.

Although views deconstructing object EOL predicate on several factors, Ture (2013) has identified subjective consumer value as a significant factor behind the scarce acceptance of EOL thesis in modern commodity discourse. Value has received researchers' attention from disciplines ranging from philosophy to sociology, economy, anthropology and marketing. By nature, consumer values for objects are subjective across actors and across groups, and are multidimensional in nature. Rather than being intrinsic to goods, Ture argues that value is shaped by consumers' mode of perceiving and using objects. She defines consumer value as the

"interactive, experiential, and subjective relations with goods which has dimensions of efficiency, spirituality, or esthetics" (Ture, 2013:54). She notes that various forms of values exist in literature as far as consumer "use" and "definitional" contexts are concerned. They range from aesthetic value, depicting consumer experience and derivation of beauty and pleasure from the form, style and fashionableness of objects; linking value, derived from objects facilitating relations with others and community; moral value, derived from the utilitarian sense of doing right and being just; and spiritual value, derived from connection of the self with the spiritual.

Gibson (2012) notes that value can also manifest in form of monetary calculations in the marketplace of exchange, through symbolic and moral attributions. Values can also be monetary and /or social, relationally signified within the context of transaction. To him, a moral economy also operates in taken-for-granted values about what possessions can or cannot be sold in exchange for money. The movement of objects within and across personal spaces and relations, and commercial domains in general is about value transformation. As such objects do not in themselves carry values, instead value is a symbol assigned to things collectively by the social group and within contexts of collective representations, beliefs and rituals. Value in itself is a complex and shifting concept that operates within various registers of meaning, and sometimes all at once (Gibson, 2012). Put differently, since the values they have are given to them by persons, objects in themselves have no meaning. Ordinary commodities acquire the status of gifts through mechanisms which actors themselves employ, and these actors can appropriate gifts with capacities to become expressions of themselves (Chevalier, 2013:14). It is by the same token that objects are said to have powers to become "performative" and to become "actants" with capacity to interact with humans within "object-relations" (Jackson, 2004; Woodward, 2011).

In discussing value, Ture (2013) contests the EOL and throwaway theses, arguing that "disposition" (and discard) as a practice can also be a site for "value transfer" and "value creation." In essence, disposition denotes a process of revaluation which generates and assigns 'transferable value' to possessions. Likewise, "disposition conduits" exist and they turn possessions into gifts, sacrifices, or commodities through which consumers transfer and create value by forming new relations and maintaining and strengthening their social connections.

Through system of value enhancement, consumers control the flow of their possessions and negotiate disposition, in line with what they define as nontransferable value. Thus, disposition triggers attachment to objects. Ture's study unpacks value-in-disposition by highlighting various disposition processes as (gifts, sacrificial, and monetary) exchanges, which build desirable relations around disposed objects to construct, enhance, or transfer value. In short, object's movement in value creation and maintenance and in the transferability of its value shapes consumer's social and material relations. For her, various disposition conduits serve as "media of value" and "realization of value".

While material conversions undertaken during disposition enhance an object's esthetic and use value, consumers can obtain monetary value through re-commoditization. A singular object can move through different conduits depending on the type and perceived transferability of its value and consumers' competence, aspirations, beliefs, normative consumption practices and social network. Deconstructing the assumptions of throwaway society about disposition conduits, Ture shows that throwing away can create more value than seemingly thrifty or altruistic disposition conduits by preventing objects from reflecting negatively on consumers. Hence, consumers, depending on their possessions, adjourn a product's EOL by temporarily preventing it from becoming rubbish. Two major practices that protract an objects lifespan are: "gradual garbing and brutal use" (Ture, 2013:14). Rather than throwing away consumers, using these two channels instead "direct their possessions" through what they define as safe disposition conduits. Hence, in the quest to lengthen object's lives, consumers "construct a moral self," and connect with others –or, in their pursuit of value. Rather than separate the object from its value, successful disposition therefore transfers the object's perceived value into its next life. As such, the life of such a possession is extended through transferable value.

Kopytoff (1986) revisits Appadurai's postulate on values by positing the cultural biography of things. He argues that, like every person has various biographies – psychological, professional, political, familial, economic and so forth, which individually mirror some aspects of his or her life story, an object to can possess several biographies not just a single one. Kopytoff, like others, also acknowledges the significance of value in the social life or cultural biography of things. To effect objects with new lives, values according to him must be cultural in origin. He argues that

within use and exchange values ordinary objects acquire easy transition into commodities and depending on nature of values assigned, the same things can be treated as a commodity at one time and not at another. In essence, an object seen as a commodity by one person may be seen as something else by another. Within a moral economy, such variable values consequently mediate objective economy of visible exchanges and transactions of objects.

Some discourses corroborate Kopytoff's view as they challenge the designation of disposed used electronics as electronics waste (e-waste), thus assigning them with EOL. For them, what represents e-waste in the West may possess further utility among people in developing countries. Omobowale (2012) argues that through local cultural construction and social appreciation, e-wastes can become reusables and consumables in developing countries like Nigeria. Similarly Achankeng (2003) argues that e-wastes-flow into African countries like Ghana may seem capitalist in nature, but in reality they also evince growing commercial reconstruction of these supposedly waste objects as tradable commodities. Hence, e-wastes transform into commodities and consumables, and are stripped of their initial surface identities as wastes.

Lepawski and McNabb (2010) and Lepawski and Billah (2011) substantiate the southward reinstallation of e-waste lives upon their movement to developing south from the global north arguing that rather than terminating as wastes, used and discarded electronics from the west are routed in the direction of "created values" and "remanufacturing practices" describable as transubstantiation. The processes through which objects gain new lives through 'created values' as Lepawski and McNabb (2010) argue hinge on cultural differences in geography, rather than on the assumption that developing countries are dumping grounds or "pollution havens." Vallauri (2009) stands upon previous debates to argue that far from becoming solid wastes, discarded electronics from the West can experience or witness "e-waste magic." In this magic, otherwise waste electronics turn into repairable and reusable electronics for ICT development in developing countries and thus too, into developmental aids. Part of the "magic," "unintended consequence" of e-waste, according to Vallauri, is the tendency for their disuse and discard in developed countries to translate into opportunities for "digital divide bridging" in developing countries (Oteng-Ababio, 2012).

Ongoing e-waste theses altogether confound the technological-determinism thesis that the discard of used electronics in the West represents automatically the entry of these electronics into the state of wastes (e-wastes). Toxicological-determinism is seen by both Vallauri (2009) and Lepawski and McNabb (2010) as partial rather than absolute narratives of the topical e-wastes challenge. To designate discarded electronics as e-wastes with EOL, therefore, represents nothing but an impediment to a robust and inclusive insight value-domains and dimensions of e-waste. Rather than providing clarity of the reality of object lifespan, the throwaway society thesis is thus rendered weak as it only impedes easy recognition of "e-waste magic(s)" or the "unintended consequences" of objects prematurely designated as e-wastes by lifespan research and literature.

2.1.2 Object Relations and the Dynamics of Consumer Culture

Object-relations literatures contribute to debates on lifespan of objects by showing that in various contexts creative utility consumer cultures can be enacted and objects can thus live longer than their originally planned and technologically programmed lives (Woodward, 2011). To this end, it is argued that subjective cultural meanings of people can influence their relations with both domestic local and foreign objects (Shotunde, 2012; Omobowale, 2013). Foreign objects in this case include objects which spread mostly from the West to other parts of the world through the sweeping forces and sway of globalization. Stobart and Van Damme (2010) affirm the thesis of object-relations within consumer culture by positing that consumption is a pliable practice of consolidating past owning as much as purchasing something new. With a cultural and anthropological twist, studies emphasize the tempo or periodicities of consumption. They hold that the relationships between people and things have life histories of their own, dominated by use and reuse, frequency of purchase, disposal and dispersal, gifting, storage and lending, pawning and circulation, renewal or lifestyle changes. Studying people's attitudes to and retention of old possessions is one way of grasping the "biographies of things"; and thus, places the history of consumption in an essential social and cultural perspective. This context provide basis to question the further assumption that goods possess EOL, especially when considering what happens to them when their utility for initial users ends.

Jackson (2004) shows, as opposed to the view that consumption is shaped and determined by globalization, that local consumption patterns can become sites for challenging global homogenizing claims of globalization theory. He proposes terms like "local difference," "cultural resilience," "artful consumption" to show that during consumption, people demonstrate greater allegiance to their local cultures than to cultures of countries producing such consumer products. For transnational consumables such as Cadbury, Coca-Cola and McDonalds products, cultural resilience of consumption manifests in object-relational practices such as "domestication of meanings" and "appropriation" of foreign product brands through the use of local "cultural connotations" to change, tame, indigenize and localize foreign brands using more ethnic-friendly terms. The reconstruction of these products via local connotations ensues in countries like China where Cadbury's sugary products acquire the local name *Jibali* (best of luck) with lesser sugar, and where consumer nationalism (*xiaofei minzuuzhuyi)* depicted by *dado ying (*down with McDonalds) characterized indigenous reconstruction of the global commodity. In the case of Russia, Jackson identified "artful consumption" in which through subject object-relations, ordinary material objects received treatments as *comrades* from Soviet consumers. The mending of objects to make do with them made it possible to extend the lives of these *comrades* (Jackson, 2004:170). As an alternative to discard, goods were diverted from their intended use through practices such as storage, exchange, barter and hoarding (just in case), by Soviet consumers through creative practices. Rather than discarding them, disused furniture for instance, were taken to *dacha* (country house) or gifted to a relative. According to Jackson, these creative subject-object relations predicate mainly on the culture of reuse. Jackson consequently recommends the use of the term "globalizing" rather than "globalized" to describe globalization vis-à-vis consumer practices.

Woodward (2011) uses the conceptual apparatus of object-relations to propose a new way of theorizing aspects of consumption practice relating to person-object relationships. This approach, according to him, usefully suggests pathways for developing a model of consumption which neither reduces person-object exchanges to the psyche, assemblages or practices, or to the dead hand of socio-structural forces. He examines the powerful and cultural implications arising from relations between actors and objects consumption. He asserts that humans are driven to consume because they are object-seeking by nature. This nature enables them to engage with objects both

psychologically and culturally in a productive manner called “transition.” Object transition manifest, for instance, in toys such that patterns of object-engagement experienced in early childhood is carried over into adult life with other objects -transition. According to Woodward the transitionality of consumer objects can be posited because (1) they are more important than relationship with other people (2) they afford separation from others (3)they are used by people in ritual ways to establish successful patterns of behavior (sleeping, easing anxiety, overcoming fatigue) (4) they have capacity to soothe and smooth social relations. Transitional Objects also have sensual quality as they (can be smelt, touched, heard or tasted). Thus, objects could be seen with the capacity to act outside themselves in relation to others. Thus, object becomes a psychic resource for integrating maturing personhood and is removed from being merely or permanently material.

Consequent upon the above, Woodward (2011) argues further that objects may not always be necessarily hard material things, though they sometimes can be. Rather, they are defined principally by their status as commodities with potentials to be “decommodified” through “subjectification” processes. The capacity of transitionality is often animated when humans form attachments to objects**.** Given that object transitionality hinges on the psychosocial, Woodward challenges the theoretical doctrine of object-materiality to show that consumer objects can also exist in non-material forms. To this end, he argues that to have cultural relational potency, any object must have capacity to unite symbolic, material and social elements, and out of such fusions of utility with symbolic and emotional meaning, social actors engage episodes of transitioning consumer objects through physical and psychological space. To understand transitionality better Woodward employs the concept of “third space”. This space is neither the individual subject nor the external object environment; neither inner or outer, self nor material thing, but the spaces of creativity, play and productive imagination that are created when both meet. The third space generally represents a cultural space because it unites the human subject with the external environment through a transitional object. Put differently, person-object interaction always bridges inner and outer world, self and culture. It is therefore in the third space that desires come to be materially expressed and transitioned.

Another fundamental contribution of Woodward to object-relations discourse is the concept of self-transformation aided by transformational objects. The term "transformational objects" plays a role similar to that being played by "object-transitionality." In this case, any engagement with an object alters both the subject and the object and this is best thought of as being transformational in character. Woodward argues that there is no necessary relationship between the physical qualities of an object and meanings attached. Rather, what matters are the fundamental promises made by an object to aid self-transformation. In other words, self-transformation depicts a productive alteration of a person's physical and mental state (2011:376-377).

One context through which the life of objects can extend within the object-relations apparatus is through *projection* and *introjection.* Whereas in *projection,* people put their feelings, beliefs or parts of the self into another person or object, *introjection* describes the situation where elements of an object are taken into the self. People could also *project* onto objects certain meanings, fantasies, desires, emotions, and objects can be introjected in the process of use. Similar to the transformation of objects to *comrades* (subjects) in Jackson (2004), Woodward identifies a process called *immersion.* Immersion involves a dual process of *subjectification* and *materialization*. Subjectification defines the process whereby "people draw things into themselves, transforming it from object to subject, thus allowing it to take on a life whereby one no longer sees the object itself but oneself, one's projection, one's convictions and beliefs." Materialization on its part describes a situation in which "a person is drawn into an object, effectively becoming it, or what it is seen to stand for." Largely, in "immersion what exists is not an object, nor a person, but oneness of material and human, united by an emotional, rather than mechanical connection" (2011:379). In examining Consumption as a gendered social practice Beth Fowkes Tobin, in an unpublished article, aligns with Woodward's by arguing that "not only do objects, like dresses participate in the formation of identities and the constitution of embodied subjectivities; subjects can endow objects with subjectivity, and objects can in turn act with a kind of agency we tend to arrogate to human subjects".

Richard Bowe, Ball and Gerwirtz (1994) substantiate the foregoing by linking consumer behavior or consumption to cultural capital – the antedating socio-personal conditions in which

consumers are located or have been enmeshed. He notes that consumer culture is predicted on the search for satisfaction and status which revolve around the maintenance of social difference. Thus, he constructs consumption culture as a site for the expression and reproduction of social difference through the different strategies of consumption individual consumers adopt. Bowe's position aligns with Thorstein Veblen's (1857-1929) postulation of Conspicuous Consumption in the theory of the Leisure Class. Joy, Sherry, Trolio and Deschenes (2010) have argued that the significance of the self in the evaluation of others is a taken for granted reality in consumer research literature and a major lacuna in consumer culture studies. The concept of the self is however central to understanding consumer behaviour. The pursuit of identity is core concern for each individual. And this pursuit in itself flourishes through the use of products, ideas, people and objects. The argument is similar to Jackson's (2004) that object-relations is one context through which creative object-relations enhance the alteration of self. What, therefore, links consumer desire to a particular object is not so much the object's particular characteristics as the consumer's own hopes for an altered state of being involving an altered set of social relationships. To this end, Therkelsen and Gram, in their study of 'Holiday consumption observe that the marketplace is a medium for both identification or "affiliation with" with and "differentiation from" (2008:269) others and as a necessary site for consumer identity construction and social relations with others. Consuming then is no longer focused on deriving "use value" as Marx argued but on creating meaning for identity enactments and other life projects towards expressing both difference and affinity. These processes ensue within "aestheticization of objects." Therefore, consumer culture is perceived as a system of signs and symbols that facilitate communication of meanings, whereby an object's value resides not in its characteristics (materiality) but in the meanings that it communicates. Therefore, consumption is an effortful accomplishment that is underdetermined by the characteristics of the object (Bonsu and Spence, 2008).Hence**,** Objects are consumed not just as things for what they do, but also because they are communicative mirrors of the self.

Given consumer capacity for voluntary action, it is proposed that consumers as a category must be construed not as a collective lacking autonomy of thought or action, instead they must be seen as private individuals pursuing their identities through autonomous actions via the institution of the market, but always within a social context. In an article titled "Postmodernism, Consumer

Culture and the Society of the Spectacle" Sherry and Sternal (1992) corroborates the view of Bonsu and Spence by conceptualizing the consumer as a postmodernist actor who in the spirit of postmodernism (incredulity of a controlling structure or system) represents an autonomous agency of being. This consumer works within a social and economic order less controlled or driven by power of reason which characterized the modern era. Through consumption, actors engage in living out personal choice and expressing their unique inner core. Consumption can also be driven by the desire for reinvention of the self in order to take on the desired roles just as it could also represent an attempt to escape undesirable consumer culture and to strive towards a more desirable one (Therkelsen and Gram, 2008). While it is possible for class to determine attitude and practices, particularly within the context of food, Warde (1997) observes that the postmodernist interpretations of current consumer behaviour and their theories about social groups remain core to understanding consumers and consumer culture in general. To this end, he argues that the social belonging of class, common with production oriented market debates, has lost its significance as a determinant of behaviour. Consequently, people have the freedom to formulate their own identities and choose their own group of reference within consumption space. The diminishing role of class determinism and individual search for personal identities and social belongings is now expressed through conscious choices of style and consumption patterns. Hence, even with change in product supply, individual choice is naturally encouraged by various manifestations of individualism characterized mainly by consumer improvisations.

A major perspective that has evolved towards deeper understanding of consumer culture is the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). In an article published by Arnould and Thompson (2005) entitled "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," attempt is made to synthesize long held views of scholars on consumer culture. They argue that many nebulous and concerns have characterized previous consumer culture research. They hold that these concerns have been rather more obfuscating than clarifying. Traditions inquiry in this regard includes the relativist, post-positivist, interpretivist, humanistic, naturalistic, and postmodern perspectives. The discursive style behind these perspectives is considered weak because it has a tendency to predicate on overemphasis on methodological distinctions or the generation of irrelevant contrasts between each theme. CCT, as they argue, is not a unified grand theory but is a family of theoretical perspectives addressing dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the

marketplace, and cultural meanings. Culture in this sense describes heterogeneous distribution of meanings rather than a homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life and unifying values. Consumer culture denotes "a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005:2). The term consumer culture covers themes such as consumption of market-made commodities, desire-inducing marketing, interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, objects used by groups, densely woven network of global connections and extensions through which local cultures are increasingly interpenetrated by the forces of transnational capital and media forms. In the main, culture is conceptualized as the very fabric of experience, meaning and action.

The CCT originates as a response to the call for consumer research to broaden its focus in investigating neglected experiential, social, and cultural dimensions of consumption in context. Methodologically, the CCT research focus is not easily accessible through experiments, surveys, or database modeling. This is because attention is devoted more to issues of product symbolism, ritual practices, consumer stories in product and brand meanings, and the symbolic boundaries structuring personal and communal consumer identities. The CCT embraces methodological pluralism and hardly canonizes a qualitative-quantitative divide nor necessitate fidelity to any one method. The CCT is organized around a core set of theoretical questions related to the relationships among consumers' personal and collective identities; the cultures created and embodied life worlds of consumers; underlying experiences, processes and structures; and the nature and dynamics of the sociological categories through and across which the consumer culture dynamics are enacted. While disposition practices have received comparatively lesser attention, CCT studies have shown that they play significant role in how consumers negotiate role and identity transition. The CCT also focuses on how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals.

In advancing knowledge frontiers the CCT has advanced consumer behaviour knowledge by illuminating four broad areas such as (1) consumer identity projects (2) marketplace cultures (3) the socio-historic patterning of consumption, and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer's interpretive strategies. With reference to the first coverage, the marketplace is construed as a source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people, including those who lack resources to participate in the market as full-fledged consumers, construct narratives of identity. Consumers are seen as identity seekers and makers. Consumer identity projects are also seen to have a structuring effect on the marketplace. On its part, the marketplace culture addresses the most distinctive features of the marketplace dimensions. Contrary to the anthropologic views that people are culture-bearers, consumers are seen as culture producers. The stream also examines the modes by which consumers forge feelings of social solidarity and creative distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected, and sometimes transient cultural worlds through the pursuit of common consumption interests in form of consumer subcultures, microculture, culture of consumption, neotribalism among others. How the marketplace is harnessed to build collective identity, rituals of solidarity and common lifestyles is also central to this stream. The third structure, the socio-historic patterning of consumption, addresses the institutional and social structures that influence consumption systematically such as class, community, ethnicity and gender. An underlying question in this coverage is: what is consumer society and how is it constituted and sustained? The last theme, Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumer Interpretive Strategies, pays attention to consumer systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions in such a way as to defend or protect the interest of the dominant in the society. In this context, consumers are framed as interpretive agents whose meaning creating activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and lifestyle ideals portrayed in mass media that consciously or otherwise deviate from these ideological constructions. CCT also focuses on macro-level concerns by investigating the influences that economic and cultural globalization exert upon consumer identity projects and identity-defining patterns of social interaction distinctive social context.

Ritual dimension of consumer behaviour is also core to object relations within consumer culture discourse. Rook (1985) argues, on the one hand, that social research has failed to focus on post-

industrial context of rituals. On the other hand, he argues that the anthropologic dimension of consumption and consumer experience remains a virtually uncharted course. Rook's view is in tandem with the earlier position of Arnould and Thompson (2005) who posit the need to conceptualize ritual context of consumption. Another impediment blighting research on consumer behaviour as ritual is the anachronistic interpretation of ritual and ritual behaviour as exclusively religious expressions or as primitive regressive behaviours. Despite longstanding and varied definitions of ritual, Rook argues that they are unsatisfactory because they myopically restrict ritual experience to religious or mystical contexts in which rituals itself is associated with large-scale occurrence or public settings. In an attempt to contextualize ritual in consumer behaviour, he operationally defines ritual as: "a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness and inner intensity" (Rook, 1985:252). Through this definition Rook shows that ritual incorporates both structural and qualitative consumer behaviors built around episodic strings of events that predicate on repetition, performed habitually, mediated by ritual scripts having beginnings, middles and endings, and that trigger immediate behavioral response. The orientedness of ritual with scripts also implies that ritual involves role-taking by various individuals.

Within consumer culture context, ritual according to Rook could manifest through individual and group identity-projection, breaking away or social relational self-distancing from others, vocational placement and performance in which fantasies about career futures are constructed narratively, and through intimacy aspirations in which young adult consumers project grooming rituals as preparations for dating and sexual interactions. Ultimately he argues that as enactments of social and individual myths, rituals dramatically and symbolically portray individual strivings for social status, maturity and sexual identity (Rook, 1985:262). Individual consumer action or group consumer activities can also be described as practice**.** Practices can be understood as routinized and socially embedded forms of behaviour that require skill and competence to enact. A richer understanding of the marketplace can be gained through social practice rather than through discursive formations which only lead to radically new conceptualizations and potentially new forms of society's action (Jackson, 2004:172).

Consumption has also been theorized and discussed as a potentially dramaturgic in nature. To this end, Tumbat and Markus (2007) argue that drama as a form of performance permeates consumer culture. While consumer researchers have largely explored the role of drama in advertising, consumer culture theorists have in turn developed the dramatic underpinnings of consumption practices and consumer lifestyle orientations. Drawing from recent studies, they illustrate how American-middle men construct themselves dramatically as "men-of-action – heroes" in mundane and improvisional consumption domains. A major weakness in the focus of previous studies is that they suffer from a key theoretical oversight. This weakness is underscored by "a pervasive dramatic idealism that renders the performances of consumers and marketers as surprisingly playful, harmonious and apolitical" (Tumbat and Markus, 2007:488). They blame this tendency for theoretical oversight to the fact that consumer culture theorists have rashly adopted the marketing perspective on drama and performance. Studying consumption, they note, provide an attractive theoretical platform for developing further theoretical linkages between dramatic performance, consumption, culture, and marketplace conflict.

Almost related to the context of rituals is the domain of practice. In this case research construes consumption as a form of practice. Halkier, Katz-Gerro and Martens (2011) note that practice theory has come to occupy salient theoretical space across the social sciences and humanities. Its pristine coverage include fields of anthropology, cultural studies, design studies, environment and sustainability research, geography , history , media, social policy, sociology, marketing and consumer behavior research. Alan Warde's (2005) leading articl*e Consumption and Theories of Practice* is a major stride in domesticating practice to study of consumption. Whereas previous research emphasized attention on analysis of the symbolic meanings of consumption connected with identity-formation, Warde calls for need to move from examination of consumption as 'purchase' to examination of consumption as practice with focus on the context of 'use' and 'enjoyment' of goods and services.

Halkier et al, (2011) with recourse to the above argue that beyond focusing on ordinary consumption vis-à-vis terms like habit, routine, constraint among others, consumer research must begin to examine the significance and role of 'practice theory' to consumer culture. Similar to

the thrust of 'ritual' they define present practice as a type of behavior that is routinized having several elements which are interconnected to one another. Practice could also include forms of bodily, mental activities as well as 'things' and their use among others. Objects are core to performance and therefore too to practice. Leaning towards practice requires examination of the 'interstices between technologies, utilities, resource consumption and the problematic of sustainability', aspects of connections between consumer 'knowledge and practice' or dimensions of behavioral change. Among the themes already covered in practice theory and consumption studies are 'disposal and waste practices', 'theorizing of markets and market practices', 'trust relations in food retailing settings', 'green consumers', 'value creation', 'resources theory and the popularization of veil wearing. Tobin in an unpublished article also argues that consumption is a social practice that is intersected with identity formation. To this end research gradually departs from economic historians to focus on meanings which objects hold for consumer's behavior. Hence too attention turns towards meanings and relationships which objects engender, focus on gender also motivates focus on contexts in which consumption occurs.

Literature on the one hand, posits that the marketplace is a drama space in which consumers supposedly act out scripts written out by marketers. On the other hand however, Tumbat and Markus (2007) argue that the marketplace is controlled and shaped not principally by marketers but by the meaning-bearing consumer. To this end, the second-hand marketplace serves as the central stage on which divergent groups of social actors engage in a dramatic interplay of structure and agency to legitimate their own ideological positions of identity and power. Based on a five-year ethnographic investigation on the war on music downloading predicted on use of qualitative research instruments such as interviews, historical data, and cultural observation, Tumbat and Markus (2007) identify marketplace drama as a series of antagonistic ritualistic performances among opposing groups of consumers and producers, through which divergent ideological goals are attained and the normative patterns of social interaction in the marketplace are changed. They show through the lens of Victor Turner's social drama theory that social drama can take place outside of the deterministic systems of meanings and interpretations that guide dramatic actors in particular ideological directions.

2.1.3 Narratives on Used Electronics as Electronics Waste (E-waste)

2.1.3.1 Introduction to the Concept of E-Waste

The concept e-waste is an abbreviation of the words electronic waste and is commonly construed as a form of waste although in a sense quite relative to conventional and longstanding views of waste. The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary defines waste in general as materials or items that are no longer needed and are thrown away**.**

Electronic wastes (e-wastes) are generated by electronic goods when they are discarded by consumers at the end of their useful life or are replaced by newer models, despite the fact that the older models still have useful lives (Umesi & Onyia, 2008). E-wastes also consist of electronics and more or less durable products used for data processing, telecommunications or entertainment in private households and businesses (Unep, 2009, Lepawski and McNabb, 2010 & Greenpeace Report, 2010).In a word e-wastes are conceivable as latent outcomes of advance in information communication technology.

2.1.3.2 Industrial Development and E-Waste generation

Currently, the electronics industry is the world's largest and fastest growing manufacturing industry (Ni and Zeng, 2009). Over the last decades this industry has revolutionized the world making electrical and electronic products to become ubiquitous of today's life around the planet. Without these products, it plausible that modern life would not be possible in post-industrialized and industrializing countries. In a broad sense, a good proportion of these products serve in such areas as medicine, mobility, education, health, food supply, communication, security, environmental protection and culture. Such appliances include many electronics and more or less durable products used for data processing, telecommunications or entertainment in private households and businesses (BAN 2005; UNEP, 2009 & Greenpeace Report, 2010, Onwughara et al 2010; Popoola, Abiodun, Oyelola, Ofidile, 2011). Paradoxically however, this same industry (the electronics industry) also simultaneously creates electronic wastes (e-wastes) which currently forms the most rapidly growing segment of the municipal and solid waste stream generated in developed countries and many parts of the world (Akuru and Okoro 2008, &Ni and Zeng, 2009).

E-waste can be defined as end-of-life electrical and electronic equipment (EEE). It could also be any electrically powered appliance that no longer satisfies the current owner for its original purpose. Examples of EEE include large and small household appliances (refrigerators, toasters), Information Communication Technology (ICT) Telecommunication equipment (personal computers), Consumer equipment (radios, cameras), lighting equipment (fluorescent lamps) and electrical/electronic tools (drills, saws, soldering equipment). Others include toys and sports equipment (electric train, video games), medical devices (radiotherapy, dialyzers), monitoring and control instruments (smoke detectors, noise meters and laboratory equipment) and automatic dispensers (for hot and cold drinks) (Eko E-waste summit, 2011).

E-wastes or Waste Electrical Electronic equipment (UEEE) range from outmoded to redundant electronic items including those lying fallow due to non-usage such as monitors, keyboards, personal scanners, work-stations, personal digital assistants, docking stations, servers, cell phones, hand-held diagnostics, screening tools, television sets, video machines, DVD players and mobile phones among many other items. Herat (2010) who defines e-waste as 'anything that has a battery or a power plug' also lists them to include devices such as Computers, Monitors, Keyboards, Photocopiers, Televisions, VCRs, Fax Machines, Mobile Phones, Video Cameras, Stereos, Microwave Ovens, Washing Machines, Dishwashers and Digital Cameras. They could also include telecom equipments such as servers, fax machines, copiers, scanners, tape drives, backup drives, and typewriters (Usha 2004; Popp 2005; Collins 2007; Umesi and Onyia 2008; Cornell 2009;Osuagwu & Ikerionwu 2010 Umesi and Onyia (2008).

Indeed, rapid technology change, low initial cost, planned obsolescence, man's quest to own the latest electronic gadgetry (McConnell, 2009) and low initial cost of near end-of-life EEE are catalyze the growing rate of electronic waste around the globe and its massive exportation from the developed world to poor developing nations in Africa and others. Consequently, today's IT, particularly the computer industry, brings new technology upgrades to the market every 18 months, decreased life span of products and more accessibility to internet usage have all resulted in the exponential increase in the sale of used computers and EEE. The average lifespan of a computer which was six years in 1997 became shortened to two years in 2005. Implicitly, dealing

with electronic waste is rapidly becoming one of the major environmental challenges of our technological generation (O'Brien, 2010).

Cumulatively, about 500 million Personal Computers were said to reach the end of their service lives between 1994 and 2003; and similar quantities of electronic wastes are expected for all kinds of portable electronic devices such as MP3 players, computer games among others (Osuagwu & Ikerionwu, 2010; Schmidt 2006; Collins, 2009 &EKO E-WASTE SUMMIT 2O11). Also, despite poor data on the amounts of e-waste collected and treated through ”official” e-waste system channels, which makes current management of significant proportions of e-waste go unreported (Unep, 2009, Greenpeace, 2010); and given that available data on e-waste arising is poor and insufficient and that estimation techniques are required for extension of known data to regional-global coverage, the United Nations University’s estimations indicate that current e-waste arising across the twenty-seven member nations of the European Union amount to around 8.3 – 9.1 million tons per year; bringing global estimates to around 40-50 million tons per year (UNEP 2009; Collins, 2009; Greenpeance Report, 2010).

Moreover, the United Nations Environmental Program, observed that an average of 50 million tons of electrical and electronic equipment waste are generated worldwide annually. Of these millions of tonnes of electronic waste being generated in the US and in the developed world in general, an estimated 50% to 80% collected for recycling are being exported to poor nations and developing nations in general such as China, Nigeria, India. Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, India and Ghana (BAN, 2005; Collins, 2009; UNEP, 2009; Herat, 2010).The European Commission submits that approximately, almost 70% of globally generated e-waste is unaccounted for and only a third of waste electrical and electronic equipment (33%) is reported to be treated according to the legislation. The rest in most cases is landfilled (13%) and sent to substandard treatment inside or outside the EU (54%).

Furthermore, of the estimated 8.7 million tons of e-waste generated annually in the EU about 5.8 million tons is not recycled. It is also alleged that illegal exports to non-EU countries represent large part of this quota. This amounts to an importation of 15–45,000 tons of already used recyclable electronic components, which may be even more harmful than they are useful. It

estimated that 5 million PC units, with a weight estimated at 60,000 metric tons is imported annually into Nigeria through the major sea port of Lagos only. It is assumed also that if this trade continues unabated, with an annual increase of 10%, then an estimated 40 million units of PCs or monitors (or 468,000 metric tons of e-scrap) would have been imported over the period 2005–2010. This will amount to an importation of about 77,000 tons of e-scrap/ year to be distributed to poor nations of the world (Greenpeace Report, 2010).

Undoubtedly, an average of 500,000 tons of obsolete Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipments (WEEE) are dumped into Nigeria monthly (Osuagwu and Ikerionwu, 2010). It is noteworthy that while large tons of e-wastes come into Nigeria, Akuru and Okoro (2008) hold that about 75% of the imported second-hand computer wares are unusable junk that are non-functional or irreparable. O'Brien (2010) held that in 2004, over 183 million computers and 674 million cell phones are sold worldwide. Similarly, the 2005 EU trade statistics shows that more than 15.000 tons of colour television sets were exported from the EU to African countries. This means that averagely 35 tonnes, or more than 1 000 units of used television sets, arrive every day in Ghana, Nigeria or Egypt. While these figures pertain mainly to television sets, it is opined that the overall export of used computers, mobile phones, printers, CD players and other electronic components (most of which might be junks and for which there is no exact estimate) to poor nations may even be quite higher in proportion. For instance it was observed that on a global scale, 271 million computers and exactly 1 billion phones were sold worldwide in 2007. Currently, it is also estimated that there are over 500 million obsolete computers in U.S all of which would end up in poor nations (Herat, 2010; O'Brien, 2010 & Greenpeace, 2010).

Relatedly, the Basel Action Network (BAN) –a body charged with the international regulation of transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, in 2005 made some findings about second hand television sets to Nigeria. BAN reported that at the Nigerian port of Lagos, an estimated 500 containers of used electronic equipment enter into the country each month, each one carrying about 800 computers, for a total of about 400.000 used computers a month (Umesi and Onyia, 2008; Greenpeace, 2010; Echenim, 2011).

2.1.3.3 Second Hand Consumption and E-Waste inflow into The Third World

In a generic sense, the concept of second hand in view of consumption does not strictly apply to UEEE but also to a whole range of other products within a commercial context. Other products which are equally regarded as second-hand in many cases include textiles, books and automobiles to mention but few. This list also contributes in no small measure to the overall weight of global consumption of second hand that takes place in the developing world. As a precursor to thoroughly understand the trade of second hand goods (also called durable goods), Kumar (2002) observed that active resale markets are an important aspect of durable goods. Producers with market power often directly and indirectly encourage resale trading in industries as varied as automobiles, electronic goods, computers, and softwares among others. Some key motivations behind the existence of resale trading in durable goods have been identified. First, adverse selection exists and owners realize that the goods they have acquired are inferior in quality. Secondly, there are exogenous changes in consumer preferences that lead to lower demand for a product. Third, the product physically depreciates or deteriorates over time, leading the owners to update to their preferred quality of product service. Another is that physical depreciation motivates resale trading in durable goods due to product obsolescence (Kumar, 2002).

A look at existing cases of trade and consumption of second-hand products in developing countries would be imperative. Princen (2003) identifies that second-hand markets could include textile or 'cloth markets' in which used clothes are either exported from western countries or imported by developing countries. In addition to the textile markets are second-hand automobile markets and used book markets. He maintains that export of large proportions of textiles and second hand clothes to developing nations 'reduces demand for new clothing in the receiving countries. Consequently, many developing countries discriminate against the import of second hand clothing, imposing import bans, licensing requirements, or higher tariff rates. Very clear examples of what importation of second hand clothes from developing nations does to domestic developing economies are numberless. Imports of used clothing in Zambia for instance, have significantly "decimated" the local textile industry. Likewise, while South Africa bans the import of worn clothing, except for humanitarian donation, Mexico requires import licenses for used clothes. Generally speaking, he holds that countries in which restrictive practices are rife are

mostly those with automobile industries who seek to protect their new automobile products. Second hand or Used book markets are also said to exist. Key forces behind these increase in second hand markets such as the used book market among others is the growth of the internet. A second is the global trade liberalization which considerably now reduces barriers to second hand markets in general. The internet as he maintains provide new opportunities for consumers to sell their goods.

The growth of the second hand automobile markets is also noteworthy especially between the developed and the developing world. Pelletiere and Reinert (2006) opine that in a holistic sense, developing nations receive from, but also benefit from increased trade in durable goods. This gain or benefit implies that durable goods are labor-intensive in their use and by their very nature require maintenance and repair. Hence, given that the required labor is abundant in developing nations, and because services for repair and maintenance are available, developing countries are better able to utilize these durable goods than developed nations in which such labor is either scarce or absent.

Undoubtedly, another factor behind the growth in second hand automobile markets is that of the existence of environmental and safety regulatory regimes. A clear example is the Japanese regime which despite some liberalization, continues to be less tolerant of used automobiles than even the United States. Simply put, Japan automobiles are subject to stringent testing procedures and costly inspection and maintenance regimes that significantly increase the depreciation of vehicles for domestic consumers. What follows is that a fitness certificate valid for only three years is given to vehicle owners after which it is expected that at the expiration of this period, the vehicle will once again go through a rigorous quality certification process that is both expensive and time-consuming. It thus becomes evident that, most Japan consumers replace their vehicles after only three or five years. This generates a large supply of used cars with a very low value in the Japanese market. What is more, it is also noted that the ‘Japanese culture’ attaches a stigma to the practice of purchasing used goods. Trade opportunities thus arise, in which countries with such quality standards will export used cars to countries with low quality standards. The resultant exit and ‘push’ of its automobiles to the world market, thus creates higher value automobiles for receiving countries such as the developing world in which little or no such safety or

environmental regulatory regimes exist (Pelletiere and Reinert, 2006 & Clerides and Hadjiyiannis, 2007).

Although UEEE has generated a degree of concern in this country due to the human and environmental hazards associated with it, there is no doubt that UEEE has equally opened up enormous second hand practices. Albeit no generally accepted definition of e-waste exists in the world, e-waste usually comprises the relatively expensive and essentially durable products used for data processing, telecommunications or entertainment in private households and businesses (Widmer et al. 2005). China is today known as a large destination for a large proportion of e-waste shipment from developed world. Clapp and Princen (2003) observed that most of the e-waste collected for recycling in North America ends up in China with higher percentage of it being land filled. Approximately 80 percent of e-waste produced in the US is said to be exported to Asia, and 90 percent of this enters into China (BAN 2002). Several attempts have been made by the Chinese government to ban e-waste but all to no avail. The persistence of e-waste in China is thus linked with a number of factors around its growing second hand value.

The absence of annual amount of obsolete e-waste in china notwithstanding, Liu, Tanaka and Matsui (2006) have identified that informal e-waste recycling processes such as small workshops or backyards now exist in china where a majority of e-waste is processed. In such locations, the appliances are stripped of their most valuable components, some of which include cathode ray tubes (CRTs), printed wiring boards (PWBs), cables, plastics, condensers as well as other materials such as wood, liquid crystal displays (LCDs) and batteries. While some portions of these components are processed into reusable forms, a good number of them are subsequently ‘stockpiled’ and ‘dumped’. Major locations where these practices take place include Zhejiang province of eastern China and the Guangdong region of southern China.

Within India, the consumption of electrical and electronic goods is said to be growing exponentially. Similarly, within Silampur, Indian – a sort of second hand e-waste market, it is noticeable that workers are tearing electronics apart with their bare hands. Also, most e-wastes such as cell phones which leave the U.S for developing economies without being checked are unknown. Because a good number of them land in the hands of Indian scrap dealers who are

believed to deal mainly in irreparable junks, it is alleged that those items may be falsely labeled as second-hand goods. In these markets it is observed that these phones become mixed e-waste and are consumed for the useful metals which they contain. Such metals include antimony, arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, copper, lead, nickel and zinc. These metals are said to be later shipped to recycle firms in Asia to constitute the manufacture of new electronics. In a word, most second hand computers which enter into developing countries do so easily on the conditions that they have been used for less than 10 years. Most of the regions they enter into in India include Mumbai, Kandla and Cochin, while in China a most notable place is Gaiyu and Hong Kong into which large amounts of shipments are made. It should be noted that while the Asian cases exist, few studies seem to have been carried out on e-waste second-hand markets in South America, whereas in Africa, focus seems to be mainly imports into the Lagos port of Nigeria which is considered Africa's largest, and 75 percent of which is seen to be irreparable junks (Jeffries 2006; Eko E-Waste Summit 2011)

On the whole, it is noteworthy to observe that much of the growth in the information technology (IT) sector in developing countries has been fuelled by the importation of second-hand electronics or e-waste, from rich developed countries whose consumers are all too happy to find buyers for it. Thus, many brokers and businesses have sprung up to channel second hand or used electronic equipment from North to South, rich to poor. The easy importation and consumption of tons of these e-wastes is because they satisfy the high demand for cheap second-hand products (BAN 2005, Akuru and Okoro, 2008). What is more, despite the nearness of used electronics to their end-of-life at the point of export, they are still imported in their tons into and are consumed in developing countries, in which they acquire the status of second hand electronics. In Africa currently, Nigeria and Ghana have been identified as leading destinations for electronic wastes (Fagbohun, 2011). It is held that, 'e-waste applies to much of the electronic equipment used by businesses and individual consumers that are nearing the end of their usefulness. In this context several markets across the developing world have been seen to emerge as facilitators of the global trade in e-waste (EPA, 2008).Given the growing rate of durable goods and end-of-life in developing countries, it is again plausible that easy inflow of used electrical electronic equipment and other durables into Nigeria as well as other developing nations has strong links with re-use value which they have among their consumers.

2.1.3.4 E-Waste Dump in the Third World

Certainly, modern technology has successfully proven to be the mainstay of the present day social economy, thus generating influences that not only impact upon, but also transform the way people work, communicate and even entertain themselves. While all of these appear clearly phenomenal, what remains obviously ignored is the central issue of how to safely and effectively manage and dispose of obsolete and used electrical electronic equipments generally known as e-wastes (Popoola et al, 2010, Onwughara et al 2010). The consequence of a dormant outlook on the fate of used electronics once they near or reach their end-of-life is what seems to reflect in the growing trafficking of e-waste across different parts of the world particularly from the rich developed nations to the poor nations of the third world. As recent studies reveal, if this trend goes unchecked, 'it is estimated that by year 2016 the developing countries will generate twice as much e-waste as developed countries' (EKO E-WASTE SUMMIT, 2011).

O'Brien (2010) particularly observed that in the last few years, e-waste has begun to enter the public consciousness as a result of a number 'of exposés of the underground global e-waste trade'. Non-governmental organizations, such as Greenpeace and the Basel Action Network, have documented the transport of thousands of tons of electronic devices from North America, Europe, Japan and South Korea to China, India, Nigeria and many other countries where their hazardous components are dismantled under sweatshop conditions. With their growing appetite for faster and sleeker electronic devices, developing nations are unwittingly fuelling long-term environmental degradation and health problems in the developing world.

Although, rapid technology change, low initial cost, planned obsolescence and man's quest to own the latest electronic gadgetry have been recognized as manifest driving forces behind the growing rates of e-waste exports around the globe from the developed world to developing nations such as Africa, (particularly Nigeria and Ghana), China, India, Pakistan among others (Osuagwu & Ikerionwu, 2010; Schmidt 2006 & Collins, 2009). It is plausible to also state that of the four forces, two are central to the upsurge in the rate of e-waste traffic to developing nations. These are rapid technology change and planned obsolescence. The two forces, without doubt, have multiplied the chances of technology use but also the crises and challenges that come with it -challenge of disposal as well as the associated health and environmental dangers.

E-waste dumping in the third world is also greatly enhanced by modern reduction in the lifespan of electrical electronic equipment which is called obsolescence, and it is on this platform that today's trade in e-waste thrives extensively (Schmidt, 2006). In other words, a wide range of electronics now goes out of date quickly, sometimes within just a few months of their release. What is more, notwithstanding that e-waste is one of the fastest growing segment of the global municipal waste stream, Jeffries (2006) made a startling observation showing that the volume of global e-waste or WEEE is expected to increase by at least 3-5 percent per annum. This implies that in five years 16-28 percent more WEEE will be generated and in 12 years the amount will have doubled. The growth of WEEE is about three times higher than the growth of the average municipal waste. Moreover, even the so-called functional products are near their end-of-life, which so many developing countries have the challenge of dealing with (E-WASTE SUMMIT 2011).

It is imperative to look at the quantity and percentage of e-wastes or waste electrical electronic that are generated, shipped and dumped in developing world. Despite poor data on the amounts of e-waste collected and treated through "official" e-waste system channels, which makes current management of significant proportions of e-waste go unreported (Unep, 2009, Greenpeace, 2010); and despite that available data on e-waste arising is poor and insufficient, and that estimation techniques are required for extension of known data to regional-global coverage, it is held that, of the 40-50 million tons of electronic waste being generated in developed nations, and in the US in particular, an estimated 50% to 80% collected for recycling are being exported to developing countries and other poor nations others such as China, Nigeria, Thailand, India. Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, India and Ghana (BAN, 2005; Collins, 2009; Unep, 2009; Herat, 2010).

Further, despite the enormity of WEEE consignments being exported into developing nations, it is a paradox that only less than 25% are functional EEE and over 75% are WEEE or irreparable junks (Eko E-Waste Summit 2011). COLLINS (2007) identifies that although many, favorite destinations of Used Electrical Electronic Equipment (UEEE) have been identified to include recipient countries such as Thailand, Nigeria, Indonesia, China, India and Pakistan(Heart, 2010).

In addition, while the challenge of unspecific e-waste data and imprecise record remains, and albeit the management of significant proportions of e-waste is hardly accounted for, it is apparent that increasing reports on the e-waste dumping in e.g. China, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ghana is becoming alarming (UNEP, 2009). Elsewhere it is shown that the growing electronic waste problem in the US, particularly North America, ends up in developing nations as most of the "e-waste" collected for recycling are exported to China. In spite of that, only a portion is actually recycled (Clapp & Princen, 2003). Obviously, the weakness of the US in legitimate repair and reuse, as well as the discarding of electronic items has led her into the exportation of e-waste to the educated in other countries. And Africa, with its own economy dependent on the leftovers, has turned to picking through electronic trash. Others hold that, developing countries are interested in the electronic material primarily for the metal commodities they contain - steel, aluminum, copper and die bits of precious metals found in circuit boards (Schmidt, 2006 & Collins, 2007). All of these amount to, but also clearly reveal the massive dumping of e-waste in the third world.

To present the absence of wherewithal for e-waste repair and reuse in the US as justification for exportation of e-waste to developing countries, as Schmidt (2006) and Collins (2007) argue is rather limitist and denigrating. To critically engage their supposition will be to ask why would Africa, a region considered by the west to be a dependent and developing economy, be the right destination for the exportation and dumping of e-waste? Indeed, the need to survive in now compels in developing countries the urge to consume e-waste, but even that is a weaker justification for the deliberate dumping of harm in Developing countries in the name of e-waste exportation in the name of what may be considered as unsustainable excuses by the west and by the language used in the extant epistemology and literature on e-waste. it is safe to argue at this point that the foregoing perspectives on e-waste scarcely do justice to the problem of inequality and crises of underdevelopment which so called development agenda of the west perpetrates in developing countries.

Given that a considerable percentage of global export of electronics from advanced nations reveal e-waste dumping in the third world, a look at numerical estimates of this dump in regions such as Nigeria would suffice. As at 2005, an estimated 500 containers of WEEE containing

about 5 million personal computers were imported into Nigeria through the major sea port of Lagos alone. An estimated 53, 600 metric tonnes of e-waste are dumped annually at Lagos State landfills which include 860,000 computers, 530,000 printers, 900,000 monitors and 480,000 television sets (E-WASTE SUMMIT 2011). Similarly, Basel Action Network (BAN) –a global agency charged with the international regulation of transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, revealed that large quantities of obsolete electronic equipment are often exported from western countries to Lagos, Nigeria for re-use and repair (Umesi and Onyia, 2008). Estimated domestic figures show that 50 containers of second-hand computer-related electronic equipment come into Lagos each month. Each container is 40 feet high and contains about 800 electronic items. This would equate to about 40 thousand second-hand or scrap units pouring into Lagos officially each month. The official number of personal computers and laptops sold in the formal market in Nigeria in the last two years between 250, thousand and 300 thousand per yea**r.** Summarily, an average of 500,000 tons of obsolete Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipments (WEEE) are dumped into Nigeria monthly with its associated health and environmental hazards. E-waste includes computers, entertainment electronics, mobile phones and other items that have been discarded by their original users (Popoola et al, 2010, Onwughara et al 2010, BAN, 2005; Echenim, 2011).

The quality of Environmental standards as well as the number of existing regulations within and between nations concerned with transboundary movement of e-waste across the globe is cannot be ignored. It has been observed that while developing countries lack the infrastructure for the environmentally sound management (ESM) of e-waste, as well as broad-based policy framework (regulation) specifically for e-waste control, existing laws on hazardous waste are weakly enforced where they exist (E-WASTE SUMMIT 2011). The UN estimates for instance, shows that each year of the 20 to 50 million tons of e-waste being produced globally, 70 per cent ends up in developing nations. African nations such as Ghana, Nigeria and Ivory Coast are clear examples of countries with little or no regulation on recycling or disposal. Thus in order to bypass existing international laws designed to prevent obsolete electronic goods being exported traders label the WEEE as second-hand goods or charity donations (McConnell, 2009).

Critics of trade in used electronics maintain that it is too easy for brokers calling themselves recyclers to export unscreened electronic waste to developing countries, such as China, India and parts of Africa, thus avoiding the challenges tied to e-wastes disposal and turning developing countries into big dump yards of e-waste. They also argue that lower environmental and labor standards such as cheap labor, and the relatively high value of recovered raw materials leads to a transfer of pollution-generating activities to developing nations. In most cases the exportation of electronic waste to China, Malaysia, India, Kenya, and various African countries (Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya among others) for processing, are sometimes done illegally. For instance many surplus laptops are routed to developing nations as "dumping grounds for e-waste". Perhaps, it should be noted that because the United States has not ratified the Basel Convention or its Ban Amendment, and has no domestic laws forbidding the export of toxic waste, the Basel Action Network estimates that about 80% of the electronic waste directed to recycling in the U.S. does not get recycled there at all, but is put on container ships and sent to countries such as China where little or no environmental scrutiny exists. Hence, many U.S. electronics recyclers are seen to be brokers or exporters, who collect truckloads of electronic equipment, transfer them into shipping containers and send them around the world for a tidy profit (Lepawski and McNabb, 2010, Greenpeace, 2010 & Echenim, 2011**)**. Elsewhere, Schmidt (2006) maintained that Africa has become the world's latest destination for obsolete electronic equipment. She holds that, even though much of this material are more or less functional and are provided in good faith by well-meaning donors, it remains that the brokers who arrange these exports often pad shipping containers with useless junks, essentially saddling African importers with electronic garbage. Undoubtedly, this factor is crucial to the plight of e-waste dumping in the developing world. What is more, it represents the clearest reality of e-waste dump in developing nations.

It follows from the above that unlike the practice in developed nations where legislations and strong checks and penalties are enacted against waste dumping, most developing nations such as Nigeria lack a clear regulatory framework for the control of waste. The consequence of this is an unbridled illegal trafficking of e-waste cloaked as second hand electronic and other already used packages from developed nations into her borders. Similarly, the attempts to regulate e-waste disposal are further complicated by the fact that e-waste is universally generated by businesses, institutions and households. It is safe to also state that Nigerian laws and regulations

and those of other developing nations do not specifically address e-waste disposal. Also, State and federal solid and hazardous waste regulations are applicable to any waste. In a word, it is difficult to determine if e-waste components are characteristic hazardous wastes due to the presence of heavy metals (Collins, 2007, Tereda, 2012).

But it is also worthy to argue that permissive state laws in developing countries and massive generation of e-waste in these nations do not justify the refusal of the US to ratify conventions of Basel and others. In fact the refusal by the US to be part of such agreements betray indirectly, their surreptitious resolve to perpetuate the further underdevelopment of developing regions through continuous exportation of e-waste into them. The absence of domestic laws in the US as foregoing submissions claim is clearly not because the US is weak or economically incapable of setting up such laws but because, the US seeks to ignore the plight of the vulnerable people in recipient nations and to protect her own economic and environmental interests.

Moreover, like most waste trade, it is argued that e-waste export to developing countries is motivated by economic inequality between the north south dynamics and by liberalization policies. in effect, the toxic effluent will flood towards the world's poorest countries where labour is cheap, and where occupational and environmental protection is weak. Consequently, free trade in hazardous waste leaves the poor category of the globe –south with an untenable choice between poverty and poison, 'a choice that nobody should have to make (Umesi, Onyia 2008). It therefore becomes obvious that cheap labour, low environmental standards and the relatively high value of recovered raw materials have rendered the developing nations porous for e-waste dumping, thereby ensuring easy transfer of pollution- to regions already rocked by domestic threats of swelling solid waste generation. Consequently, water, air and soil in the villages where "recycling" ensues become vulnerable health spaces and disaster environments. What is more, a good proportion of imported electronic equipments often end up in landfills, where toxins from metals in these e-wastes pollute the groundwater and generate hazards to humans (Collins, 2009; Greenpeace, 2010 & Echenim, 2011).

Electronic products such as desktop and laptop computers, and mobile phones, contain numerous hazardous chemicals and materials, which are often released during the recycling or disposal

process, presenting a serious threat to human and environmental health. Although it is held that the interest of Developing countries in electronic materials is primarily for the metal commodities they contain such as - steel, aluminum, copper and die bits of precious metals found in circuit boards, it cannot be ruled out that e-waste dumping in these nations has its own associated challenges. Following from her journey to Nigeria in 2006 to examine the management of waste, the Basel Convention noted that in addition to an environmental catastrophe, there was clear evidence of U.S. electronics in large quantities being dumped on this poor nation. It was also revealed that 'large quantities of obsolete electronic equipment exported from western countries to Lagos, Nigeria for reuse and repair end up in gathering dust in warehouses or being dumped and burned near residences in empty lots, on road sides and in swamps, creating serious health and environmental contamination (Jeffries, 2006; Schmidt, 2006; Collins, 2007; McConnell, 2009)

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal was adopted on March 22, 1989, and entered into force on May 5, 1992. The Convention emphasizes environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes. The convention states that all practicable steps be taken to ensure that hazardous wastes are managed in a manner which will protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects which may result from such wastes. Some objectives which the convention stipulates include the following:

i. Reduction in trans-boundary movements of hazardous and other wastes subject to the Convention;
ii. Prevention and minimisation of the generation of hazardous wastes; and
iii. Active promotion of the transfer and use of cleaner technologies.

These objectives are supported by a regulatory system for their monitoring and control. Nigeria became a signatory to the Basel Convention in 1989 but, since then, it has not been able to come up with a regulatory framework to check the illicit trade in second-hand electronic products. Simply put, in Nigeria, the Basel Convention has been ratified but not domesticated. Existing national laws are inadequate to deal with the problem of e-wastes in the country (Umesi, Onyia 2008). As several of such regulatory programmes exist across the world and within Nigeria, what

obviously remains to be explored are the underlying paths as well as the forces that enhance and perhaps also, account for the growing illegal importation of e-wastes into developing nations despite existing regulations.

It is imperative to note that much of the present growth in the information technology (IT) sector in developing countries has been fuelled by the importation of second-hand electronics or used electrical electronic equipments from rich developed countries whose consumers are all too happy to find buyers for it (Akuru and Okoro, 2008). Thus, many brokers and businesses have sprung up to channel used equipment from North to South, rich to poor. The easy importation and consumption of tons of these e-wastes has been linked to its satisfaction of high demand for cheap second-hand products (BAN, 2005). The southward e-waste traffic has also been largely attributed to the prevalence of poverty and lack of financial resources in developing countries in which a large percentage of the population lives below $1 one dollar per day. Other literature credit the rising traffic to the existence of cheap labour in developing countries which makes repair and re-use of the old equipment feasible, giving it longer life and supposedly allowing access to electronics among low-income earners in developing nations (BAN 2005). Despite the nearness of used electronics to their end-of-life at the point of export, they are continuously imported into and are consumed in developing countries thus acquiring the status of second hand electronics. Today in Africa, Nigeria and Ghana have been identified as leading destinations for electronic wastes (Fagbohun, 2011; SBC, 2011). Given that the massive inflow and endless importation of electronic wastes have a very nexus with the various domestic practices of e-waste re-use, it is the concern of this study to probe deeply into the social organization of e-waste consumption in Nigeria as it relates to re-use value.

2.1.3.5 E-Waste and Development

It is now common knowledge that Used Electrical and Electronic Equipment (UEEE) is valuable to socio-economic development in Nigeria and is important in governance, education, sports, politics, telemedicine among others (Robinson, 2009, Herat and Paratiamby, 2012). Undoubtedly, Nigeria is estimated to be one of the fastest growing users of the internet and the world's fastest growing market for mobile users. Implicitly, Waste Electrical Electronics Equipment (WEEE) or e-waste, though an emerging problem, can also be a very valuable source

of secondary raw materials if they are sorted and properly handled. This is because enormous potentials for re-use as well as investment opportunities have been identified in them by their consumers in the developing world. The summit revealed that economic opportunities are evolving around trading, repairing and recovering materials from end-of-life (eol) EEE (e-waste). It maintained that the large volumes of e-waste being generated contain considerable quantities of valuable metals such as iron, copper, aluminium, gold and other metals which could be handy for reuse but also harmful and hazardous when care is not taken during the process of dismantling (Schmidt, 2006 & EKO E-WASTE SUMIT 2011).

Precisely, modern electronics can contain up to 60 different elements most of which are valuable and some of which are hazardous, and some both. In its entity electrical and electronic equipment is a major consumer of many precious and special metals and therefore an important contributor to the world's demand for metals. Thus, it is no hidden fact anymore that e-waste now generates considerable demand among consumers in the developing world due to its re-use value (BAN 2005 & UNEP, 2009). Yet it would be apposite to equally submit that, as to whether or not used electrical electronics or e-waste have truly resulted in positive and functional development in Nigeria is mainly dependent upon how it impacts upon man, the socioeconomic life and the environment. To understand this impact, a number of submissions from literature, as examined in the succeeding part would suffice.

Recent findings in literature reveal that the quest to bridge the 'so-called digital divide' is one of the key reasons most developing nations and waste experts now advance as the rationale for transferring UEEE and for the increasing in-flow of electronic waste into the developing countries (Osibanjo & Nnorom, 2007; Umesi & Onyia, 2008; EKO E-WASTE SUMMIT, 2011), yet despite this claim, it is also evident that only 25 percent of these e- wastes and used electrical electronic equipment are useful while about 75 percent are irreparable junks which end up mostly in landfills. Similarly, the same quest for the closure of digital divides is advanced for a good number of transboundary movements of e-waste to developing countries from Europe and America and sometimes Asia (Herat 2010 & Greenpeace, 2009). Consequently, however, only very little attention is thus paid to the alarming rates of landfills and waste hills that consequently emerge in developing nations from this unchecked importation not to mention also the serious

health hazards (such as skin cancer and cerebral infections among others) and threats being posed to the lives of people in developing nations that result from this growing technology transfer. The overall result therefore is that developing nations have been turned into dumping grounds for all kinds of waste electrical electronic equipments (Tereda 2012, Popoola et al, 2011).

The impact of growing e-waste generation and transfer on domestic attitude of consumption in developing nations and on the environment is equally noteworthy. For instance, Nnorom and Osibanjo (2007) have shown that there is a large consumption inflow of second-hand EEE such as dish washers, Radio sets, TV sets, electric kettles, printers, copiers among others into Nigeria. This is because used items such as used PCs can be obtained for as low as 30% of the cost of a new product of a similar brand. This implies that even new locally manufactured products such as the OMATEK and ZINOX computers, whose production should ordinarily boost the local economy, would be rejected for second-hand computers from developing countries because they cost less. Hence, computer brands such as HP, DELL, APPLE, ACER, TOSHIBA, and MACHINTOSCH have become all too popular in developing nations following friendly costs and frequent use due to endless importation. In a word, domestic production within developing nations is stultified while foreign production is promoted.

Given that people's state of health and wellbeing remains a central aspect of development, the health dimension and consequence of the growing e-waste importation into developing nations is also noteworthy. Doubtless, most literature now emphasize that e-wastes contain benefits despite notable problems associated with them such as human and environmental risks and hazards. Thus, the accumulation of end-of-life waste EEE which follows from unchecked importation of second –hand electronics results in the depletion and pollution of the environment (Osibanjo & Nnorom, 2007). These hazards are posed by metal substances embedded in these electronic waste devices and they include mercury, lead, beryllium, cadmium barium, brominated flame retardants among others (Popp 2005; Kenj and O'Brien, 2010; Roland, 2008; Ni and Zeng, 2009; Fagbohun, 2011; Punch, February 28, 2011).

Osibanjo & Nnorom (2007) further hold strongly that aside the negative effects of e-waste pollution on health in developing nations, there are also associated and sometimes irreversible

losses of resources. They maintain that in Asia and Africa for instance, where crude e-waste recycling activities take place, circuit boards are treated in open acid baths next to rivers to extract copper and other metals considered precious. The consequence of this is the destruction of aquatic life and resources due to the release of toxicity into such water bodies. Implicitly, to tolerate e-waste importation without adequate check spells growing depletion of existing resources of various kinds in developing countries. Another major challenge despite this growing impact however is that, there is a lack of awareness among consumers, collectors and even the recyclers of the potential hazards of WEEE, crude 'backyard recycling and other such practices. For instance, An American Medical Association report stated that just 'one seventieth of a teaspoon of mercury can contaminate 20 acres of lake: making the fish unfit to eat' (Umesi & Onyia, 2008; Schmidt, 2006). In a word, Crude E-waste management occurs in the informal sector of the economy involving people who are ignorant of the hazards of exposure to toxins in e-waste with children and women becoming most vulnerable (E-WASTE SUMMIT 2011). Without doubt, the grave side of imported e-waste among its consumers seems to be a very strong matter of concern for development.

Notwithstanding that the majority of literature suggest that factors such as rapid technology change, low initial cost and even planned obsolescence account for the growing rates of e-waste exports around the globe from the developed world to developing nations of the world and Africa, particularly Nigeria, Ghana, and sometimes Cairo in Egypt, it would be imperative to note that the adverse consequence of this growing accumulation of waste or dump especially on development in these regions cannot also be ignored. In regard to Nigeria, Fagbohun (2011) summarizes some factors or catalysts perceived to promote underdevelopment due to the importation of e-waste or UEEE into Nigeria. These include: the lack of national regulation regarding import rules for used electrical electronic goods; relaxed, weak and insufficient enforcement of existing laws; lack of awareness on the risks, harm and potential hazards associated with e-waste. Moreover, there is also the poor corporate social responsibility by the industry which leaves government to grapple alone with the problem. Others include the absence of adequate infrastructure for collection, recycling and recovery of e-waste, poor interface of the informal sector with the regulatory authority and an apparent lack of economic alternatives to activities carried out by the informal sector (Fagbohun, 2011, Popoola et al, 2011).

Going by adverse dimension of e-waste, already presented, it is plausible that apart from Climate Change, e-waste is one of the major environmental challenges of the 21st Century. As a result, the world is constantly in search for solution to the problems posed to human health and the environment by ever increasing generation of WEEE and by its movement from developed to developing countries (EKO E-WASTE SUMMIT, 2011). Given the obvious challenges associated with e-waste, most of the importers have chosen to refer to them as second-hand EEEs rather than as wastes (Herat, 2010). It suffices to submit here that, in no small measure, e-waste signifies serious challenges and risks to both human and environmental health and to that extent it might not be justifiable to say that its importation should be encouraged because it contains substances that can be recycled.

Summarily, its prospects for improvement of life notwithstanding, it seems difficult to totally consider e-waste as developmental because a good number of challenges tied to it seem to suggest more grave implications for developing countries than otherwise. In the same vein, e-waste, which by legal provisions is considered hazardous waste, now ends up being discarded and routinely burned in what environmentalists refer to as 'another cyber-age nightmare and is now landing on the shores of developing countries.' BAN points out that 're-use is a good thing, bridging the digital divide is a good thing, but exporting loads of techno-trash in the name of these lofty ideas is seriously damaging the environment and health of poor communities in developing countries, and it is criminal. In any case, under international rules governing trade in toxic waste such as the Basel Convention', much of this trade is illegal. Clearly, the excuse to bridge digital divides as the justification for dumping of e-waste in developing countries seems untenable when viewed in terms of the apparent ills that e-waste importation begets for consumers in developing countries whose borders have become all too porous due to apparently low environmental standards, ignorance and predominance of poverty. Apparent consequences include endless exploitation, future ecological disasters, suppression of domestic markets for new products whose used forms are onwardly imported (Tereda 2012, Umesi & Onyia, 2008, Lepawski and McNabb, 2010).

2.1.4 The Context of Second-Hand Trade

Beyond the 'further lives of things' narratives, literature in this section argue that the further life of goods is sustained by the existence and dynamics of second—hand culture, especially trade ensured by consumer demand. In this regard, Stobart and Van Damme (2010) argue instead that second-hand cultures are an essential part of modern affluent and throwaway society. Periodizing the emergence of second-hand trade, Beverly Lemire (1988) argues that second-hand merchandise of goods such as textile dates back to the preindustrial and early industrial England in which consumer demand for such goods were high but unrecognized in literature and research discourse. Throughout this period, trade in second-hand clothing as a common feature of the English life met the needs of a wide cross section of the working people, from coal heavers to office clerks, from shopkeepers to wives and servants. It was not restricted to the indigent, to the destitute, or to the recipient of charity. The trade flourished in response to the second tier of demand, a demand which had not yet been translated into large-scale production of consumer goods yet was powerful enough to stimulate intermediate trade. The values of these wares varied, but this variety in itself presents the buyer with a range of qualities and prices otherwise outside of the buyer's reach.

Other scholars focusing on trade note that despite its long history, the economic power and global scope of the trade in used clothing increased in the early 1990s in the wake of the liberalization of many Third World economies and following the sudden rise in demand from former Eastern Bloc countries (Thomas, 2003; Palmer and Clark,2005). While clothing was exported from the West and Westernized countries to Zambia or the Philippines, India was transforming used clothes for export to the West. Hong Kong by contrast was an advanced city importing fashionable items previously worn in developed countries (Palmer and Clark, 2005). Evidences of second-hand trading in eighteenth-century England also shows in the tonnes of clothes that were shipped out of London and into the provinces and the Continent by wholesale dealers. These were sold on stalls in markets and fairs, or from the growing number of specialist retail shops – a mix which persisted well into the nineteenth century. Consumption has long been acknowledged as a crucial field of interest, capable of reflecting on historical processes of material, social and even cultural change. More recently, however, research into the actual transactions between buyers and sellers has sought to bridge the gap between the supply structure

and the product market, on the one hand, and the demand preferences and material culture of the consumers even within households, on the other (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010).

Extensive attention has also been given to the agency of second-hand trade goods and the agency of actors. Scholars arguing that used merchandise outlets have developed into big businesses note that second-hand goods include a wide variety of stock not limited to clothing, but covering home furnishings, dishes, toys and an array of miscellaneous articles. Other frequently referenced forms of second-hand or durable goods include more generally automobiles (Pelletiere and Reinert, 2002, 2006), textiles (Omobowale, 2013) electronics -computers and softwares (Kumar, 2001, Omobowale, 2013), and even books (Thomas, 2003). In addition, there were also vibrant markets for books, furniture, household goods, carriages, artwork and even food which had previously been owned by other people (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010). Discourse on the agency suggests that the agency of second-hand retail and consumption is both fluid and inclusive in nature. While it consumers may be perceived as poor because they buy second-hand goods, Wiseman (1979:30) argues instead that:

> "it is difficult to ascertain the socio-economic status of persons who patronize second-hand clothing stores. Some of the women as she notes look poor; others appear to be of indefinite class origin trying to stretch a slim budget. Yet some women go because they can pick up items that would be too frivolous for them to consider buying retail, such as sequined louses and gold-threaded leisure jump-suits".

Above she suggests that the second-hand consumer identity is vague and may not be easily deciphered. Their common ploy in the market only poses identification problems for a participant observer. Isla (2013) argues similarly that the agency of the second-hand consumer is neither exclusive to one category but cuts across nearly all social classes of people. Her findings reveal that although more and more people from middle to upper income groups buy clothes from their shops, shoppers from low income groups are significantly greater in number and openly admit that they hardly buy clothes in malls. The wealthy could also visit the second-hand market because they are looking for specific high-end brands or for a unique style. For the well-to-do, knowledgeable customers, who greatly appreciate the quality of second-hand designer labels, they do not bargain because they know a "good buy" when they see one. Poorer customers, who may or may not be familiar with elite brands, complain about the higher price

and barter accordingly. Local designers buy used designer clothes to scrutinize the fabric, design and how a price has been put together. Actors costume designers and choreographers also appreciate and do not hesitate to buy more expensive luxury brands inconspicuously and demand discretion from them. Her findings suggest that people's subjective meanings rather than socio-economic class factors determine or shape and define who consumes second-hand goods.

The agency of second-hand consumption as others argue may not be exactly exclusive or class bound. Rather it necessarily cuts across actors from all socio-economic backgrounds. To this end, Stobart and Van Damme (2010) argue that conventional understandings of the second-hand trade in early modern Britain emphasize its importance in the consumption practices and cultures of the lower orders, with used goods forming a mainstay of the household economies of poor consumers who could not afford to buy new. Yet the reality was rather different in the context of Europe and other places studied: consumers from all social groups bought a wide variety of second-hand goods. The aristocracy acquired luxury items such as Old Master paintings at auctions or through private sales; and they joined the gentry and the middling sorts in buying furniture, tableware, linen and so on from house sales and public auction (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010:4).

International market of second-hand goods is prominent in both the West and other parts of the world, particularly developing countries. (Palmer and Clark, 2005) have argued that second-hand consumption in the West is ventured into as a pastime and as an experiment with the unknown in fashion cultures. Clerides and Hadjiyiamis (2007) conversely argue that in importing countries, the consumption of durable goods from coming the West is ensured by the presence of lower environmental standards and its benefit to consumers who purchase them for their cheapness and affordable prices. Asymmetric quality standards is yet another push factor behind trade in used goods from high to low standard countries while at the same time reducing trade in new goods in the latter. The Japanese stringent testing procedure for used cars, mentioned earlier is a good example.

Because these goods are labor intensive in their use, maintenance and repair compared to new goods, Pelletiere and Reinert (2005) identify, in addition to affordability, that labor abundance in developing countries as opposed to labor scarcity in developed ones drives the movement of

durable goods towards countries of the global south. Isla (2013) notes that need, affordability, and thrift are reasons that figure prominently in the used clothing consumption. Pelletiere and Reinert (2003) argue that the lower technological level of used machines suits the skill levels of developing countries. Slow depreciation of goods remains another factor driving favorable transfer and trade of second hand automobiles in developing countries. Reasons why second-hand goods like used automobiles depreciate more slowly in developing countries include lower cost of labor intensive repairs, lower average incomes leading to lower demand for luxury features relative to basic utility features, lower depressive effect on old model prices of newly – introduced models, and lower breakdown opportunity costs due to lower average levels of human capital.

Thomas (2003) corroboratively argues that the development of internet-based markets for used goods and growing international efforts towards trade liberalization are reducing the barriers to second-hand markets. He also identifies that a relationship exists between demand for second-hand durable goods and demand for brand new goods. While it is argued that used goods compete with new goods (Kumar, 2001), Thomas notes on the one hand that the typical assumption in environmental assessment literature is that the reuse and demand for second hand goods threaten and decrease demand for brand new products. Consequently, in markets with zero second-hand prices, such as markets for furniture, clothing and garage –sale items, increased second-hand sales can be expected to decrease for demand for new goods. He also notes on the other hand that second-hand markets for consumer durables stimulate the economy partly by enabling the well-to-do the sooner to replace their worn out or obsolescing durable goods with new ones and thereby increasing the total demand for them. This implies that second-hand markets may actually increase material consumption, rather than decrease it.

Three major reasons have been identified for resale trading in durable goods. Such trading occurs if (1) there is adverse selection and owners realize that the goods they have acquired are inferior quality (2) there are exogenous changes in consumer preferences leading to a lower demand for the product and (3) the product physically depreciates or deteriorates overtime, leading the owners to update their preferred quality of product service. The physical obsolescence argument motivates resale trading in durable goods due to product obsolescence. Besides product

obsolescence, technological obsolescence is also a powerful motivation for resale trading even in the absence of physical depreciation (Kumar, 2001)

Stobart and Van Damme (2010) have argued that a key question on which second-hand trade and consumption is predicated is: who bought and why they chose the second-hand to new goods. This focus on consumer meanings leads to the reconstruction of consumer motive away and to shift away from pristine economic determinist debates on the market. This shift challenges age long assumptions that motives were primarily economic and invites new scholarship to consider the social and cultural attractions of second-hand goods. Their chief argument is that in addition to an emphasis on the actual evolution of secondhand objects, there is need to theorize more fully the specific social position and motivations of the buyers and sellers of older goods.

Studying the second-hand consumption of goods in southwest Nigeria, Omobowale (2009, 2013a&b) to this end argues that through local cultural appreciation of the foreign used products, as opposed to locally used ones called *aloku*, consumers construct them as *tokunbo* which literally means *from abroad.* The term is a locally evolved interpretive meaning of appreciation and esteem symbolizing 'reuse value' for goods and products that are imported from developing countries of the world into Nigeria. Such goods for which Nigerians ascribe reuse value include second-hand clothes, second-hand automobiles and second-hand electronics otherwise called e-wastes (Omobowale, 2013). Reuse value, as signified by *tokunbo,* symbolically accords 'standard", "good quality" and superiority to foreign *used* as against local *used* items Omobowale, 2010). Nigeria's economic down turn beginning in the 1980s catalyzed by the introduction of Nigeria into the world economy was foundational to local interest in foreign used products as favorable but also as rational alternatives to high cost of brand new products (Omobowale, 2013a). The foregoing contextual local appreciation and affinity for used products from 'across the seas' has also orchestrated the movement of otherwise end-of-life e-waste from developed to developing third world.

Consequent upon the interpretive outlook, electronics officially designated in international and local regulations as e-wastes evolve as consumables and as reusables in Nigeria within the context of actor's own subjective meanings. The construction of social appreciation for e-waste, seeing them rather as second-hand electronics, as ICT aids, and as "development package"

(Omobowale, 2013:157) symbolize construction and reconstruction of value and meanings attached to used goods in the immediate Nigerian social structure. This leads to the differentiation between domestic second-hand and imported second-hand electronics goods. In Nigeria, the social construction of imported e-waste as *Tokunbo* and as valuable second-hand, clearly presents it as a valuable alternative to the expensive ICT from developed countries (Omobowale, 2013:513) which is by nature cost-prohibitive (Omobowale, 2012:516). Hence, what is construed in developed society and in pure-scientific literature as e-waste alternatively enjoys subjective interpretive reconstruction as 'reusable, consumable' and therefore too, as tradables in Nigeria.

Elsewhere Palmer and Clark (2005) observe that second-hand consumption is an interpretive medium for marketplace consumer rituals that facilitate practices such as identity-construction. As opposed to the view that goods' transfer represents subtle colonialism, they identify that consumption of second hand clothes is important in the construction of a modern personal appearance and challenges any perception that second-hand trade signifies colonial hegemony or domination of the West. They present an evidence of second hand clothing assuming a global scale both economically and culturally, while contributing to the construction of fashion identities at the local level. Hence the received meanings of old clothes are challenged in order that new meanings can be constructed. In the same vain, they argue that second hand clothing from the West has enabled city dwellers elsewhere to dress well in quality garments with an eye to fashion. The relationship between fashion, modernity and the city continues to underpin the trade in second hand clothes in the 1990s. They also identify that marked difference exists between the culture of consuming the new and that of consuming the used. While the construction of new identity may exist, Isla (2013) notes that it is the desire for social acceptance that motivates consumers to purchase used items. Hence, consumers dress not only according to their age, gender, and occupation, but also in order to be socially accepted in the wider society.

Estebam and Shum (2007) have also identified that initial use history and biography of durable goods shape and determine the social composition of second hand markets. They argue that in many durable-goods industries, used products are traded in decentralized secondary markets that are not directly controlled by the producers of new goods; this includes the automobile industry.

Buttressing the role of second-hand consumer practices in shaping the market, Buskens and Weesie (2000) in their study on 'Buying a Used Car' have argued that the subjective definition of used car purchase procedure informs the choice of where and from whom to buy and of what sort of relations to enter into, with used car retailers and merchants.

Kumar (2001) has argued that second-hand market relations shape consumer behavior and tastes. The presence of resale or second-hand markets, he argues, will alter consumer behavior by providing gains to trade to buyers with diverse tastes. In her work, 'Reflections on the Cultures of the New and the Second Hand in Italy', Setiffi (2011), focusing of material culture, argues that second-hand consumption is an act of social communication which is expressed through the acquisition and circulation of goods. To consider material culture as an area of symbolic mediation means that it is a means of interpreting social reality. Within this interpretive context the notion of what is considered as new or used acquires a value transcending the substance of the goods. Her principal argument is that goods and objects circulate within the relational structures that shape them, and individuals communicate an intelligible cultural code through the objects. Only a broad view will enable the consideration of goods in their capacity to construct reality. In this sense, the 'action' of objects, which besides carrying symbolic content, are capable of creating a shared social reality through their use in the rituals of consumption.

In her study Close Encounters of the Quasi-Primary Kind *Sociability in Urban Second-Hand Clothing Stores* Jacqueline Wiseman (1979) identifies the second-hand clothing store interactions as a symbolic representation of medium-sized urbanity. With her focus on marketplace processes of meaning, she engages in a way the position of Tumbat and Markus (2007) that the marketplace is a drama space characterized by antagonistic ritualistic performances by drawing critically on the thesis of urbanity. Although urban life has been characterized as discouraging primary-type interaction except in areas where people of similar interests see each other on a long-term basis, Wiseman (1979) argues otherwise. Instead she notes that fleeting or quasi relationships of a primary nature do occur in some city settings, either by design or by accident born of their social structure and ecology. In her study of second-hand clothing stores Wiseman sets forth in detail how transitory sociability emerges in a mundane setting where people need each other to attain shopping goals as a result of various store policies.

Unlike the supermarket space, the second-hand textile space according to her generates a bond space.

Considering that second-hand goods are naturally displayed, Wiseman further observes that sellers involved with this merchandise are frequently exposed to theft by buyers. Sellers as a result, devise methods of coping with the situation by creatively manufacturing social situations that eventually encourage strangers to talk to each other and even help one another while shopping. The conditions, sizes, purposes and apparent quality of second-hand items are not predictable but are ordered by the buyer. Besides being vulnerable to consumers, Wiseman adds that in the second-hand textile market, consumers also determine the price of goods not the sellers. Another problem that is common with second-hand textile merchandise is the problem of sizing which has led merchants to create space for rituals such as 'backroom sorting' in which non-traders called 'backroom sorters' sort out these goods into the categories of 'small, medium, and large'.

Isla (2013), like Wiseman (1979) recognizes the potentiality of the second-hand trade to create varied forms of social relations that includes social bonding. Since the used clothing trade is a global phenomenon that transcends national boundaries, social relations of used clothing traders, retailers, and consumers unite to challenge deterministic belief driven by institutions that regulate and compete with this trade. Investigating the second-hand fashion trade and consumption in the Philippines', she presents the second-hand merchandise as a site for creative rituals. Among merchants for instance, store display or arrangement of items is guided by social categories, and used clothing retailers can be grouped according to social categories, on the upper scale are retailers of designer, high-end brands who have somehow become connoisseurs or fashion experts, facilitating brand consciousness, selling only the best goods and choosing locations in the more upscale areas of the city.

2.1.5 The Dynamics and Contradictions of "Used" Meanings

Challenging the implicit dichotomization of an objective material world and a subjective textual or discursive world, Jackson (2004) recommends that studies on materiality need to pay greater attention to the "wayward expressiveness" of matter, including its capacity to act outside its

relation with human subjects. Hence, he triggers future research interest on "consumption and material culture."

Another key area highlighted by him is the need to study consumption as a social practice. He argues that theories of practice offer a radical alternative to the conventional emphasis on individual decision-making. In other words, practices could be understood as routinized and socially embedded forms of behaviour that require skill and competence to enact. Studying consumption as practice requires an understanding of the history and development of practice itself, the internal differentiation of roles and positions within those practices, and the consequences for how different people are positioned when participating. Focus must also be directed to how practices are organized and how moments of consumption are enjoined. To this end, research must could focus on what types of practices are prevalent in different situations, what range of particular practices individuals engage in, and what typical combinations of practices occur in particular times and places.

While attention has been devoted elaborately to a range of consumer goods and services including mobile phones, complementary medicine, and interior design, pretty little attention has been devoted to comparative issue of whether it might be possible to identify "Commodity-specific cultures." Given that clothing is a highly charged commodity whose cultural significance should not be disparaged, it is needful to investigate the social significance of clothing in terms of the wearer's embodied identity.

Woodward (2011) posits the need to pay attention to the cultural effervescence of everyday material culture and the role things play in structuring and mediating cultural practice.

Rook (1985) argues that extensive ritual involvements challenge researchers to conceptualize and investigate market behaviours in new ways. He criticizes the narrow range of market phenomena that researchers typically study and advocates the need for broader perspective using fresh research constructs. Being a body language which involves mental and physical behaviours, owing to its symbolic behavioural composition which has been overlooked, ritual context invites more direct observational studies of consumers' experiences in choosing, buying and using various ritual artifacts. Ritual research must also focus on the role of fantasy in

consumers' lives. Epistemologically, it is also needful to loosen paradigmatic thinking about research methodologies. Excessive reliance of consumer studies on fixed-format surveys for statistical computer-analytic processing which only scratch the surface of consumers' real lives and jeopardize the very relevance of consumer research must be transcended. Hence, more holistic, qualitative approaches are of the essence. Moreover, ritual behaviour by its very nature, invites field observation that would help in extracting the meanings embedded in ritualized consumer behaviour.

Gielser (2007) presents key necessary questions for understanding consumption culture vis-à-vis drama within marketplace contexts. These include: how do certain cultural tensions translate into particular dramatic narratives, roles, and behaviours? How do consumers and producers dramatically construct or modify their personal and symbolic boundaries and social roles? What is the relationship between dramatic performance, cultural legitimacy and social identity?

According to Halkier (2011), recent attempts to understand consumption as practiced has informed the study of the materiality of music. Their empirical qualitative study of the dimensions and extent of the dematerialization of music, technology and listening experience enhanced insight into changes in musical consumption. Their research showed that digitalization of music does not necessarily denote dematerialization of music listening habits. While it is true that digital music files, which replaced material albums (cassettes, CDs), have eliminated the tangible part of music consumption, it is needful to understand the roles which objects such as iPods and their accessories play in producing social meanings and in mediating what people do, feel and love when listening to music. They also argue that combination of convention theory with practice theory would make it possible to overcome weaknesses of practice theory. Some potential new directions include the need to conceptualize scope and scale of practices, different types of agency of practitioners and trajectories of practices. There is a need in practice studies of consumption to focus on a broader arena of multiple intersecting practices instead of focusing on single practices. Focusing on ways of consuming must also become central over focus on individual consumer choice. While practice theory emphasizes ways in which individuals embrace and stabilize existing practices, studying circuit of practice is necessary for

understanding how individuals change practices when transforming or abandoning patterns of activity.

Focusing on used textiles, Wiseman (1979) postulates that it is needful to develop a theory to aid in understanding how secondhand encounters are handled and under what circumstances they are converted into modified primary relationships from which people do seem to get social sustenance. She also argues that not enough is yet known about the facilitating or obstructing effects of employees on the sociability of customers in various settings or on the emergence of customer-employee pseudo-primary relationships. That is, the roles being played by employees in fostering or in impeding bonding.

Whilst this long-term relative decline in the importance of secondhand goods as a whole is well established, recent research suggests that there is need to have refined understanding of both the nature of secondhand goods and the ways in which supply and demand varied across time and space, and between different sectors of the secondhand market. Additionally, just as activists and political parties seek to establish global or even national "green policies", it has become equally needful for researchers to begin to understand the environmental behaviour of consumers. It is also argued that there is a vast under-theorization of secondhand consumption and this impels the need for researchers to espouse the present-day practices and motivations of secondhand trade and consumer culture (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010).

It is important to engage the ironic transition in the social consciousness of Nigerians from shame once attached to patronage of foreign products to the overt present pride, shameless and esteem which accompany patronage of imported goods, a practice identified by Omobowale (2010; 2013) as local social appreciation for *tokunbo.* International e-waste merchandise and enterprise, sustained proudly by both internal and external factors now thrives extensively through the instrumentality of consumer tastes in developing countries like Nigeria. Of course the incorporation of Nigeria into the international world economy, as a dependent nation, subjected to the whims of foreign control is traceable to the 1980s with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) (Omobowale, 2013b). The mission of both local and international governments to ensure that Nigeria develops by this means, eventually pitched Nigeria on its highway to the grave of underdevelopment which still looms at present. Not only

has Nigeria become the victim of capitalist and neo-capitalist economic policies, as the e-waste reality reveals, she has also become a dump economy and a haven global environmental degradation by e-waste dumping.

It is safe to argue that, shamelessness in patronizing foreign used goods and rise of distaste and shame towards local brand goods, based on the notion that local goods are abject, represents a climax and institution of a dependence mentality and nothing else. In part, the West may be a precipitating factor to Nigeria's underdevelopment in the past, but as far as prevailing social consciousness of Nigerians towards everything foreign is concerned, it can also be posited that, Nigerians remain major instruments orchestrating their own present exploitation as evinced in their patronage of and payment for e-waste dumping. In other words, if e-waste exportation is actually represents an exploitation of Nigerians, then it is equally convenient to assert that Nigeria's peculiar consumer culture is instrumental to for the execution of such exploitation.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Weber's Social Action Theory

The social action theory is central to the status of sociology as a science and it focuses on social action as the value-motivated behavior of individuals. Action theories consider human action as the major object of sociology (Bendix, 1954; Marshall, 1998; Hogan, 2009). Action theorists emphasize the agent's own definition of the situation, his power of rational choice, and his ability to negotiate interaction or to manipulate expected role performances. Action in the Weberian sense portrays the ideas and purposes of conscious agents. The Max Weber's action theory conceives of social action as subjective meanings which individual human actors attach to their actions and to situations in their mutual orientations with specific socio-historical contexts (Coser, 1977, Hogan, 2009).

Weber has identified *verstehen* (understanding of people's actions) as the method per excellence of sociology. To him, understanding and interpretation are closely related, and sociologists must recognize the involvement of interpretation in all acts of understanding (Marshall, 1998; Baker, 1999). Hence, social action theory has to focus not only on the nature of action but also on their meanings and interpretations as the underlying actions (Hall, 1981). In essence, the focus is on

persons acting in relationally defined situations and in systems of social relationships (Hogan, 2009).

Weber distinguishes ordinary behaviour from action, holding that action often comes with subjective meanings for the actor (Marshall, 1998); and by nature, social action is not just literal, but comprises both failure to act and passive acquiescence. It may be directed towards the past, present or expected future behavior of others, and not every kind of action, even of the covert type, is social. Overt action is, in fact, non-social if it is oriented solely to the behaviour of inanimate objects. Subjective attitude, which is a prerequisite for social action renders an action social, only so far as they are oriented to the behaviour of others. Therefore, an individual's social activity becomes social only insofar as it takes into account someone else's behaviour. Definitely, not all actions are intrinsically social. It can only be so when the actor's action is meaningfully oriented to that of others. The accidental collision of two cyclists is, for instance, not social. But their attempt to rationally avoid each other, or whatever might follow the collision would constitute social action (Warriner, 1969; Thompson and Tunstall, 1976).

Since meanings and interpretations are germane and prime to action theory, sociology is considered scientific because it gives a radical, coherent account of people's actions, thoughts and relationships (Marshall, 1998). As an interpretive sociology, Weberian perspective considers the individual and his action as the basic unit of study and the individual as the sole carrier of the meaningful conduct. The interest is to probe concepts with reference to "understandable action"; and the methodology is to consider the mutual orientation of social actors, the understandable motifs of their actions, and the external manifestations of behavior or underlying motivations. Studying social action is trying to impute motives by interpreting actions and words. Weber proposes that we can *verstehen* (understand) human action by penetrating into the subjective meanings that actors attach to their own behavior and to the behavior of others (Heap, 1977; Coser, 1977). There are two potential types of actions, namely "mere action," action towards things which may or may not be meaningful, and "social action," action oriented meaningfully from one actor to another. It is the latter concept or type that is studied in this work, and it is construed to mean the meanings attached to goods, and in this case, the imported used

electronics and the unfolding actions within the context of consumer demand and the organization of used electronics merchandise (Thompson and Tunstall, 1976).

The issue considered is whether the merchandise that is thrown away is useless or not. The throwaway society theory, argues that in a modern society, products are not made to last a long time and, therefore, have to be thrown away. This implies that thrown away goods are intentionally designed for a short time use and are to be thrown away. The market is, in fact, willing to accept the time-span allocated for the efficiency, utility or relevance of the goods because it can derive profits, encouraging people to keep replacing their goods from the used electronics. Cooper (2012), the central figure behind this theory, argues that we live in a throwaway society in which, for a number of reasons, we are discarding things well before they have even reached the end of their "technical life span" which is the maximum length of time for which the product could function (Grower, 2010). The idea that best captures, the intuition of the market is described as "rapid product obsolescence" (Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2008). Obsolescence is aimed at encouraging consumption and purchase of new products through reduced lifespan of old products. It also occasions consumption of obsolete objects which constitutes "unsustainable consumption" in which otherwise waste objects are consumed as goods (Setiffi, 2011). Essentially, the theory has attributed causality and determinism of action to production, design and actions in the production chain. In essence the nature and fate of consumption which in this case is framed as unsustainable consumption is understood chiefly in terms of manufacture forces and the predetermined criterion of design rather than as a voluntary expression of the consumer. Essentially, the throwaway society theory shows largely that consumer behavior/consumption and the action of men are shaped by the lifespan of things, which is essentially limited.

Going by the essence of social action in which meaning is core to action, it means that meanings that actors attach to a used good could redefine its utility value. Gregson, Metcalfe and Crewe (2007) highlighted in their argument, that rather than being thrown away, products, including those resulting from rapid obsolescence are stored, sold-on or handed-down. In essence, goods that have been thrownaway by an individual, can acquire reuse values based on subjective meanings attached to them by another actor (Gibson, 2012; Ture, 2013). Hence, too, what is end-

of-life for some in a situation creeps into another life, and is born again into further utility, depending on the meanings attached. The throwaway society is thus brought under critique by the significance of subjectivity of human action and the relativity of meanings behind actions of actors. If indeed meanings attached to use and reuse, rather than the material attributes of goods, including technologically programmed lifespan of things, shape the fate of goods, it means that what turns out as throwaway is itself subjective and indeterminate rather than fixed or given at all. In other words, insofar as actions are shaped by subjective meanings, attributes such as end-of-life and throwaway would be 'contingent on meanings', they would not be predictive fates of things.

To corroborate the significance of *verstehen* –subjective understanding from the actor's own perspective, Jackson (2008) and Setiffi (2011) propose that "used objects," as opposed to new ones, could become *fetish* objects carrying different values based on their subjective meanings as embedded within the social relational structures constructed for them and predicated on consumption. The fetish objects become means of "symbolic mediation" and "social communication," as representational form, like biographies (psychological, professional, political, familial, and economic) which image some aspects of the life story and as Kopytoff (1986) postulates, enter into series of possible social actions. In other words, the cultural biography constructed for merchandise is core to that object's being and inform the meaning and interpretation of such an object. Within the adoption of a social action theory, therefore, one is in a position to contest the framing of used electronics as being exclusively e-wastes having end-of-life. It can be said with Vallauri (2009) that toxicological construction of used electronics remains a partial narrative on these objects. Indeed, they could have "unintended consequences" which Vallauri (2009) describes as "the e-waste magic." It is magical in the sense that the emergence of discarded waste electronics in developing countries could result in the bridging of digital divide between developed and developing countries. This is because these objects could be routed in the direction of "created values" and "transubstantiation" in developing countries. Lepawski and McNabb construe the "processes of valuing" as predicated on geographical differences and technological capabilities, hence, a good thrown away in one society may have new utility in some other societies. Throwaway and utility are contextually and subjectively defined, depending on the context of instrumentality, value and needs of each society and the

interacting actors. Hence, the subjective meanings carried by actors will define a used object as waste and/or usable. Weber's theory of social action and its emphasis on the significance of subjective meanings, presupposes that we live in a constructive society of humans, who are capable of difference even in their definition and interpretation (s) of things.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section presents a detailed discussion of the processes employed to access, collect and process the data used in the study. The procedures followed were systematic in nature and covered the research design, the study population, the sample technique, data sources, instruments and approaches for data gathering and data processing. O'Leary (2007) defines research as the process of gathering data in order to answer a particular question(s). When researching real-world problems the questions asked generally relate to the need for knowledge that can facilitate informed decision-making, thereby aiding problem resolution. In essence, research can be central to determining what we should do, what we can do, how we will do it, and how well we have done it. While research methods enable the researcher to provide answers to scientific questions Gravetta and Frozano (2006) have argued that there are different ways of knowing or finding answers to questions. These methods could be inductive or deductive in nature depending on the nature of the phenomenon being studied and what in particular is being studied about such phenomenon.

3.2 Research Design

Research methodology is a strategy or a plan of action that links methods to research outcomes, and governs the choice and use of methods (Cresswell, 2003). The research methodology, for the purpose of this study, is to collect data for the understanding of social relations of imported used electronics merchandise, as a phenomenon largely informed by a 'world of shared meanings and interpretations'. In this wise, an exploratory research design was adopted for the study. This is because this research ventured into growing area of the sociology of second-hand consumption connected with subjective understanding of meaning and action in the context and experience of the actor(s) involved. Weber calls this endeavour 'Verstehen' - a German word for subjective, predictive and emphatic understanding' and 'interpretation' (Coser, 1977, Marshall, 1998; Baker, 1999) matters. The methodology is essentially qualitative in nature, and it is rooted in an interpretivist approach. The use of this interpretive approach is significant to qualitative research because, it evolved due to limitations inherent in the methods and procedures for producing

scientific claims to objective knowledge and for advancing a clear understanding of human social relational phenomena. The success of interpretivism, over the shortcomings of positivism, relies on the dependence of qualitative research on ideas from philosophical phenomenology, especially, its emphasis on lived experience as the basis for social action (Schwandt, 2001; 2005).

3.3 Study Area

This research setting was Lagos State, Nigeria. Lagos was not arbitrary chosen; rather it was given preference for its centrality as an entry point for imported goods and as a major international market for trade in importation and consumption of used electronics in Nigeria (BAN, 2005). The multiculturality of Lagos society, and its socio-historical political nature, as an international commercial hub for varieties of trade relations in Nigeria, is a further justification for this choice. Precisely, three locations in Lagos were purposively selected for the study; these are, namely, the Ikeja Computer village, the Westminster used electronics market, and the Alaba international electronics market. They are big markets for used electronics not only in Nigeria, but also along the West African region.

Its location at the sea side as an entry point for importation, its geographical cosmopolitanism and its social composition justify the choice of Lagos as the study area for this research. As Obono (2007) argues, Lagos is characterized by high volumes of immigration, high population densities, a migration- induced growth rate of 8 percent per year, an average household size of seven, poverty, tremendous concentrations of slums and squatter settlements, and a high youth unemployment rate. Apart from its accommodation of social and cultural contestations, Lagos is a bustling agglomeration of contiguous slums and metropolitan areas. In fact, Lagos is a melting pot of numerous ethnic groups drawn from the West African sub –regions.

3.4 Study Population

The population of study comprised of traders, consumers, scavengers of scrap used electronics in Lagos. It also comprise all those who operate as consumers and traders of used electronics on the three sites (Ikeja Computer village, the Westminster used electronics market, and the Alaba international electronics market) chosen for observation. Moreover, the population extends to senior officials of the Nigerian Customs Service (Public Relations Officer), the state Director of

the National Environmental Standards and Regulatory Enforcement Agency (NESREA), and the Country representative of the Basel Action Network (BAN).

3.5 Sample methods

The study used the non-probability sample method of selection given the study's leaning with tenets of interpretive research in which subjective understanding rather than a representative and generalizable explanation of the phenomenon was sought. To this end the study adopted the Purposive and the Snowball sampling methods to select research participants from the various areas selected for study. These two methods enabled the researcher to surmount the hurdle imposed by the tendency for selective disclosure among participants at the inaugural stage of the research.

3.6 Methods of Data Collection

As noted earlier, the selection of research participants follows logically from the nature of the research goals of a study. Given this study's devotion to the subjective experiences of market actors involved in the social relations of IUE merchandise, as defined by its interpretive obligation, the study adopted the qualitative research method of enquiry. This method enhanced the collection of data from both narrative primary sources from actors and from textual secondary sources and materials.

3.6.1 Secondary Sources

Secondary data for the research were drawn from Non-confidential records such as Customs Records, Periodicals of the Basel Convention and NESREA, and the constitution of one of the used electronics market associations.

3.6.2 Primary Sources

3.6.2.1 Observation

The non-participant observation was a major instrument for generating data for this study. This method enabled the researcher to capture first-hand, the social processes which underlined the unfolding realities and relations of the phenomenon of study – demand and the merchandise of imported used electronics. The various dynamic actions and culture in which relationships in the three markets unfolded were aptly captured more by observation than by participation.

3.6.2.2 Key Informant Interview (KII)

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with each of the following stakeholders: the director of the National Environmental Standards and Regulatory Enforcement Agency (NESREA) in Lagos, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the Nigerian Customs in Lagos, the country representative of the Basel Action Network (BAN) in Nigeria, 6 executive members of electronic trade association in the three markets under study, two (2) large scale buyers who have spent over five (5) years in imported used electronics business, one (1) head of technician association, the chairman of used electronics haulage company, two (2) used electronics scrap scavengers. In all, fifteen (15) Key Informant interviews (KII) were conducted.

3.6.2.3 In-depth interview (IDI)

In-depth Interviews were conducted with each of the following stakeholders: ten (10) male and female sellers, ten (10) male and female consumers, four (4) importers, four (4) cart pushers, two (2) former executives, eight (8) current serving executives and associational heads of the markets, shop-keepers, four (4) used electronics scrap retrievers, three (3) large scale scrap assemblers. Altogether, forty-four (44) in-depth interviews were conducted through snowball and purposive method.

3.6.2.4 Focus Group discussion (FGD)

Due to the limitation imposed on this study by the challenge of unwilling disclosure and skepticism on the part of sellers in the market, it was possible to conduct only six (6) FGDs with scavengers who were mostly Hausa from Northern Nigeria. Each of the FGDs conducted comprised of at least six (6) and a maximum of seven (7) participants in each of the groups selected. The researcher's proficiency in Hausa language made it easy to gain access to participants despite their skepticism. It also made it possible to transcribe verbally the interview schedule originally designed in English into Hausa language. The participants drawn for the discussion, as with the participants in the waste scrap trade in general were essentially young males Hausa from northern. The FGD sessions held mostly in the evenings because participants preferred this time to early mornings or noon time when they are often busy. Discussions held with them were captured through the digital flash recording device and through the record accessory on the researcher's Global Systems Mobile (GSM) phone.

Methodology Matrix

The research objectives aimed to:	IDI	KII	FGD	Non-Confidential Sources
1. understand the social relations of consumer demands for imported used electronics	✓	✓		
2. uncover possible social relations sustaining used electronics end-of-life merchandise	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. uncover the roles of gatekeepers in used electronics merchandise	✓	✓		
4. probe the social organization of imported used electronics merchandise	✓	✓		✓
5. understand how used electronics importation governance is locally constructed	✓	✓		✓

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the field using primary and secondary sources were subjected to content and interpretive analyses which eventually translated into the qualitative narratives presented in the study. In conducting the content analysis, textual themes, chronicles, repeated reviews, verbatim transcriptions were systematically generated to make sense of the patterns sustaining the unfolding social relations of the IUE market.

3.8 Ethical consideration

The fundamental ethical principles of anonymity, confidentiality and informed-consent were observed during the research. Prior to the final entrance into the field, a pilot study was conducted to build confidence trust and respect in the participants. Rights of participants to ask questions, to obtain a copy of the result, and to their privacy, were guaranteed and duly observed. Appropriate permission was sought where necessary from designated authorities in the selected markets prior to and during the conduct of the full research. To ensure informed consent and protection of participants' freedom from undue invasion, freedom, permission was sought from the recognized heads of the study units and the individual participants before interviews and observations commenced.

The issue of legislations against importation of most used electronics for many respondents was sensitive for reasons not disclosed, and so they were restrictive on information disclosure. This made it difficult to adhere to initial sample design. In conformity with need for *informed consent*, snowball and accidental sampling were employed to aid voluntary referrals from willing respondents. This helped to make up for the tendency for restrictive disclosure among initially intended respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Legal Rational Governance and Local Construction of Used Electronics Restrictive Conventions

This study conceptualizes legal-rational governance as the control framework and agency inaugurated and empowered by the Nigerian state to oversee and to regulate activities of importing, and in this case, the importation of used electronics into Nigeria. This framework is also considered legal because it enjoys the backing and support of some international treaties and conventions enacted for the management of cross-border movement of goods, particularly used electronics (Basel Convention Center for the African Region, 2013). Literature acknowledges that trade legality remains at the core of regulatory debates on used electronics, particularly those referred to as wastes (Khan, 2014). While legal-rationale framework of research has enjoyed extensive coverage in research and literature, the micro and particularly, the low level responses towards IUE governance, particularly within developing countries is vastly overlooked (Khan, 2014).

Understanding the dimension of social response (of target audience) to the various IUE compliance schemes is therefore important (UNEP/STEP White Paper, 2014). To this end, this section explores the legal-rationale governance of the importation of IUEs into Nigeria and how merchants and consumers locally construct this governance in their different capacities as demand agents. It reveals that materiality-centered meanings of IUEs manifest in the social relations between legal-rational officials and merchants of IUEs. As for the legal-rational governance, this study identifies three key notable actors: the NESREA, representatives of Basel Convention and representatives of the Nigerian customs (Herat and Paratiamby, 2012). These actors locally represent the various state and non-state agencies saddled with the regulation of the global movement of used electronics. In-depth interviews held confirm the principality of these three agencies as explained below:

> We collaborate with NESREA and we complement their effort. By law they are not allowed to be at the port because government overtime has been trying to

> reduce the number of regulatory agencies that operate in the port. Other agencies such as NESREA, SON, NAFDAC all operate out there but we, the customs are the lead agency at the port. When we stumble on goods that require their attention we invite them. In effect, we have the eagle eye, once we stumble on any one we alert them (IDI/PRO Nigerian Customs/ 2013).

The interviews below reveal that official restrictions on importation basically hamper the importation of any used electronics that is 'non-functional', 'toxic' and 'broken'. With these 'material' requirements, officials of NESREA have obligations to subject every used electronics shipment coming into Nigeria to a 'functionality-test' mostly through 'random sampling' (SBC, 2011, BCCA, 2013). Hence:

> What importer are normally expected to bring in to the country is what we call used electrical electronics which are functional and whose functionality has been ascertained at the port through what we call random sampling. Once they are certified to be working, importers are then allowed to go with their containers (IDI/ Official NESREA/2013).

The response below highlights the significance of legal-rational governance at both local and international levels towards used electronics importation:

> Considering the dangers posed by these toxic electronics, NESREA came up with a regulation to regulate the import of used electronics. We call it the regulation on UEE. There is also the BASEL convention that forbids the illegal transboundary movement of anything hazardous from one country to another and Nigeria is a signatory to that convention. There is also another law called the "Harmful Waste Act". It is a federal government law which also forbids the import of anything harmful. Not only waste electronics but also anything harmful chemical, insofar as it is hazardous you cannot bring it into the country, bringing it in would require that you to follow the procedures stating how it must be packaged to protect the people from being harmed (IDI/Official NESREA/2013).

The material conception of IUEs as e-wastes when they are 'broken' or when their parts are 'severed' is substantiated below:

> But we consider them as wastes when we find out that some are working while others are not or some are broken or some of their parts are severed, such as power cables or chords. Or when we discover that they are old model black and white TVs for instance, or worn out and outdated, or already discarded by the 'Oyinbos' (the Whites), we then call them waste (IDI/Official NESREA/2013).

There is yet another 'material' which 'toxicological' interpretation of IUEs perceived as embedded heavy metals as stated in the interview below:

> Such harmful elements include cadmium, beryllium and lead and they are toxic. That is what makes them dangerous. The moment it deviates from normal, it becomes toxic and we do not want it. Our people are using them ignorantly (IDI/Official NESREA/2013).

The restriction on the importation of IUEs can be traced to the perception that developing countries are being used as dumping grounds for solid wastes from developed countries. This is clearly expressed in the interview below.

> We hate to be a dumping ground. If you bring waste into this country, what will be done with it when it cannot be recycled or refurbished? What recyclers do is to pick items they like and sum up those they dislike for burning. Meanwhile through burning, they contaminate the soil and the underground water. Even the vegetables planted in such areas are contaminated (IDI/Official of NESREA/2013).

The interview below indicates that, the meanings attached to IUEs by officials inform their actions and the nature of social relations which they enter into with merchants of IUEs who are involved in importation of the 'non-functional':

> When they inspect the contents thereof and if any single one out of the whole content is found not to be in working condition, it would amount to seizure or impounding. Or most times it would be returned back to the country of origin. Based on their discretion they would either send the shipload back or detain the ship and demand for a payment of fine, most times ranging from half a million dollars to a million dollars. And I can tell you of about two vessel companies that have so far been detained (IDI/ IUE market Official/2013).

Overtly, the narratives of import officials reveal that dependence on the materiality of used electronics is at the heart of legal-rational interpretations of used electronics importation into Nigeria. Hence, the need for imported used electronics to be 'functional', 'non-toxic' and 'non-broken' evolve as prerequisites for the importation of used electronics. In construing IUEs as nothing else but 'potential and actual carriers of human health and environmental hazards', legal-rational framework perceive IUEs as unacceptable. This has engendered a strict and hateful attitude towards the importation of prohibited used electronics in general. Reports from these officials show that merchants lack adequate information and understanding on the grave and long-term hazards of the materiality of IUEs.

The material-oriented perception of IUEs means that for legal-rational officials, IUEs remain exclusively 'potential and actual evil and nothing else'. This evil is inherent in the official and customary use of the term 'e-wastes' to 'materially' describe IUEs. The report of the Secretariat of the Basel Convention (SBC) (2011) in Nigeria substantiates this view in its stipulation that, any used electronics that fails to meet up with 'functionality-test' automatically qualifies as 'e-wastes'. As far as the officials are concerned, the importation of e-waste-a potential and actual evil, is a dent on the Nigerian local image; and this inspires them to impound, seize, and confiscate IUEs. As the above data reveal, the reliance and focus on their materiality as the basis for building meanings for IUEs only leads rational-legal officials to engage in nothing other than demonization of IUEs as e-wastes, to medicalize these objects as toxicological and to criminalize IUE importers *as* deviants on the basis of the provisions of the laws guiding their activities (Osibanjo. 2009). The 'material' official conceptions derive from two basic premises in literature: 'toxicity' and 'obsolescence' (BAN, 2002). Whereas 'toxicity describes the hazardous dangers posed by the harmful embedded metal substances in most used electronics, 'obsolescence' describes the depreciating and shortened lifespan of electronics products precipitated by 'planned manufacture of products'. The rational-legal framework and material conception align with extant views that waste electronics are everywhere, they experience obsolescence and rapidly swell local and global solid waste stream predicted to grow to 12 million tonnes by the year 2020 (Robinson, 2009, Computer Aid International 2012). The view that various legislative restrictions exist against importation of prohibited waste electronics exist at local, regional and international levels (Herat and Pariatamby, 2012) is also buttressed by the noted practices of officials.

Contrary to the position that rational-legal regulation effectively prohibits the importation of e-waste and toxic used electronics, data from merchants shows that covertly, prohibited used electronics e-waste are actually imported into the country. A major factor encouraging such circumvention of the law is the tendency for legal-rational officials to be corrupt. Corruption on its part generates in merchants strong misgivings towards the effectiveness and workability of legal-rational governance. In the responses that follow, official corruption is seen by merchants not only as a problem but also as an encouragement for the circumvention of the laws guiding legal-rational governance of the importation of used electronics. To this end, an importer said:

> They (NESREA) cannot stop these things from entering, they will still collect money and bribe and we would still be here...because how can you stop it, how can you stop it, tell me? (IDI/Importer/2013)

Still, another interviewee supports the above arguing that:

> You see, the truth is that if the system is good we would not be having these problems we have around now. If import management authorities are doing their job, influx of adulterated and substandard electronics equipment would not exist. What do you expect the security agencies that are at the port to do? Other than to have '*themselves sorted out*' and allow you bring in anything. So the importers who are into the importation of substandard items have no problems with that, they pay their way through and get these things into the country (IDI/IUE Market Official/ 2013).

Yet, another merchant, this time a market official corroborates the above arguing that:

> … the problem with this country is that the laws of this nation are meant for the poor or the common man. Otherwise all these electronics whether substandard or whatever you call it pass through the wall and somebody clears them and we allow them to come in to the markets where the users would buy (KII/IUE Market Official/2013).

However, as zealous as these officials (perhaps those that may not be corrupt) may seem about preserving the law, the negative perception of them encourages merchants to disregard e-waste policies as unworkable and unsustainable. The lack of regard for the law makes the merchants recalcitrant and it is their obvious reason for justifying their activities. Merchants argue that the 'collection of bribe' is a common practice among the legal-rational officials. With official corruption playing a catalytic role in circumvention of governance, IUE merchants consequently prefer to pay their ways through for the purpose of keeping their merchandise going. What results from these typical social relations between officials and merchants is that on the one hand, the framework of e-waste governance becomes porous while circumvention on the other hand metamorphoses into an ingrained cultural practice that remains technically difficult to curb.

The fact that the legal-rational governance is 'sorted out' portrays corruption as a 'systemic' cultural norm that has become ingrained in government circles. The quotation frames policy agents as helpless victims of this prevailing culture who have no other obligation than to simply comply with the corrupt culture of the mainstream society. It therefore becomes very easy for 'adulterated' and 'substandard' electronics to be imported into Nigeria. The view that 'security

agencies have themselves sorted out', and the 'importers have no problems with that' presupposes a normalized outlook towards corruption even among e-waste merchants. E-waste import is thus portrayed not as a crime but as a normative in continuum; one in which policy officials lead while e-waste merchants simply follow. In this culture, the circumvention of e-waste policy is normalized and creatively reinterpreted by both policy officials and merchants as a means of survival.

Corruption evolves as a key factor behind the growing importation of e-waste into Nigeria and it is contextually framed not simply as a culture peculiar only with the phenomenon of 'e-waste' importation but as a practice that is rife in nearly all spheres of the system. In a wider sense, one could argue that corruption basically remains an impediment to the successful legal-rational governance of e-waste, that is self-imposed by state import officials. One can also argue that, corruption as a corporate social practice among officials and merchants, who together seek to advance personal interests of survival only serves to perpetuate and institutionalize the circumventing import governance into a custom. These data generally strengthen literature positions that although, various multilateral and national initiatives aim to restrict flows of e-waste from OECD to non-OECD countries, in practice, cross-border movements of waste used electronics remain widely unregulated (Schmidt, 2006; Jeffries, 2006; Khan, 2014).

Notwithstanding that corruption is universal and has tendency to spiral in a downward direction to the lower level actors from state officials, it turns out that those more likely to be criminalized are the poor and the less influential non-state actors, not the influential state actors, -officials. Contextually, the obligation of adherence and compliance to legal-rational state laws is chiefly framed as an expectation from IUE merchants (of some) rather than one of both the merchants and the legal-rational state officials (a duty of all). In essence, equality before the law is not observed as far as the used electronics import legal system is concerned. Whereas state officials, through their corrupt practices encourage merchants to locally circumvent governance, it turns out that in their initially reported though contradictory 'material' designation of IUEs as waste electronics, those who get criminalized eventually are not the 'privileged' but 'corrupt' officials, the 'non-privileged' merchants of IUEs thriving on official corruption and loopholes.

Conceptual inconsistencies and definitional ambiguity on what constitutes inappropriate import also evolve as a factor sustaining the influx of used electronics designated as e-waste into Nigeria (Bontoux, 1997). This definitional challenge manifests in form of misconceptions on the meaning of e-waste among the officials and between officials and local level actors –merchants of IUEs. In this sense, it is difficult to clearly distinguish between waste and non-waste electronics. Definitional inconsistency and its potential to breed role confusion among the officials are buttressed in the interview that follows:

> At the very beginning we had challenges with the Nigerian customs themselves. Previously they did not see anything wrong with TV, computers and other electronics. Because they saw nothing wrong with them they preferred to allow such importations. Therefore if I detain a ship they would release the ship and ask it to go. At that point we had to bring in consultants part of whom was Professor Osibanjo, a country representative of the Basel Action Network (BAN) who took samples from the shipments which we had intercepted and these samples were analyzed. After the analysis, the house of assembly found out and called all of us. It was at that time that the government legislated the inauguration of the National Environmental Standards and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) to replace (Federal environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) as watch dogs against potential importation of hazardous waste substances into Nigeria (IDI/ NESREA Official /2013).

The response below shows that ambiguity on what constitutes waste or non-waste electronics even between state officials themselves does not impede their tendency to 'medicalize' IUE importation:

> We had a similar issue recently when two containers of imported electronics were suspected to have come in with nuclear reactors. But by the time we examined them, it turned out that they were just used electronics, monitors, Television (TV) sets, name them. We jointly examined the two containers on board the vessel that brought them and when we confirmed they were used electronics qualified for NESREA's approval, they were released (KII/PRO Nigerian Customs Service/2013).

Clearly, what follows from 'definition ambiguity', the 'absence of a consensual definition' and from 'role confusion' among officials is the tendency for the officials to sometimes raise false alarm so as to symbolize their activity. The presence of confusion does not only betray definitional clarity but is also responsible for what officials comprehend as the actual problem of IUEs. The tendency to proceed with the criminalization processes not minding absence of role

clarity presupposes outright dependence and reliance on subjective discretion as a source of direction in governance rather than dependence on spelt out guidelines. The only form of governance which is guaranteed by such dialectic official interpretation is nothing but a 'guess regulation'.

Existing literature shows that there is no universally accepted definition for e-waste (UNEP, 2009; Greenpeace, 2010). The absence of a consensual definition which impedes articulation of e-waste import at the wider levels of regulation also remains a major concern which fosters global inconsistency on the understanding and application of the term "e-waste" in legislation and in everyday use (Lepawski and McNabb, 2010; Borthakur and Singh, 2012; UNEP, 2014; Khan, 2014). A number of countries have come up with various definitions, interpretation and usage of the term "E-waste/WEEE" (Borthakur and Singh, 2012). Definitions which have been advanced by various scholars generally suffer from definitional challenges and conceptual inconsistency (UNEP, 2009; Herat and Paratiamby, 2012; Lepawski and McNabb, 2010; Lepawski and Billah, 2011; SBC, 2011; Khan, 2014). Criticizing these definitions, UNEP (2013) posits that waste electrical electronics could include discarded computers, office electronic equipment, entertainment device electronics, mobile phones, television sets and refrigerators. This definition as they argue includes used electronics which are destined for reuse, resale, salvage, recycling or disposal. Whereas the definition classifies electronics as waste because they are discarded, it clearly ignores the potential for reuse practices in which discarded used electronics now regarded as e-waste enter into.

Another variable that is ignored in this conceptual definition of waste is the social construction of e-waste and its materiality which is also described as the 'socio-materiality' of e-waste (UNEP, 2013). This study argues that meanings ascribed to e-waste by 'latter users' or 'second-party' use should inform what waste or non-waste electronics are. In other words, the role of subjective reuse meanings rather than incomprehensive definitional frameworks should guide the comprehensive conceptualization of what is classified and designated as waste electronics. Critically speaking, it seems rather ironic and somewhat narrow for officials to classify or define an electronics that have been perceived by others as 'reusable, resalable, recyclable' as waste by simply focusing only on its discard as a defining variable. To this end this study argues that the

concept of ‘discard’ is in itself far too insufficient for defining any used electronics as waste. Instead the study argues that subjective interpretations of second-party actors must be incorporated into and must inform the legal-rational definition of waste and non-waste electronics.

The excerpt below from the EU (European Union) (Herat and Paratiamby, 2012:2) further buttresses the ambiguity of defining waste and non-waste electronics. This definition construes e-waste as:

> Electronic equipment which is dependent on electric currents or electromagnetic fields to work properly and equipment for the generation, transfer, and measurement of such currents and field designed for use with a voltage rating not exceeding 1000 volts from alternating current and 1500 volts for direct current….

In this rather generalized definition, one is forced to ask questions such as: what exactly constitutes waste or what element(s) in particular distinguish(es) waste from non-waste electronics? This definition makes it difficult and nearly impossible even at the legal-rational level to clearly identify electronics classified as e-waste. The study therefore proposes that it would be difficult for state governance officials to clearly identify or even distinguish between ‘importable’ and ‘non-importable’ used electronics. This is because even within the Basel Convention, which is arguably the most comprehensive global policy on e-waste (EPA, 2009), legal definitional uncertainties pertaining to waste remain a major source of contention which has orchestrated the evolution of many definitions contained within e-waste regulations, policies and guidelines. Consequently too, diverse interpretations are evolved arbitrarily by various parties to Basel and other stakeholders involved in cross border e-waste transfer (UNEP, 2014).

If international policies as comprehensive as the Basel Convention suffer definitional challenges (Khan, 2014), it follows that low-level regulation against e-waste import will experience an even greater crisis of distinguishing between what is and what is not waste electronics in a developing country like Nigeria. Ultimately, the morality and validity behind the legal-rational governance of used electronics importation is brought to question. A baseline definition or a list of devices is therefore necessary to properly characterize the size and composition of the e-waste universe (EPA, 2009). With a consistent approach to defining e-waste, the information needed to

effectively manage risks from e-waste will be easily identified. What developing countries like Nigeria need most is a labeling and certification system to distinguish between UEEE and e-waste, as well as the human and technological resources to implement such a system efficiently (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2009). This is because the regulatory distinction between waste and non-waste has become a critical determinant of the flow of global UEEE and e-waste stream and the enforcement of legislative policies (Khan, 2014).

Locally, another factor impelling the influx of prohibited non-functional used electronics and the circumvention of legal-rational governance in Nigeria is the low-level construction of them as objects that can be resuscitated. The rationale behind this interpretation is the thinking that the non-functioning used electronics which constitutes a large part of imported electronics are redeemable through the skill and capacity of informally trained technicians present in the market. Whereas 'materiality' (toxicology and obsolescence) informs the legal-rational definition of IUEs, low-level actors –merchants creatively reconstruct materiality (dysfunctionality) in terms of its potential usefulness for Nigerians who are gainfully employed repairing these electronics. Instead of construing their importation as deviance or as a criminal action, merchants preferably redefine the process as an opportunity for livelihood. What issues from the foregoing is a second-level of contradiction between officials and merchants in which merchants provide a counter narrative against the stipulation that only functioning used electronics must be imported. They argue that:

> We bring in non-working without giving them for repairs overseas because the cost of repair is high and because locally we have those who can repair them here. Besides when Nigerians go there they do not decide to buy all working. We buy both working and non-working because we would pay nothing for it (non-working) (IDI/Associational Head of Nigerian used electronics Importers in Lagos/2013).

Another merchant corroborates this when he argues that:

> Every imported used electronics that usually come into this country come as non-tested and non-functional electronics and we give them to our mechanics and engineer who fix them. That name 'tested' (a name for resuscitated/repaired non-functional electronics) actually happens in this market (IDI/IUE TRADER/2013).

In essence, the interpretive attraction to non-functioning IUEs clearly influences merchants, their actions and the social relations they share with state officials. One can also argue that whereas the official e-waste interpretation bearing on materiality orchestrates a 'supposedly' strict governance outlook on e-waste importation as the officials claim, the reconstruction of this materiality vis-à-vis its economic functionality encourages the circumvention of governance while official perceptions of illegal importation informs the criminalization of 'e-waste' importers, circumvention of laws hinged on the converse local reconstruction of 'e-waste' sustained by local meanings intensifies prevailing contradictions on waste or non-waste interpretations. The prevailing contradiction reveals that non-functional used electronics (e-waste) on the one hand is anti-developmental from the official perspective and developmental on the other among merchants and technicians. The acknowledgement that the majority of what is imported comprise of 'non-functional' electronics, and the fact that "we pay nothing for it" suggest that Nigerians –importers help the West to evacuate their waste free of charge. It also buttresses earlier positions that in reality illegal e-waste flow persists (See UNEP, 2013 and Khan, 2014). The same view also lines up with the view that only 25 percent of used electronics being transferred to developing from developed countries are in good working conditions while about 75 percent of them are non-working and irreparable junks which enlarge and swell the prevailing municipal and solid waste stream (Schmidt and Jeffries, 2006). The position that growing capitalist dumping of e-waste in poor Global South by countries of the rich Global North continues in the guise of 'donor missions' and 'bridging digital divide' is also buttressed thus (Jeffries, 2006, Schmidt, 2006, Puckett et al, 2002).

Data further reveal that the repairable construction also facilitates a local perception of non-functioning IUEs as a medium of poverty alleviation. In this case, meanings assigned to non-functionality connect IUE importation to the economic salvation of the unemployed through practices that make the electronics work. An official of the market buttresses this reality saying:

> Here, in this market we have over five (5) thousand people who are feeding on imported used electronics that are brought in originally as 'non-functional' electronics. This market is really large market (IDI/Market Official/2013).

The perceived economic possibilities connected with the importation prohibited electronics encourage a normalized disposition towards circumvention and leads merchants to view with pessimism legal-rational officials. To this end, an importer argues that:

> They (officials) cannot state that every imported used electronics being brought into Nigeria must all be in perfectly working condition or state. If you do, most of those boys involved in fixing non-functioning electronic that come in will lose their jobs (IDI/Importer/2013).

The economically functional low-level construction of non-working IUEs –'e-waste' and the consequent critical outlook of merchants towards legal-rational governance inform the local designation of legal rational governance as premature as explained below:

> Owing to the situation of poverty which is resolved when importers bring in non-working used electronics, I feel that Nigeria is not yet ripe for this level of environmental awareness. And even if they (government) want us instantly to attain that height, it cannot just be sudden. We cannot be at that stage now. The process really needs to be gradual and it should possess an element of human face in it. If it is done this way, we will definitely ensure to make the scheme work. But it cannot just be a draconian scheme whereby you will throw reason and caution to the wind and you completely lose sense of logic just as we now have it. I do not think it is going to work, I do not really think this law is going to work. No! (KII/Market Official/2013).

Merchants in the above responses affirm the positive construction of non-functionality as being emancipatory and this notion remains at the very heart of local circumvention of governance. In reconstructing officially disparaged non-functional IUEs (e-wastes) away from its negatively perceived materiality -'non-functionality', the position of merchants substantiates what UNEP (2013) has coined as the 'socio-materiality' of e-waste. Notwithstanding that merchants have positive and glowing perception of non-functionality, it must be mentioned that this perception does not necessarily nullify the potential and actual 'toxicological' tendency for these electronics to be humanly and environmentally hazardous as officials propose. It only establishes that merchants have a tendency to be exclusive and unidirectional in their interpretation of non-functionality. It also presents them as actors who look with sheer indifference at the costs – potential and actual evils of prohibited electronics as portrayed by officials and as reported in e-waste literature and research (O'Brien, 2010; Jeffries, 2006; Schmidt, 2006).It can be argued that insofar as poverty amelioration is ensured through importation, official worries about non-functionality remains a secondary concern for merchants. In a larger sense, the materiality premise informing the proposition of an existing throwaway society is brought to question.

Another visible perception betrayed in the narratives of merchants is an indirect denunciation and portrayal of the legal-rational agents as being too extreme in their official roles in governance. Hence, state officials are viewed not as the respectable face of the government, but as obstruction to the attempts of Nigerians involved, to survive. Merchants, by the same means, express and exhibit higher obligation towards prevailing situations of poverty among Nigerians than they express towards legal-rational governance. They also view officials as agents who have a price, and can be bought over.

The interpretive body language evinced in hitherto responses also unveils a differential of meanings and distance between the official and the low-level perception non-functional IUEs. In this differential, merchants remain ill-disposed towards the state. Consequently they portray them as being "premature, draconian and insensitive" to the situation of large proportions - "over five thousand people who are feeding on non-functional electronics". It is to this end that merchants castigate the legal-rational official governance and the potential success of their activities in the excerpt below:

> Frankly speaking, I consider the creation of NESREA a mistake by the federal government of Nigeria. This is because prior to the establishment of any regulation, a government needs to meet the people dealing directly with these so called harmful goods. They are supposed to seek the opinion of the grassroots people concerned. From the beginning you have to meet them because it is through them that you know all there is about the business (IDI/Importer/2013).

In yet another response, merchants present the noticeable indifference of officials to local reliance on the blessings of non-functionality (e-wastes) as an excuse for non-compliance with state regulation:

> Yes we want to respect the law but the problem is that anyone with access to power in Nigeria always gets intoxicated with these powers, becomes overzealous and goes extra miles to do what even Europeans manufacturing and using these things do not do. They go for workshops over there in Europe and quickly forget that someone trained them. So when they return they act even contrary to what is acceptable over there. They claim to know more than the Oyinbos (the white man) or Europeans. For instance in Europe, there are items called refurbished items that are allowed but Nigerian regulatory agency says no, that they want only functional electronics. The moment there is false alarm from their overseas partners as we had recently with one of our colleagues, NESREA does not want to know. Even when we offload all those

> electronics after scanning they still persist that they contain toxic and hazardous wastes. In this their overzealousness they are completely inhuman. In fact I do not want to talk about them (IDI/Importer/ 2013).

The initial response indicates a feeling of exclusion from e-waste policy design. It indicates that merchants feel completely marginalized and distanced from the policy process. In essence , the narrative reproaches NESREA for being a form of governance that is disconnected from the low-level actors, and that pays little or no attention at all to the realities of the poor. It indicates that subjective local meanings of social development are hardly factored into the legal-rationally defined development. In the same process, officials are seen as rather indifferent to the employment opportunities and economic benefits which 'e-wastes' present to Nigerians involved in consumption and merchandise of electronics. The discordant local perceptions reveal an existing gap between 'materiality' conception of IUEs as 'e-waste' among officials and the 'socio-material' economic interpretations of them among merchants -the supposed target audience of import policy.

In the succeeding response, another level of pessimism expressed towards governance hinges on the local perception that officials are rather too zealous and far too extreme in playing their regulatory roles. To this end, officials are seen as 'obsessive' and as 'power-intoxicated' in a manner that overlooks the delicate needs of Nigerians involved in the merchandise of non-functional IUEs (e-wastes). To a large extent, the role of officials is construed as somewhat extra-judicial.

Considering that 'non-functional' electronics are 'materially' designated in research and literature as 'e-wastes' (Robinson, 2009; O'Brien, 2010; Herat and Paratiamby, 2012), and given that such electronics are classified as potential carriers of toxicology (Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2007), one can argue that local interpretations or 'socio-material' reconstruction of the 'non-functionality' of IUEs represent 'techniques of neutralization'. These techniques range from the reconstruction of non-functional materiality of IUEs to be a blessing rather than a curse as they can be repaired and they serve as a means of livelihood for some. If indeed non-functionality officially designates imported electronics as being 'evil' on the basis of their potential toxic and obsolescing materiality, its acceptance by merchants as economically beneficial indicates

nothing but a re-interpretation of non-functionality as a none evil or even as the 'less of two evils'. The higher evil on the one hand, is the option of adhering to official state stipulations and the choice to accept poverty and unemployment as a way of life. The lower evil on the other hand is the acceptance of both functional and non-functional IUEs as mediums for reducing or eliminating suffering among the unemployed in Nigeria. This way, the potential and actual problems of 'e-waste' are craftily downplayed in the problems attached to poverty and unemployment among Nigerians.

The next technique of neutralization that can be inferred from the afore presented data is the tendency to reproach and discredit legal-rational governance as a framework for constituting an impediment to the beneficial economic and business interests accrued by merchants from the importation of non-functional IUEs. The framework for governing importation of IUEs is in this case portrayed as being disconnected from the very reality of Nigerians –merchants and repairers whose livelihood and survival are tied to both the 'functionality' and the 'non-functionality' of IUEs.

The third technique of neutralization is expressed in form of 'condemnation of condemners'. The 'condemnation of condemners' unfolds within the narratives of merchants who customarily blame to officials as the 'key problems', or as 'part of' the problems of used electronics importation. Whereas 'reproaching the legislative framework of governance' represents an indirect criticism of officials, the 'condemnation of condemners' represents a more direct criticism of the officials themselves by merchants. 'Condemning condemners' also affirms that merchants would prefer only to see the positive rather than the negative dimensions of waste electronics importation. The tendency to apportion blame to others by 'condemning condemners' represents a standoffish stance to the problems generally associated with the importation of used electronics. In essence, merchants, through the neutralization techniques, creatively cushion the magnitude of the supposed evils present in 'e-waste' (imported non-functional used electronics). In a larger sense, the condemnation of condemners generally leads to nothing but the definition of officials as weak actors owing to their tendency to be corrupt; the negative presentation of officials as people who are insensitive to 'the grass root reality' and local situations of the people. The tendency of officials to criminalize importers based on material construction of IUEs

and the opposite tendency of merchants to portray officials negatively based on socio-material interpretations of IUEs as sources of economic salvation represent a dialectics and contradiction between policy itself and the its target audience as discussed earlier.

4.2 Social Relations of Consumers' Demand

The consumer culture research identifies acquisition, consumption and possession as major marketplace practices and presents three levels of analysis namely macro, meso and micro (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Stobart and Vane Damme, 2010). In this section, the study unveils the micro dynamics of imported used electronics consumption within the larger social organization of merchandise which continually ensures the influx of these electronics into Nigeria and their marketability and usage within the country. Among consumers, IUEs assume dynamic and peculiar local reuse values and meanings. These subjective valuation and meanings behind demand consequently affect subjective consumer construction of IUEs as anything but waste, their construction of the socially significant self vis-à-vis others and their enactment of social relations with sellers.

In the previous section, the merchandise and consumption of Imported Used Electronics are seen as unhealthy because of 'material' legal-rational (obsolescing and toxicological) construction(s) of them (Robinson, 2009; Osibanjo and Nnorom, 2009; O'Brien, 2010; Cooper, 2012). Conversely, within Nigeria, consumers do not regard them as e-wastes but as 'reusable' and 'consumable' second-hand electronics possessing further utility value. From the name often used among Nigerians to capture IUEs, *Tokunbo*, meaning 'from across the sea, *imported goods* become symbolic of a deep social appreciation and affection for *foreign used* objects, and invariably too, of their deep aversion for *locally used* items. This colonial mentality esteems foreign used items higher than the locally used ones. The constructed local value for imported second-hand objects as superior products has therefore informed their importation into Nigeria, a developing country (Omobowale, 2013). In the interviews held with interviews –consumers of IUE on the nature of consumer demand, particularly for IUE phone, we got this response:

> Customers usually ask for phones that are currently in vogue. Some ask for I phone 4x, Black berry curve, Black Berry Bold, Black Berry tour. Sometimes it depends on taste and choice of customers. Some even come around to ask for all these China phones. It also depends on personal differences of ones

> customers too. For me, I prefer buying Nokia series, because no matter how much, I have, people will always ask for Nokia products and they end up buying them all. I prefer them to Blackberry which always develops problems of indemnity and other issues of complaints from customers Mostly; girls love the Nokia Asha series. They often request for Asha 200, Asha 301 and others. They love it because of its qwerty keypad buttons and some of the applications that come with it (IDI/IUE Phone seller/2013).

A key informant, importer, buttresses the subjective of meanings attached to the functionality of IUEs across different brands as he argues that:

> People like LG, people like Samsung, people like Panasonic, people like Philips, they like JVC, people like Toshiba, people like Sonny, Sharp. And then appearance also matters to consumers. They request for flat screen LCDs because the flat screen looks more beautiful and is more attractive than the previous box TVs. Most people prefer Ash or shining black colors to any other colors (KII/Importer/2013).

Despite that, the purchase of IUEs may not present the buyer with the option of warranty, consumers still repose extensive confidence in the functionality by construing them as *tokunbo,* which symbolizes local social appreciation for these electronics. To this end, buyers even prefer the *tokunbo* brands to the perceived inferior brand-new electronics that are imported from places like Asia into developing countries like Nigeria. Such preference is predicted on the explanation that:

> *Tokunbo* as we all know works better than new electronics. These IUEs they bring as we know have already been used, but brand new (Asian) electronics have several fake ones out there. That is why I prefer *tokunbo* to brand new ones. For instance, when you buy a brand new electronics today, you would ask for guarantee, but when you buy *tokunbo* even you would know that *tokunbo* items often last longer and have much durability than brand new ones (IDI/IUE consumer/2013).

In the foregoing explanations, functionality remains a fundamental object of meanings and interpretations which consumers attach to the demand for IUEs. This same evaluation of imported '*used'* encourages consumers to make request for assorted brands of electronics including those brands that are relatively recent in the global market of the '*new'* unconscious of the fact that *used* electronics, owing to their relatively older history of production, use and transfer, bear older brand names. In essence, even when imported *used* do not naturally share common attributes (brand name) with *new* electronics, consumers still go ahead nevertheless to

demand for brand features of the *new* in the IUE market of the *used.* This consumer demand behavior is occasioned by the local appreciations which consumers attach to the functionality of IUEs. Such unwavering affection towards IUEs only strengthens more, the local adoration for the imported foreign (*tokunbo) used* goods as opposed to the so-called brand new one which customarily come into Nigeria from Asia. This view is indicative of the position of Omobowale (2012, 2013a&b) who posits that reuse value based on local social appreciation for IUEs remains a central factor behind local consumer demands even in Nigeria. It can be argued that in itself, the term *tokunbo* as symbolism of local social appreciation of IUEs among consumers depicts a reconstruction of IUEs away from their 'materiality' construction by legal-rational officials as wastes. Contextually the adoption of *tokunbo* as a subjective domestication of the foreign used electronics by consumers buttresses the tendency for *cultural resilience* (Jackson, 2004) even in the face of supposed homogenizing powers of globalization. This subjective locally assigned symbolism indicates that in Nigeria, local cultural processes are essential not only in social relations between actors but also in consumer - object relations and in this case, imported used electronics.

Further findings reveal that the construction of IUEs as durable goods possessing naturally long lives also influences consumer demand for them in Nigeria. Similar to the position of earlier interviews, some participants also argue that durability like functionality can also depend on or be classified in terms of the regions from which the IUEs originate. Hence, the view below establishes that consumers generally adduce durability to used electronics that originate from places like Western Europe and North America but scorn those originating from Asia. This is because Asia has creatively evolved a system of non-uniform production which the quality of goods produced for developed countries vary from those produced in developing ones. A seller sheds light on this preference by stating thus:

> Consumers patronize imported used electronics because they need them and because those coming from places like Europe have stronger and more durable lives. Unlike those often made in China and which are often produced for Africans, those made under European standards are often more rugged. When compared with the brand new phones, from Asia, the standard of the imported used one is usually very high (KII/ Ikeja Phone seller /2013).

Another interviewee sheds further light on durability of IUEs as he argues that:

> They are stronger, more durable and are more rugged than the brand new ones coming from Asia. You can use *tokunbos* (IUEs) for as long as seven to eight years, but a brand new one may not even last for a year (IDI/ Bulk IUE Consumer/ 2013).

While disdaining Asian brand new electronics, buyers have high regard for everything produced in the West, even if such electronics are already used products back in the West. The following response in fact lets us in on that:

> The truth is that brand new electronic items of nowadays are gradually diminishing in quality and you cannot compare them with those that have been made before. The *tokunbos* have a superior quality and that makes their parts continuously useful and impossible to just throw away. The cover of a CD player for instance may become a waste if it is broken but not the engines; parts of the engine can still be useful for something with time (IDI/ IUE Consumer/2103).

The preference has a lot to do with product quality and the regard for anything Western. This is therefore responsible for the success of the local markets of IUEs. A respondent's notion aptly captures this.

> Among consumers there is the mentality that anything made for the utilization of the white man is more superior to the one intended for the African market. And that notion is still very much around us and they believe that over there in Europe they have a working standard (KII/ associational Head/2013).

Interviews further show that the meanings of durability and functionality attached to IUEs also noticeably manifest and shape consumer behavior towards the *new* and the *used* electronics as explained below:

> Because most of our people here believe that second-hand is more superior to what is obtainable as the new one, it turns out that electronics, which come in as tokunbo (imported second-hand) as fairly used computers, move faster in the market. They generally enjoy more patronage and are therefore sold out on time. This means that sellers of 'tokunbo' make more money than sellers of brand new electronics. So it is difficult and hardly possible to undermine the stuff called tokunbo (IDI/ Seller/ 2013).

Also, another interviewee elaborates on how meanings attached to IUEs impact consumer behavior thus:

> When you bring in containers of brand new electronics you find out that nobody comes to you… But when you have a container of second-hand

> electronics, you see people crowding around. You will see people queuing up to make requests for the popular second-hand electronics. In making this demand they sometimes even engage in serious struggle that result in fighting. All of these happen in consumer attempts to register their requests (IDI/ IUE Market Official/2013).

Still another interviewee said:

> Quite apart from those buying within the market, we also have people coming from other West African countries. And that is why this place is called an international market; people also come from different parts of Nigeria to buy. Customers come from Benin, Osun, Ibadan, Onitcha, Aba, Portharcourt and other places. They call and send money into my account and their boys come to pick them up. In fact what we bring in never lapse and are not enough for the buyers (IDI/Importer/2013).

The consumer notions that 'ruggedness' is associable with durability portrays IUEs as goods having qualities such as resilience and toughness –qualities which can hardly diminish even in the face of potential and actual rigorous use. Contextually, consumers creatively assign valuable meanings to IUEs, and these meanings in turn accord IUEs with further utility despite the end of their initial use values with initial or even 'second-hand' users. In essence, what guarantees the continuous utility of *tokunbo* electronics is not how they were used prior to entry into second-hand but the very qualities they are originally made of. Consumers reveal that like functionality, durability is also geographic in its origin. While quality is arrogated to IUEs from Europe and America, products from Asia are disparaged as having inferior quality. Hence, consumers rely heavily on the IUE market and the activities of importers and retailers to have their subjectively constructed needs met.

As the initial interviews show this reliance is itself marked largely by the evident consumer rush towards the imported *used* more than the *new* electronics. The rush is an action that is motivated by consumer social appreciations for the symbolism of functionality and durability which these *foreign used* electronics represent for them. In essence, meanings–*tokunbo* being attached to these goods is significant in shaping the forms in which consumer actions are expressed. As Crewe et al (2003) argue it is evident that the valuation or devaluation of objects or goods relates to a complex instrumentality of the functional and aesthetic qualities of the good in question. The value of a good is shaped not only by the material (as throwaway and end-of-life debates argue)

but also by the interpretive immaterial qualities of such a good within consumer social relations. The willingness on the part of some consumers to journey as far as Lagos to purchase IUEs also buttresses the impact of the meanings attached to them, the same as the tendency to *crowd around* and to *queue up* during purchase. The implication of consumer appreciation and significance attached to IUEs is that importers and retailers of the *used electronics* stand a better chance of trading out their merchandise earlier than their counterparts involved in retailing brand *new* electronics which buyers have little or no flare for.

Noteworthy to mention is that, the transfer of a good from developed to developing regions like Nigeria, may not necessarily imply that such a good had being used before. To this end, Stobart and Van Damme (2010) argue that the designation -second-hand only describes a relation between the goods, the distributor and the consumer, and these may or may not have anything to do with the condition or use of the object itself. The conception of 'second-hand' exclusively as the flow of goods and the functioning and structure of the market by Crewe, Gregson and Brook (2003) also supports the forgoing position. They argue that, an object becomes 'second-hand only when it has changed hands between distributor and consumer more than once, regardless of its state and age. Hence, many second-hand shops tend to sell obviously new items, sometimes in their original packaging, thus providing an outlet for misdirected purchases, unwanted birthday presents and so on (Crewe, Gregson and Metcalf, 2009). Consequently, this study argues that the social appreciation of and quality of superiority which consumers attach to the functionality and durability can also be linked with the sometimes peculiar history and biography of these goods in their countries of initial use.

One can also argue that ongoing derogation of *used* electronics merchandise from Asia as the inferior quality and the eulogy of *used* electronics from Europe and America presuppose that second-hand merchandise is potential site for understanding further other dimensions of the international economic dynamics between second-hand retail and consumption actors. On the one hand, findings of this study reveal the variance in quality of Asian production for consumer economies of developed countries (Western Europe and North America) and those of developing countries in Africa, and in particular Nigeria. This reflects particularly in the varying qualities of electronics they produce and transfer to these regions. Asymmetric environmental standards in

which stricter control regimes legally disfavor and stigmatize reuse and importation of *used* or *inferior* goods characterized by (obsolescing) quality (Kumar, 2001; Clerides and Hadjiyiamis, 2007) remains a major factor behind such unequal socio-economic relations. In effect, the less strict environmental standards and more liberal economies of developing countries permit but also encourage the entry of inferior *new* goods into Nigeria from developing Asia and the developed West.

On the other hand, while derogatory international Asian retailing of the *new* prevails, findings of this study reveal that subjective consumer meanings in recipient regions of developing countries express nothing but local appreciation for the European and American used superior electronics quality through the *tokunbo* symbolism (Also see Omobowale, 2013a), while at the same time expressing stark aversion for the Asian *new* but inferior quality electronics. As earlier interviews have shown, perception of functionality and durability remain two key variables in the consumer meanings for IUEs which substantiate what Omobowale (2009, 2013a&b) had identified as 'reuse *value'.* This study therefore argues that consumer demand for IUEs is sustained largely by the nature of consumer meanings attached to them and the variable reuse values which they forge from and derive from them. Theoretically it can also be argued that whereas IUEs have been supposedly discarded or thrownaway (See Grower 2010) in developed countries of Europe and America, the subjective local reinterpretation of these same goods as reusable and as appreciated –*tokunbo,* encourages their transformation from being wastes into consumables yet again. In essence, it is implicit as argued in the earlier section that discard by initial users remains an insufficient premise for designating a good with the tag end-of-life or for positing that a throwaway society exists due to product or technological obsolescence as some scholars have argued (See for instance Kumar, 2001, Pelletiere and Reinert, 2004, Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2007)

Dominant attention in literature stresses the macro 'push' and 'pull' factors driving international second-hand retail. These factors include 'international trade liberalization' (Thomas, 2003), strict environmental regimes and labor scarcity in developed nations (Pelletiere and Reinert, 2006), discard by initial users (Grower, 2010), technological and product obsolescence in developed economies (Kumar, 2001). Findings of this study reveal that micro-factors such as interpretive and symbolic consumer interpretations and meanings also shape the social relations

remain significant pull factors in recipient consumer economies of developing African countries like Nigeria. The symbolic local attachments of significance to the functionality and durability of these electronics reveal that this interpretive 'pull factors' driving international second-hand trading of goods –IUEs are empirical.

Further interviews reveal that meanings attached to the functionality of IUEs, and in this case smart phones also contribute to the 'construction of the elite self'. The special relations created for and around consumption of used electronics substantiate the view of Arnold and Thompson (2005) that 'identity-projection' is central to consumer culture. The emphases in the relations are on consumers' perception of the self, which invariably enhances the attributes of IUEs, and of the phones in particular. The consumers' self-perception are determined from 'what is in vogue' like Blackberry phones that can be associated with them and the dexterity in the interaction with device and computers'. In other words, the self is construed in terms of the elegance of what people have and the rarity and the trendiness of the device being purchased. An IUE merchant, who has had considerable interaction with consumers, sheds light on the various 'functionality' markers in social relations of consumption:

> People usually patronize blackberry, Nokia and Samsung phones. Sometimes they request for blackberry Curve 2, curve 3, Bold 2, Bold 5. They buy them because some of them are Simbian phones; some have java phones depending on what they want. They love phones that enable downloads of applications or that can work with computers. They want phones that can browse or they can use to ping. Phones like blackberry can also be upgraded, like curve 2 can be upgraded to curve 3 (KII/Seller/2013).

Another buyer links acquisition of IUEs with potential to connect the self to the global through its browsing ability by noting that:

> Although some buy phones for games and others, for me I buy tokunbo (foreign imported) phones because of its browsing ability. And this is mostly for the sake of being in touch with what is going on. Once you are online nothing good passes you by. Through being online you have right connections that will lead you to where you are going and where you want to be (IDI/Phone Buyer Market/2013).

Still another interview highlights on the browsing potentiality of second-hand smart phones to aid the link between the self-and the virtual global system by noting that:

> I am attracted to phones that browse. I am always online; I do not really lose out because I do a kind of following up online, both in terms of business, entertainment and the like. It keeps you enlightened. When you are confused about something you can easily go to search through your Google. So it keeps you going in terms of knowledge. You know we learn everyday (IDI/Phone Buyer Market/2013).

Considering that smart phones enable the connection of the self with the global as the above interview shows, another buyer notes that:

> Phones serve as an attachment to your life and it does not really matter what kind of phone you buy (whether tokunbo or not). Some use the phone internet browser even while they are sleeping they leave it on (IDI/Tokunbo, Phone Buyer/2013).

Yet another respondent portrays acquisition of the smart phone as a medium that enables the social construction of the self vis-à-vis others by saying:

> If you are using a Nokia torch light and you went to party with many people snapping pictures with their camera phones. You will be ashamed to bring out your phone to even snap someone because the phone is small. But with *tokunbo* you can buy a Lumia and blackberry. You know when we ladies are out on parties, you hear things like *the moment that lady brought out her phone … You needed to see…* (IDI/ IUE/ Consumer/2014).

In the above interviews acquisition of IUEs, particularly smart phones creatively enable construction of the self through diverse ways. Considering that 'acquisition' is cardinal to consumer culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), interviews reveal that buyers interpretively interlock the self-image with the values and meanings they attach to imported *used* goods –smart phones. What results is a level of social relations between the object-relational construction of self in terms of the perceived functions of the object and its ability to link one with modernity. A major aspect of functionality which consumers harness in enhancing the self through the process of consumption is the *browsing potentiality* of the smart phone. The ability of a *used* phone to browse is framed as an advantage for those who are unable to acquire the *new* smart phones. This *potentiality* of the phone also means that however competitive, it may seem to access information for self-development in modern times due to the costliness of *new* phones, the availability of *used* phones provide everyone (including those unable to afford brand new smart phones) without exclusion with similar if not the same benefits -opportunities.

The perception of the self in terms of the functionality of the *used* smart phone also presupposes that the buyer has an impression of a complete self, one who does not miss 'opportunities', one who is current and up to date, one who 'becomes enlightened' and one who does not miss out from anything 'good' currently going on across the globe. By and large all of these constructed images of the self are erected on and associable with the functionality –browsing potentiality of the *used* smart phone. Evidently too, the meanings associated with the self also informs what consumers look out for in the range of smart phones they go for when it comes to purchase. Indeed, an IUE might have been *used* by a previous owner, but its reuse value ensured by its significantly perceived variable functionality presupposes that its acquisition enhances the developmental construction of the self. To subjectively construct the self through objects and to socially relate with others by the same token, evinced in the foregoing is indicative of the Weberian action thesis that action can exist in two forms: 'mere action' and 'social action'. Whereas 'mere action' depicts 'human action oriented towards ordinary objects', 'social action' indicates 'action meaningfully oriented in its course form one acting individual to another' (Thompson and Tunstall, 1976).

Interviews also reveal the tendency of buyers to utilize IUE consumption as an avenue for reconstructing the self based on personally perceived gap between the self and others. Hence, the purchase of the *used* electronics smart phones serves as an avenue for projective equalization of the self with others using *new* electronics. This is buttressed by the fact that 'using a *Nokia torch light*' –connoting inferior self-conception generates for its user uneasy feelings when in the presence of users of *new* camera phones. The availability of cheaper *tokunbo* which enables a user of 'torch light' phone to also purchase and use a *camera* phone leads consumers to see IUE consumption as a means for melting the perceived social differential between the self and users of *new.* In essence, the buyer construes consumption of the *used* as a 'route out of shame' and an entry medium into a more secure socially constructed self'. Hence the shame of bringing out a torch light phone in the face of a user of *new Lumia* is averted and erased by purchase of the *tokunbo* –imported phone. Consumer construction of the self in IUE consumption corroborates the view that creative consumer object relations can enhance consumers hope for self-alteration (Jackson, 2004). It shows that consumption can symbolize an attempt to escape undesirable self and to strive towards a more desirable self (Therkelsen and Gram's, 2008:274). Besides carrying

symbolic content, consumer meanings for IUEs reveal in line with Setiffi (2011) that goods are capable of creating a shared social reality through their use and rituals of consumption. Hence, objects are consumed not just as things for what they do but also because they are communicative mirrors of the self (Bonsu and Spence. 2008). Accordingly, consumption may not only rest on the use value of things but also on:

> But on creating meaning for identity enactments and other life projects towards expressing both difference and affinity. These processes ensue within 'aestheticization of objects'. Therefore we perceive consumer culture as a system of signs and symbols that facilitate communication of meanings, whereby an object's value resides not in its characteristics but in the meanings that it communicates. Therefore consumption is an effortful accomplishment that is underdetermined by the characteristics of the object… Consuming practices…allow for fashioning or refining individual identities as well as for clarifying and building connections with others (Bonsu and Spence, 2008:696-697).

In previous studies consumption was seen as a site for status search, expression, maintenance and reproduction of social difference with others (Bowe et al, 1994) and for 'identity-projection', 'breaking away' or social relational self-distancing from others (Rook, 1985). Findings of this study identify with previous views that marketplace rituals of consumption can be avenues for social relations of "identification" and "affiliation with others" not just means of "differentiation" from them (Therkelsen and Gram, 2008). Findings of this study question initial views designating consumption (*used* electronics) as unsustainable practices (Evans, 2012) based on the presupposition that *used* electronics are wastes electronics (Herat and Paratiamby, 2012). They affirm that consumers have freedom to formulate their own identity (Warde, 1997) as autonomous agents of being (Sherry and Sternal, 1992) through 'improvisional practices' in the marketplace (Tumbat and Markus, 2007).

This study also identifies the perceived 'repair potentiality' of IUEs as a factor influencing and shaping social relations of consumer demand in the market. Accordingly, even when *used* electronics being imported function only in part, consumers owing to local social esteem and appreciation of these IUEs as *–tokunbo* still proceed nonetheless to purchase them. Rather than derogating them as dysfunctional or non-usable, consumers preferably still accept them as potentially functional subject to repair by repairers available in the market for this purpose.

Consumers even go further to present perceived 'repair potentiality' as part of their rationale for purchasing IUEs. Some supporting interviews are presented below:

> I prefer imported used electronics to brand new ones because the advantage of repairing imported used electronics is higher. They are more repairable than new ones. There are some certain parts that get spoilt in brand new ones that may be difficult for technicians to repair, but when it comes to imported used electronics, they can always be repaired (IDI/Imported Used Electronics Buyer/2013).

Another buyer argues that:

> I love tokunbo electronics because they are assessable and you can easily repair them when they are faulty (IDI/Buyer/2014).

Still another buyer notes that:

> Tokunbo used electronics are more convertible. For instance when spoilt, their sound IC can always be easily converted by technicians. However, when brand new ones get spoilt, you may have to buy another brand new electronics (IDI/Buyer/2013).

In these interviews it is evident that local social appreciation towards IUEs is fixed and unchanging even in the face of potential material attributes that disproof perceived 'functionality' quality being ascribed to IUEs. These narratives also presuppose that even when they creep into dysfunctionality of a kind, they would automatically become wastes instead their some of their parts can still be reused to later replace non-functioning parts of any other electronics. This subjective reuse value presupposes that IUE are characteristically easy to maintain through the help of repairers present in the market. Given their significance in assisting consumers to achieve realize their flattering images and construction of IUEs meanings through the resuscitation of seemingly nonfunctioning IUEs back to life. And given that they consequently render such initially non-working IUEs to become tradable, this study operationally constructs repairers as *merchantabilisers.*

A critical point in buying the *used* electronics in the above interviews is that they are repairable. The technology can be handled by local technicians. As opposed to the supposedly *new* ones, the parts of the *used* are available and can be fixed correctly. Indeed, they are configurable or 'remanufacturable'. While non-functionality represents weakness and a counterpoint to the initial values of functionality and durability assigned by consumers to IUEs, the explanations above show that these consumer meanings of appreciation are powerful enough to sustain the interest of

the buyer in these goods without accepting possible faults present in them. In patronizing *merchantabilisers,* interviews show that consumer meanings for the repairability of IUEs instrumental in the social relations forged in the market, and in this case relations with *merchantabilisers*. Implicit in the foregoing also is that the symbolism of *tokunbo* retains a much sustained relevance in the overall social relations of IUE merchandise. The tendency to affectionately romanticize IUEs despite its occasional need for repairs simply because they are 'European or American-used' –*tokunbo* readily shows that the quality symbol of IUEs may necessarily be an objective property of the goods but a subjective assignment of consumers on them as Woodward (2011) shows.

The discovery that repairers and in this case *merchantabilisers* are central to consumer demand and thus too the wider importation and merchandise of IUEs is also substantiated in extant literature. Pelletiere and Reinert (2006) argue for instance that a key factor sustaining the dynamics in the international second-hand merchandise is the repair labor-deficit of developed countries that especially gain and benefit from *used goods* or second-hand trade to labor-abundant developing countries in which the available repair labor is also very cheap. However beneficial second-hand trade gains may be to recipient developing nations, such benefits remain marginal to the gains accruing to exporting countries when compared to environmental standard and protection imbalance between the developed and developing world. The imbalance notwithstanding others argue by and large that second-hand retail if mostly economically and technologically beneficial to people in lesser standard developing countries (Oteng-Ababio, 2012, Stobart and Van Damme, 2010)

Another important dimension of IUE consumption is the manner in which consumer meanings for IUEs shape the nature and style of social relations between them and merchants. Besides the social appreciation and esteem which consumers commonly associate with the functionality and durability of IUEs based on the symbolism of *tokunbo,* they also tend to attach meanings and values of *newness* to the *used* when requesting for IUE brands from sellers. However, because *used* goods have relatively older production lives, and hence too older brand labels, second-hand retail studies argue that marked difference exists in the brand distribution of (*used)* goods as opposed to the *new* goods (Wiseman, 1979). To this end it is easier to find *used goods*

circulating in relatively older brand labels rather than in the relatively latter or new production brands. Yet due to meanings of elegance and esteem being attached to IUEs, consumers proceed to request for *new* brand products when buying otherwise *used* goods from merchants. As explained below they would often demand for brands like LG among others when buying IUEs:

> When customers come they usually ask for LG, Sharp Panasonic, Akira and they even ask me if I have used sharp and LG before (IDI/IUE SELLER/2013).

In this unconscious interpretive equation of Imported *used* with *new* electronics, a eulogized impression is presented to sellers by buyers of IUEs. Interviews reveal that merchants in turn leverage on these affectionate perceptions of IUE brands to socially relate with consumers making such requests. Rather than intimate them on the brand differential dynamics, sellers engage in what this study describes as 'brand-simulation' or 'simulate-branding'. Simulate-branding as some sellers note, also entails some characteristic procedures or rites. Supporting interviews are presented below on the wily enactment of 'simulate-branding' through associated practices:

> For instance sellers have come to realize that Nigerians love LG. But since most Used electronics do not come as LG, sellers remove the original stickers and replace them with that of LG even when in actuality, that product may not be LG. Sometimes it may be SAMSUNG. If people keep asking for SAMSUNG and a seller realizes he has a non-SAMSUNG product which people fail to buy, he goes to buy the SAMSUNG sticker, it is just N50 NAIRA and they sell it over there. And you know it will look very much like SAMSUNG (IDI/Seller/2014).

Another seller elaborates on the intrinsic methods involved in simulate-branding:

> When customers come they always ask for different kinds of electronics and sometimes we do not have them. But what happens is that there are some guys who sell all these logo at just N50. All you need to do is to tell your customer you are coming, you buy that particular one they are asking for, and you fix it (IDI/seller/2013)**.**

A buyer of IUE corroborates the practice of 'simulate branding' and its customariness for second-hand retail in general as he argues that:

> Not all so-called brand new LGs all come from abroad, we often go to places like Aba and we see for instance how Igbo boys improvise. You know well that something is 'Igbo made' yet they brand them with 'made in China' or 'made in Japan' labels (IDI/Bulk Buyer/ 2013).

The preceding discourse reveals that consumer meanings tend to extremely flatter and hence too, trans-construct these objects to even become what they really are not. This affectionate outlook reflects as a continuum of their positive social outlook towards the *repair potentiality* of IUEs in the earlier discourse. This tendency is clearly catalytic to the social relations of transactions which consequently ensues between them and sellers. In their profit conscious reinterpretations, sellers view consumer request not as naivety that requires clarification but as an opportunity to invent the non-existing brands so as to promote their merchandise. In choosing to invent and to thus fit the available IUEs to the desirable but non-existing brands of buyers, sellers enter into yet another level of social relations with sellers and manufacturers of brand logos. In essence, the practice of reworking the brand logo or label of an imported used electronics represents not only an attempt to meet up with consumer demands for IUEs but also a cunning exploitation of consumer flattered and uncritical meanings towards IUEs. Sellers involved in this practice only stylishly delay the unsuspecting consumer by asking them to hold on for the requested brand, during which time they withdraw, rework brands through the help of 'brand manufacturers', and thereafter simulate brands for IUEs. In-depth interviews reveal that in the hand of 'brand-manufacturers' these new brands only cost ₦50 Naira, and are carefully reworked upon payment by sellers.

As a social relational practice 'simulate-branding' has several embedded but symbolic significance. Among sellers, simulate-branding for instance represents 'erasure of scarcity. In other words, with the possibility to invent consumer requested brands, a merchant involved in this practice only needs to excuse himself to remanufacture the available to match favorably with the consumer request. Consequently the seller creates a false impression to the buyer that particular goods exist when indeed they do not, thus erasing lack or the unavailability such brands. For the seller of IUEs, involvement in simulate-branding simply implies that uninhibited retailing of available goods is assured irrespective of the popularity or non-popularity of brands in stock per time. In other words, because a *Hauwa* product can be remanufactured or rebranded into and *LG* at any time, it follows that even previously unsuccessful or commonly unpopular brands that are not often requested have a chance to purchase in alternative rather original brands.

In previous studies secondhand textile merchants were identified as a vulnerable category who face the problem of theft from their consumers. To circumvent such problems –(threats posed by theft), sellers improvised through various rituals including employment and training of antitheft surveillance employees, installation of closed-circuit television, setting up of two-way mirrors in dressing rooms, forbidding consumers from trying on of clothing over street clothes, and stapling of wares together to discourage theft (Wiseman, 1979). In contrasts to Wiseman's findings, interviews in this section, show that in the *used* electronics retail space, consumers, rather than retailers of the *used* are vulnerable within the social relational structure of the IUE merchandise. The rituals of improvising which sellers evolve are not aimed at self-protection but towards exploitation of buyers whose affectionate constructions of IUEs make them vulnerable to sellers. To this end, it can be argued that meanings behind social relations of consumer demand are significant for the responsive social relations of IUE retailers towards these buyers. Halkier et al, (2011) argues that consumer research must begin to examine the significance and role of 'practice theory' to consumer culture. Understanding consumer practice would require the examination of consumption not as ordinary action but in terms of habit, routine, constraint and in fact social relations. While the consumer meanings and elegant appreciation of IUEs is symbolized through the values attached to functionality and durability, and while this tendency signifies Halkier et al's (2011) practice, the discovery of 'simulate-branding' indicates that it is equally necessary to begin to examine the 'role of practice' in the *used* retail culture. More important is also the need to understand the nexus between consumer-merchant meanings and the significance of this nexus for social relations of in the *used* or *second-hand* marketplace.

4.3 Social Relations Sustaining Used Electronics End-Of-Life Merchandise

Hogan (2009) defines social relations as a reciprocal pattern of interaction that persists over a period of time, so that a stable set of social expectations develops. In literature, end-of-life (EOL) is defined as a material attribute of an individual electronics equipment that is no longer suitable for use, and which is intended for dismantling and recovering spare parts, or is destined for material recovery and recycling or final disposal (SBC, 2011; Tereda, 2012; UNEP, 2013). This perspective commonly presupposes that electronics attain the designation of waste – e-waste, once they have attained end-of-life. This perspective assumes that products acquire end-of-life once they are disposed of by initial users, and that the material life of things is generally terminal

in nature' (See for instance, Onwughara, Nnorom, Kanno, and Chukwuma, 2010, Gibson, 2010, Grower, 2012, Cooper, 2012; Step/UNU-IAS, 2014). Studying the second-hand e-waste economy in Nigeria, Omobowale (2013) has argued that discarded waste electronics from developed countries become consumables through esteemed reuse values, which consumers attach to them as *tokunbo* (*from across the seas)* as opposed to the disparaged *aloku (locally used)*. Moving further, this section examines social relations sustaining the used electronics end-of-life merchandise vis-à-vis the interpretive dynamics of both *tokunbo* and *aloku,* respectively. In discussing these social relations, this section pays full tribute to meanings attached to end-of-life, hence adhering to Weber's 'verstehen' – a German word that represents subjective understanding of social action from the perspective of the actor (Coser, 1977; Sandberg, 2005; Ritzer, 2008).

An important aspect of the social relations between sellers and buyers of IUEs, which has its own space, value and importance is the practice described in this study as *'pseudo-packaging'.* Pseudo-packaging describes the art of surreptitiously concocting locally used but redundant electronics – *aloku,* into 'simulated *tokunbo* non-tested commodities'; that is, commodities, which imitate nearly all kinds of characteristics which IUEs otherwise bear. In '*pseudo-packaging'* as with '*simulate-branding',* sellers on the one hand capitalize on and exploit the vulnerable and naive meanings that consumers assign to things –*tokunbo, IUEs*. On the other hand, they also creatively maneuver the program guiding IUE sales and transactions to their advantage at the expense of the buyer. The phrase 'non-tested' is one of the attributes of IUEs which sellers (involved in *pseudo-packaging)* exploit to feign ordinary redundant objects into 'commodities'. *Pseudo-packagers* customarily assemble both fake, locally used *aloku* electronics and/or redundant imported used electronics into sealed packs, disguising and offering them as 'real non-tested' IUEs. A seller sheds light on what this practice basically entails, when he said:

> These people go and pack some electronics which they know is not good and package them as *tokunbo* non-tested. Sometimes they bring those non-working electronics from home and carefully package them together with imported *tokunbo* non-tested in nylons. That is why I consider this market as a universitymarket (an environment for studying and understanding several forms of human behavior); most people who become victims end up crying and sometimes leave disappointed. And the problem is that once such people finish selling, they close their shops and go (KII/ IUE Seller/2013).

Below, a seller explains how the coinage *non-tested* has been creatively reprogramed to fit both the merchandise of real *tokunbo* as well as the merchandise of *pseudo-packagers* who craftily simulate local *aloku* to look like real *tokunbo* in order to merchandize supposedly end-of-life electronics when he said:

> But when we talk of non-tested, it refers to those electronics whose functionality is under probability. They are of three types: there are those that may or may not work, there are those we call grade, they usually have minor errors and you can always fix it on your own or involve a technician. It may just be a little wire cut or something… The third class is what we call the broken. Usually, the client is never allowed to unwrap them. We are to tell you that that is how the importer arranged it and that is how they were bought (KII/IUE seller/ 2013).

Considering that the IUE market is popularly known for its merchandise of imported – *tokunbo* used electronics, *pseudo-packagers* find it easy to various locally *used* end-of-life electronics in the market as *imported –tokunbo.* In adopting the coinage 'broken' to describe their goods, *pseudo-packagers* successfully fit their merchandise into the program of 'non-tested' common with sellers of the real *tokunbo.* As the above interview reveals, what makes this adaption possible is the clever arrangement of 'non-tested' into hierarchies of the real at the top and the faked at the bottom. The arrangement includes varieties such as *'non-functional', 'grade'* or '*broken' IUEs.* In packaging these electronics into sealed nylons, *pseudo-packagers* subtly immune themselves from being easily found out or discovered. This explains why they, unlike sellers of 'real' (*tokunbo)* IUEs, are not associated with the permanent space in the market as they hardly stay after their deeds have been done. The fact that '*clients are never allowed to unwrap*' the *broken* and that '*we are to tell you that that is how the importer arranged it and that is how they were bought*' represents a creative formalization of *pseudo-packaging* in the overall merchandise. Unless the buyer unwraps them, he/she might fall into the trap of taking the bad as the good. Consumers of IUEs therefore need to be more cautious of what IUEs they are buying that are designated as 'non-tested'.

Sellers also exploit the prevailing phrase of 'non-tested' to misdirect and lure unsuspecting consumers away from the recognition of ongoing strategies and processes of deception. The subtle seduction of consumers through *pseudo-packaging* has succeeded to some degree, with the collaboration and support of those in the market described as *Osoafia (interlinks between*

sellers and buyers). The *Osoafia* persuade the unsuspecting buyers to enter into the web of relations around 'pseudo-packaged', used electronics, as evident in the following quote:

> When a customer comes into the market, he asks for tested or non-tested and the *Osoafia* (interlinks) usually takes the person there. But most times, they convince you because all their intention is to put your head where non-tested is sold. So they have a network and the assignment of the network is to attract a buyer to the location of non-tested (KII/Trader/Alaba market/2013).

An official of the market describes this willy-nilly and seductive social relations sustaining *pseudo-packaging* in the following expressions:

> Non-tested sellers work hand-in-hand with Osoafia and the Osoafia is not just one person. For instance, if an Osoafia calls you now, there will be four more others following you. They know themselves but behave and act like normal buyers. It is like a drama but it is part of their business. When you accept to move with an Osoafia, you will hear yet another Osoafia saying '*oga follow am, na my brother get the shop' (meaning* 'sir follow him, the shop which he is leading you belongs to my brother). In order to help you summon your courage, you will still hear another person encouraging you to follow (KII/CSO/Alaba International Market/2013).

In this unfolding drama, *pseudo-packaging* is also carefully programmed to enhance and favor the social relations of livelihood between the sellers of locally used *aloku* and their facilitators – the *Osoafia.* Hence, otherwise end-of-life used electronics – *aloku* acquire the status of the *imported –tokunbo.* As one of the interviewees explains, the collaboration between sellers of the fake IUEs and *Osoafia* is an instrumental relation to the installation of *pseudo-packaging.* The '*Osoafia's*' tactical scheme is to seduce the consumer through artful persuasion and to lure them into purchasing 'fake IUEs'. This melodramatic social relations unfolding is often known by other traders but unknown to most buyers who are either first timers or simply naïve visitors to the market. The network behind *pseudo-packaging* is symbolic of how far sellers of the fake electronics are willing to go in institutionalizing a new market order which facilitates the simulation of waste –used end-of-life electronics into fake IUEs –*tokunbo* electronics.

The practice of *pseudo-packaging* buttresses the earlier position that buyers, as far as the *used* electronics merchandise context is concerned; are generally vulnerable within this market. Their vulnerability, as observed above emanates not only as a successful working of merchants, but also as a result of their typical interpretations and meanings attached to used electronics that fall

in the category of *imported –tokunbo.* In essence, pseudo-packaging creates 'a copy of the copy' and people, in this case; consumers, struggle to distinguish between the 'original' and the 'copy'. 'Pseudo-packaging' thrives chiefly as a manipulation of buyer-seller relations using the coinage 'non-tested' to make buyers fall prey at the end of the day. Whereas, in the discourse on *tokunbo,* Omobowale's (2013) identified *aloku* and *tokunbo* as symbolisms of locally *used* and foreign *used goods* respectively, the discovery of artful *pseudo-packaging* in this section and *simulate-branding* in the previous reveal that these terms acquire a transactional symbolism, which makes them interchangeable rather than exclusive constructs. One can argue that, through social actions and relations of *pseudo-packaging* merchandise, end-of-life (*locally used aloku*) is creatively reworked into the prestige associated with *tokunbo.* One can equally argue that its success is founded upon or depends on the action of uncritical buyers to either purchase or not purchase the 'non-tested' *aloku* (locally used) being paraded as 'broken'.

Further, interviews highlight how the unconscious but resilient meanings and actions of buyers ensure the successful inauguration and perpetuation of *pseudo-packaging.* Below, a seller explains for instance that, cheapness and affordability are strong attractions of consumer to non-tested:

> Buyers are the problem because they prefer cheap articles and they do not know that it is fake. Most of them seek for cheap things and what turns out as cheap are the non-tested *tokunbo* electronics and that puts them into much trouble. Hence, you have to beware of hustlers (Osoafia), if they get you they take you to the wrong place (IDI/IUE seller/2013).

A seller buttresses the cheapness factor behind non-tested IUEs, saying:

> Non-tested is usually way cheaper and consumers prefer to buy them than the costlier tested ones. If you are buying non-tested which is for instance N20,000 (Twenty-Thousand Naira), you may have to pay N35-40,000 (Thirty-Thousand Naira) to get its equivalence which is tested. Because consumers always prefer cheaper ones, they always buy non-tested (IDI/ Seller/2013)**.**

A seller describes the 'penny wise' consumers as the basis of exploitation and the usual victims of *pseudo-branding* when he says: The customers who always fall victim of this dangerous fake products are the greedy ones who see this as an opportunity to buy plenty *tokunbo* (imported) that may work (KII/IUE seller/2013).

Notwithstanding that consumers are openly presented with the implications of buying non-tested, they still proceed head on to make their purchase with uncritical optimism and perception of the market as purely that of *tokunbo* goods. As such, buyers enhance, very actively the very program of their own exploitation. The following interviews explain some of the symbolic meanings commonly attached to the sale of goods classified as non-tested. Highlighting 'non-warranty' and its symbolic aphorism for the buyer of 'non-tested', a seller says:

> When it comes to *tokunbo* non-tested, the issue of warranty or guarantee does not usually come in. Sellers attach to them the idea of '*what you see is what you buy and what you get is what you bought*' to imported, used electronics. That means that at the point of buying it from the container, it is attached with 'what you see is what you buy, and what you got is what you bought'. It also means that by the time you open the box and you find nothing inside, you do not blame anybody (KII/ Market Associational head/2013**).**

Yet another seller notes that: When it comes to purely non-tested, it is a game of luck and that is what we call it (IDI/IUE Seller/2013). Another seller says: Sometimes, they (buyers) even ask for guarantee and I tell them I cannot give them anything like guarantee (IDI/Seller/2013).

The aphorism ''*what you see is what you buy and what you get is what you bought*' as indicated above represents a phrasal disclaimer on the part of the seller to the buyer of non-tested. In this case, the buyer, rather than the seller of non-tested' IUE is stylishly obligated to bear full responsibility for the possible implications or surprises that come with buying a 'non-tested' good. The 'disclaimer' also enables the seller to exonerate and absolve himself from taking responsibility for whatever negative consequences may arise. Implicitly too, the decision, and in this case, the action of the consumer to purchase a non-tested *used* electronics is his/her ultimate and final 'guaranty and warranty'. The tendency of the buyer to willingly proceed head-on to purchase non-tested with full knowledge of its transactional symbols, presupposes a 'speculate social action' which defies buyer opinions that buying non-tested is a 'game of luck'. In this case, the speculate-buyer aids the successful merchandize of otherwise end-of-life *used* electronics. In addition to Weber's classifications of action, including 'refusal to act', 'passive acquiescence' and 'social action' (Tunstall and Thompson, 1976), this study posits 'speculate-buying' as a form of action peculiar within the *used* electronics end-of-life consumption. What

validates this form of action is the existence of the merchandize of otherwise end-of-life electronics.

Although Stobart and Vaan Damme (2010) transaction is an unexplored domain within consumer culture research and within second-hand market studies, the discovery of *pseudo-packaging* as a peculiar social relational form of transaction within the *used* or *second-hand tokunbo* electronics space fills this gap. It is argued contextually that carefully programed rituals of transaction exist in the merchandise of IUEs, and that in fact these rituals are sustained not passively by second-hand or *used* commodity merchants but actively by interpretive processes and dynamics of meanings which consumers attach to end-of-life goods through their passive and speculate-actions towards *tokunbo–non-tested.* The findings substantiate Tumbat and Markus (2007) view that the second-hand marketplace is controlled and shaped not by producers or marketers but chiefly by consumers and their meanings for goods. *Pseudo-packaging* affirms his Tumbat and Markus (2007) that the second-hand marketplace is a central stage for the mixture of divergent groups of social actors caught up in dramatic interplay of structure and agency to legitimate their own ideological positions of identity and power.

The interviews held also reveal that resuscitators – identified earlier as '*Merchantabilizers'* are also significant actors in the social relations sustaining used electronics end-of-life merchandize. Since most *imported-tokunbo used* electronics are largely imported into Nigeria as potentially non-functional-'non-tested', interviewees argue that *Merchantabilizers* assist in engineering them back to life. A merchant explains this below, saying that:

> Every imported used electronics that usually come into this country come as non-tested and we give them to our mechanics and engineers who fix them. That name 'tested' is what happens in this market (IDI/IUE TRADER/2013).

Another interviewee sheds light on the relevance of *merchantabilizers* to the salvation of non-working-end-of-life waste electronics saying:

> When we bring in non–working electronics such as television sets, then our boys in the market here would begin to device different ways of making sure that they discover what is wrong and seek for ways of fixing them back. Thereafter, audio outputs come out and the system works again (IDI/Importer/2013).

The art of '*merchantabilizing* non-functional goods has also gradually grown into a specialization as presented below:

> Even the technicians are very specialized in what they do. Each of them specializeon a particular product. The specialization is so organized that even when you bring a JVC to a technician specialized on repairing Sony, he would not accept to, no matter how minor the problem with that JVC is. So I can tell you that there is a high degree of professionalism in how we operate here (IDI/Importer/2013).

These interviews substantiate the literature debates that most second hand electronics being imported into Nigeria are nonfunctioning e-wastes, particularly because as much as 75% of these electronics are imported as irreparable junks and wastes as opposed to only 25% of them that are functional (Jeffries, 2006; Schmidt, 2006; Puckett et al, 2002). Whereas in *pseudo-packaging,* the locally *used* and generally non-functioning *aloku electronics* are simulated to appear as *tokunbo,* through the construct non-tested, the presence of *merchantabilizers* enables the transformation of otherwise non-tested as well as non-functional *used electronics* to become functional. The name assigned to the *used* electronics resuscitated back to life by *merchantabilizers* is 'tested'. In the ongoing social relations between sellers and buyers, 'tested' electronics refer to *used electronics* that have been plugged to a power source and have been confirmed and proven as functional prior to sale.

In the interviews which follow, the service of *merchantabilizers* has also grown on the one hand into a form of training which sellers depend upon to enhance their merchandize of the generally non-working *used* electronics. On the other hand, the service of *resuscitating* encourages social relations in which people pay to present their locally *used* non-functioning *aloku* electronics to the market to have them resuscitated. A seller explains the social relations of training *merchantabilizers* to boost *used* electronics merchandise when he says**:**

> As sellers, we realize that the cost of servicing and repairing imported electronics costs much money, so we decided as a way out to send one of our boys here to go and learn the art of repairs in companies. So after the boy learns how to repair these electronics, he becomes of tremendous benefit to us because if our customers present their purchased electronics with complaints or for repairs, we repair for such customers at a fee. We charge fees because we trained the boy as well. And before he leaves, he would also train at least two people. We have to do

> that because what comes here is non-tested, otherwise we end up paying for repairers to fix them for us (IDI/Trader/03/2013).

A seller highlights the consequent patronage of *merchantabilizers* saying:

> Yes, you can always bring any kind of electronics that is non-functional to this market for sale and sellers can buy it from you. Be it LCD, amplifiers, computer, TVs and the like. All you need to do is just to pay a little token (IDI/Seller/2014).

The relevance of *merchantabilizers* to the social relations of *used* electronics end-of-life merchandise is that all kinds of *aloku* electronics can be presented for repairs in the IUE market. Another is that buyers who are unfortunate enough to buy a non-functioning used electronics as non-tested have a chance to offer such non-functioning electronics to *merchantabilizer* for repairs. With *merchantabilizers,* chances are that supposedly non-functional (end-of-life) used electronics can be resuscitated. Secondly, the perception that end-of-life electronics can be restored back to a working living state also encourages a new form of merchandise among sellers. In this merchandize, the services of trained *merchantabilizers* are used as an avenue and medium for more profits from buyers as well as non-buyers.

A third form of social relations which ensue from the presence of *merchantabilizers* is that which I describe as *Offersumption.* Instead of coming to buy electronics like consumers, actors involved in *Offersumption* bring to the market, their non-functioning *aloku* electronics in exchange for functional (*merchantabilized)* used electronics, at any cost prescribed by the *merchantabilizer* or the *seller* in charge of a *merchantabilizer's* service. The term 'Offersumption' is coined as a synthesis of 'offering' (non-functional used electronics) and 'consumption' (receiving a product in return for both a product and little money).With the possibility for anyone including non-buyers to patronize the market for repairs, the subtle implication of *merchantabilizers* is that in the long run, there would be a mixture of both the real *tokunbo* IUEs as well as the locally *used aloku*– fake *tokunbo* on the table of IUE sellers. This possibility purports an even deeper level of vulnerability for the generally unsuspecting and uncritical buyers. A major argument here is that the social relations sustaining the used electronics end-of-life merchandise cannot be detached from consumer meanings and the program of IUE transaction.

This study also discovers that even when IUEs degenerate materially into scraps, they do not automatically acquire the status of waste or end-of-life. Instead of becoming trash or garbage, they contextually acquire new values within the framework of social relations of merchandize which deconstructs the possible existence of a throwaway society. End-of-life is consequently adjourned through subjective values that are attached to these scrap electronics. Animating what Gibson (2010) describes as 'holding processes', characterized by 'brutal use' and 'gradual garbing', interviews that follow show that meanings of potential future utility assigned to otherwise used end-of-life electronics remain crucial for both the construction of and actual engagement in social relation. Below, a *merchantabilizer* (repairer) identifies that end-of-life electronics can be stored and preserved in view of the potential future usefulness for cannibalization when he says:

> Once we discover that any electronics is non-working we do not throw it away. What we do is to assemble such electronics somewhere so that whenever someone brings an appliance for repairs, we can always use parts of those previous ones to fix them (IDI/Technician/2013).

In the next interview, yet another seller notes that end-of-life can be deferred by storage due to the potential future usefulness of its parts for buyers in need of them:

> You should know that these used electronics can never be seen as wastes because no matter what, somebody, somehow, somewhere will definitely need it. Or better put, a part of it will still be needed for something important (IDI/Merchant/ 2013).

Below, another seller notes that the utility of electronics with end-of-life components is unaffected at all by the possible 'non-functionality' of the whole product. Hence, he supports the above view, saying:

> When you say the ones that are no longer functional, there are still parts that can still be useful. For instance, in a situation where a television tube gets burnt, you need to replace it with another. Someone can still come to the market to ask for these parts. When they need to repair the old ones, they will now come for exactly what they want but that may not be available anymore in the market. People would now come to the market for those parts (IDI/Merchant, 2013).

The perceptions of interviewees on the storability of end-of-life used electronics presuppose that in actual reality, even when the use of electronics has ended, discard is scarcely the next option. Instead, meanings are directed to the hidden potentials of such an electronics which transcends

its immediate material state. The assertion that "they will come for exactly what they want that may not be available in the market" presupposes that in reality parts of these supposedly end-of-life electronics eventually regain new lives. This phrase also indicates that peculiarities surrounding changing technological production occasionally reinstall and upgrade the seemingly waning or supposedly end-of-life product. In these interviews, the adjournment of end-of-life is presented as an avenue for entering into relations with others in the future. In essence, the denunciation of end-of-life is predicated on the construction of social relations as a futuristic experience or social action to be taken. These interpretive outlook mirror the postulate of reuse value in Omobowale (2009, 2012, 2013a&b). Omobowale argues that objects which have been designated as waste can become consumables through reuse values.

The emerging denunciation of used electronics end-of-life through the assignment of future reuse values to them illuminate the view of Palmer and Clark (2010) that for objects to move from the transient category of depreciating value to the durable category of accumulating value, they must pass through the covert category of rubbish to enable their value to be radically assigned. Stobart and Van Damme (2010) also show that household possessions were redistributed and reused from generation to generation. Even when perishable commodities as food attain the end-of-their use, Evans (2012) argues that their disposal was differed through series of refrigeration. The very act of discard among humans, as he argues is neither abrupt nor exciting but is laden with anxiety. In short, she argues that the life of objects is mediated by social relations predicated on subjective variables such as family conventions among others.

In the interviews that follow, the concept of EOL is challenged based on the perception that scrap electronics have commercial values that are significant for social relations. A seller deconstructs the EOL thesis by noting that every kind of *used* electronics including scrap electronics which have been classified in electronics materiality literature as e-wastes have commercial market value (See Jeffries, 2006; Umesi and Onyia, 2008;Oteng-Ababio, 2012). The value is founded on the belief that scrap-trade economy exists which intercepts the automatic entry of otherwise waste electronics into their end-of-life as noted below:

> When it comes to electronics in this market, and so far as electronics are concerned there is nothing like expiry or expiration. You can still make sales out of them (IDI/Merchant, 2013).

Another interviewee deconstructs the thesis of EOL by alluding to the recycling potentiality of supposed waste objects when he said:

> There is nothing that is not useful in Nigeria again. If you drop a piece of iron now, somebody will pick it up; it could even be a bathroom slippers. In fact they pick everything including the condemned iron that you see around. The people involved in that practice are called recyclers; and I guess that recycling companies send boys into this market to pick such items up. If you have them in quantity they buy from you (IDI/Trader/2013).

Yet another interviewee in fact debunks the notion of throwaway society because scrap-traders exist to always buy supposedly waste electronics:

> Do you know that in the era we are in now, there is nothing that is waste anymore? For the electronics we use for instance, there are still people who come to buy them from us. In fact, as they move around we sell our non-working electronics to them (scrap traders). After they buy them, they take them somewhere too. Whether they go to rebrand or repackage them I do not know. But what I know is that they still buy them (IDI/IUE Merchant/2013).

Still, another interviewee corroborates the significance of scrap-traders to the redemption of EOL, noting that:

> When we have tested and tested and they do not work, we do not throw them away. We either use them as samples or sell them (to Aboki-scrap traders). There is nothing we just throw away like that (IDI/IUE Merchant/2013).

Yet another seller notes the significance of scrap-traders to the displacement of EOL when he says:

> Sometimes, the electronics we buy get spoilt easily and become non-functional. What we do is to sell it (to aboki - scrap traders who come to buy it) (IDI/IUE Merchant/2013).

Still, another seller elaborates on earlier explanations saying:

> And if you have parts for old televisions for instance, if you have to make your sales, you can make a lot of gain out of it, so there is no waste in it. Even from the panel you can still make some money. Just loosen a television and bring out the panel, you can sell it direct, whether old or new televisions. There are people to buy them. The buyers are already there (IDI/Merchant/ 2013).

Summarizing the preceding alternative values into which otherwise used electronics enter into insofar as merchants are concerned, a seller identifies ‘storage for future use’ and ‘resale’ as chief or principal regimes of value that people infix upon supposed ‘obsolescent’ or otherwise

'EOL' electronics. She illustrates the limitless use value present in IUEs and used electronics in general by using the 'palm tree analogy' as seen below:

> One thing with second hand stuff (imported used objects) is that everything is marketable. I can sell your shirt. You may think nobody likes it but you hear someone say 'I have been looking for this for the past one year'. You could see it as waste but one thing I have found out is that you do not throw anything away. You do not know who would need it for whatever reason. This market has taught me one thing in life that nothing is useless. I studied agricultural science, and I dare say that, it is just like the palm tree where we use the stem, we use the fronds, we use the leaves, we use everything. But it gets to a point where you think it is useless but someone picks it up to recycle[s] it. So, I do not really think anything is useless (KII/ Merchants/2013).

On the one hand, the above interviews debunk the position that a throwaway society exists at all. The assumption that the life of goods is terminal at end-of-life, implicit in the throwaway society discourse is particularly contested. The end-of-life thesis is particularly challenged by the fact that these IUE sellers assign and attach meanings of commercial value to otherwise waste or scrap electronics. These commercial values consequently inform the formation of social relations which sustain used electronics end-of-life merchandise. The perceived existence of scrap-traders commonly described as '*aboki'* also empowers the interpretive deconstruction of the end-of-life thesis. The downplay of discard through the handing-down of used electronics to scrap traders suggests that in addition to commercial valuing of waste electronics, the social actions and social relations of IUE sellers with scrap trader (*aboki*) also hinges on a philanthropic intention. **The** philanthropic intention is depicted by the decision to present scrap traders with e-wastes for trade at relatively cheap costs, rather than discarding such objects. The view that the '*aboki'* represent "the last checking point or the last bus stop (terminal point)", deconstructs the notions that scrap electronics are wastes and indicates a symbolic value assignment to them by sellers of IUEs. The view that "there is nothing we throwaway and there is nothing like waste" because scrap-traders "in turn take it to where they are scaled to make his own money (profit)" (IDI/IUE Seller/2013), suggests that used electronics are in a journey through episodes of values.

Having established that meanings attached to waste electronics are symbolically connected with practice, this section turns to the various episodes of values which supposedly waste electronics enter into to postpone a product's end-of-life. In the interviews and analyses that follow, the

succeeding discourse establishes that scraps do not only acquire commercial values within meaning-driven social relations between actors. Further, findings reveal that in fact the tendency to actively commodify used electronics scraps within chains of interacting market–actors exist and are sustained by specified practices suggesting that scrap-trading is an informal business on its own. Rushkoff (2005) defines the term 'commodification' as a process of assigning commercial value(s) to an object or objects which do not initially have commercial value. Contextually, this study argues that the end-of-life of used electronics is ironically a basis on which social relations of commodification are formed and built. As a matter of fact, the commodification process enables all kinds of scraps to acquire a new status as commodities having monetary values without exceptions as explained below:

> The fact is that a prerequisite in this business is money. Without money, no exchanges take place. We pay before getting the scraps and those 'ogas' (superior scrap Merchants or Lords) equally pay to have them from us (IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013).

The non-exemption of scraps during commodification is buttressed by an interviewee who says: We do not often discriminate against scraps as far as we are in this business, whatever comes we buy (IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013). Yet another 'trader notes that: What we often buy and assemble are Panels, Copper, iron, Aluminium, Panels of Flat screen and other scraps (IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013).

Another trader buttresses ongoing commodification process saying "we do not pack scraps, we buy them from shop-owners and repairers of electronics in this market" (IDI/Scrap Trader/2013). 'Scrap-sourcing' has been identified as one of the practices which traders of scrap enter into in commodifying scrap into sellable goods. The process, as a trader notes, depends on the necessary interaction between scrap-traders and actual sellers of IUEs (esteemed *tokunbo* electronics*)*:

> Traders of imported used electronics often call us once they have any (scraps). We give them our contacts and they call us once there are scraps. These same people also have friends elsewhere whom they assist us to link up with, we also give such people our phone numbers and they call us whenever scraps are available (IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013).

Another trader notes similarly that:

> Sometimes we have friends who always go from shop to shop to scout for them. After scouting from shop-owners, they would often bring them to us. At some

> other times these shop owner friends of ours would rather test them before handing over to us **(**IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013).

The informal business of scrap electronics also takes on a form of specialization within the social relations, commodifying and deferring used electronics end-of-life. A scrap trader explained this below, when he says:

> We all deal in different things in this labor. For instance, he deals in copper and iron, I also deal in copper and iron, but the access each of us has to customers varies in degree; he has his customers while I have mine (FGD/ Scrap Trader/2013).

Another 'interviewee notes similarly that:

> One thing is that each person (aboki) specializes in just one or some specific kinds of electronics scrap. For instance, I have a customer who just came; he specializes mainly on batteries and UPS (uninterrupted power supply) wires (FGD/ Scrap Trader /2013).

The practice of specializing could take the form of 'scrap-assembly' in which scraps are bought in bulk, sorted and classified, just as another interviewee notes when he says:

> I am specialized in assembling of scraps, and what I particularly buy from those boys range from battery, laptops, hard disks and so on (IDI/ Scrap Trader - Assembler /2013).

Another assembler highlights specialization, when he says that:

> Scavengers customarily come over here to sell to me. And when it comes to my very big customers, they often call me on phone once there are scraps since I have their numbers. So what those boys do is to range and scout for scraps while all I do is to assemble by buying from them when they come. So I get to buy from them battery, laptops, hard disks and so on (IDI/ Scrap Trader-Assembler /2013).

Still on 'assembly', another trader highlights sorting and classification of scraps saying:

> The assembler could also buy scraps from shop owners and take them to his own shop where he sorts them out. At other times, he could go to warehouses where they have broken items (legally prohibited e-wastes) to buy these scraps from merchants (IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013)

Another key practice which informs the commodification process is that of 'pricing' or 'price-fixing'. When it comes to *pricing,* interviewees reveal that two major techniques are often employed: 'weighing' of scrap(s) or 'direct physical observation' to tell price. Explaining further

on scrap assembler, a scrap-trader highlights the social relations of 'pricing' using the scale system, he notes that:

> They buy from us in bulk and not in pieces. They know what these scraps cost as they often weigh what we bring on scales to determine how much they would pay us in return. One kilogram (kg) of copper for instance goes for N700 (Seven Hundred Naira). Aluminium of the same weight goes for a hundred naira (N100), and Iron goes for less because it is the cheapest (IDI/Scrap-trader/2013).

Still, another trader highlights on pricing through 'direct physical observation' when he says:

> Somehow, we always get to know the moment we see them. That is because that is what we do, that is the business we specialize in. And when a new member comes into the business, such a person is always told details on how each type of scrap is sold and how much each of them goes for. So you just get to know it once you are part of the business (IDI/ Scrap Trader -Assembler/2013).

Interviews also reveal that after being assembled, scraps proceed yet again into another episode of life in which they are mobilized for exportation to other countries. As far as the study of this market is concerned, the only seeming end of their journey is the point at which scraps are sold over to exporters often described as 'maigida' or 'Oga'. A scarp-trader explains scrap mobilization for exportation, saying that:

> When we buy these scraps, we also sell them to 'maigida'. The 'maigida' on his part buys everything from us. After sorting them, he in turn takes them outside the country to places like Cotonou, China and others (IDI/ Scrap Trader /2013).

Another interviewee supports the above saying:

> When we buy, we often take them to some 'ogas' who buy from us. They take them to Cotonou and other places but they do not stay around here. The only exception is if the scraps we assemble are worth ₦200,000 to ₦300,000 and are too bulky for conveyance, we then invite them to come and see for themselves. Thereafter, they bring a truck to pack them after which they export them (IDI/ Scrap Trader/2013).

The fact that used electronics end-of-life is adjourned, protracted and elongated through the various practices identified in the highlighted social relations, makes it uneasy to posit that a specific end-of-life really exists. This is because first, instead of being discarded after failed attempts to be resuscitated, scraps proceed from sellers of *tokunbo* into a new form of life in the hands of scrap-traders where they acquire a new commercial value. In this episode of value, the

end-of-life and a possible throwaway society is deconstructed as scraps witness what Gregson et al (2007) identify as 'selling-on'. Hence, scraps regain new lives through sale in a modern era construed as a 'multivalued commodity' era, an era in which even wastes are revalued as sellable(s). While it is possible for goods to experience several values including aesthetic, linking (bonding), moral, spiritual values as Ture (2013) notes, the selling-on of waste electronics to scrap-traders indeed affirms Evans' (2012)submission that disposition is a necessary moment in enacting practice. In this case, the symbolic social relational practice of redirecting waste electronics scraps from end-of-life channels into commercial marketable channels challenges and complements extant consumer-culture-orientation of 'practice' studies (Warde, 2005). Hence, beyond seeing practice as a 'routinized consumer behaviour, having several interconnected elements' (Halkier et al, 2011), this study suggests that the social relational context of used electronics end-of-life is an active space for scrap re-engineering for consumption.

The systematic assignment of value evinced by practices of commodifying used electronics end-of-life suggests that the informal scrap electronics business represents a set of rituals. They are rituals because they are expressed based on symbolic meanings and guided practices between IUE sellers and scrap traders. Rook (1985) defines ritual as "a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and tend to be repeated over time" (Rook, 1985:252). Several practices are highlighted above which qualify as rituals of commodification. One of them is the inclusive trading of scraps in which all kinds of scraps are traded without exemption. The next set of rituals which suggest that the social relations behind the used electronics end-of-life merchandise are specialized and somewhat professional include, component-specific scrap sourcing, specialised scrap-assembly in which scraps are sorted and classified, 'price–fixing' through 'weighing' and 'direct-physical-observation' and 'scrap-mobilization or exportation'. Through these rituals, scraps witness what Appadurai (1986) defines as 'tournaments' or 'regimes of value', which accord them a social life of their own, and what Kopytoff (1986) calls the 'cultural biographies of things'. Hence, the meanings and values of things and in this case *used* electronics emerge in movements initially as commodities and subsequently as other things through diversions.

As interviews reveal, the agency which emerges at the terminal of social relations of the used electronics merchandise are the exporters of scraps. These actors purchase scraps from the assemblers who buy in bulk and in turn sell on these scraps through exports to actors in other countries. Their recognition in the market as *Oga* or *Mai gida* literally means *Master* or *Head of the home.* In scrap-trading however, the term subjectively denotes S*crap-Lords* or *Scrap-Masters.* The presence of *Scrap Lords* presupposes two major significance in the market. First, the social relations of commodifying scraps are specialised and somewhat hierarchical in nature. The second is that the unfolding program of adjourning end-of-life is not domestic to the market but transcends progressively beyond even the Nigerian scrap merchandize space.

The preceding discussion does not presuppose that end-of-life does not exist at all; rather it suggests that insofar as the social relations of IUE merchandize, and indeed the merchandize of scrap electronics are concerned, 'end-of-life' is indeterminate. It is indeterminate because meanings which people attach to the materiality of used electronics are subjective rather than fixed in themselves. The complex social composition of actors involved in the merchandise, and in this case sellers of the *real* imported-*tokunbo* and sellers of *fake* (simulated) *tokunbo* also compounds the difficulty of deciphering the concrete terminal at which *used* electronics(both imported and local) actually attain their actual end-of-life.

The systematic sets of rituals and social relations facilitating the adjournment of the supposed end-of-life of disused electronics are also significant in repositioning previous assumptions in literature. Whereas Schmidt (2006) and Jeffries (2006) had argued that only 25% of used electronics imported into Nigeria are useful, while the other 75% amount in scraps and junks, the social relations of used electronics EOL merchandise explain the fate of the other 75% that are presumed to be wastes. It means that even as supposed wastes, these 75% acquire new utilities as they proceed into further lives, through chains of commodification processes and the various episodes of subjective values which actors involved in waste electronics scrap merchandise attach to them in Lagos Nigeria.

This section also identifies that the commercial meanings attached to scraps have also encouraged scrap-traders to erect social relational values to guide this informal business. What

emanates from these organized relations is an informal entrepreneurial code, which every member is obligated towards. This code defines the standards of norms, values, morality, requirements and conditions of entry into and exit from the business, and principles of hygiene. An interviewee explains below that sanction is the reward for failure to abide by moral principles of honesty and integrity as crucial requirements for membership in scrap-trading, saying:

> One principle we observe in this scrap business is complete honesty and truthfulness which requires that no member must be involved in any shady deal or act that may betray or jeopardize the interest of our group. For instance, one of us was recently caught stealing used electronics form a technician's shop. After he was caught, he was levied by the market authority and had to pay N10,000. Although we all assisted in bailing him out by contributing N5000, he was later dismissed from here. We generally believe in collective interests and the principle of helping one another (FGD/Scrap Merchant Actors/2013).

Another interviewee expatiates on the ill-disposition of members towards theft when he said:

> When anyone is caught stealing such a person would automatically have to vacate from here permanently (FGD/Scrap Merchant Actors/2013).

Yet another interviewee identifies 'referral from significant others' as a criteria for membership when he said:

> One way of becoming a member is that someone who is already a part of us can also invite or bring his friend or brother to be part of this labor, so as for such a person to equally have a means of livelihood (FGD/Scrap Merchant Actors/2013).

Besides being referred, still another interviewee notes that the would-be member must also have an agreeable personality that poses no threat to the integrity and prevailing peace of the group:

> As a principle, our first consideration is that the person must be agreeable and compatible with us. If we know you would not exploit anyone or tarnish our image, even if you lack resources to start, we would not have any problems with you (FGD/Scrap Merchant Actors/2013).

As for experience and acquisition of skill, still another interviewee notes that a minimum of one or two weeks is required for a new member to acquire the basic skills of the trade when he said:

> When we receive referral from friends who ask us to assist to socialize the invitees into the art of scavenging, we expect such a person to spend a week or two to socialise with the rest of us to learn the whole art. Thereafter, he is weaned to stand on his own (FGD/Scrap Merchant Actors/2013).

As yet another interviewee notes, hygiene also remains an integral part of the standards of scrap-trading. To this end each member has an obligation to pay a specified due to enable the group hire and maintain the service of a cleaner:

> We do have rules, for instance, we generally frown at indiscriminate piling of refuse after each day's work without proper disposal. Therefore, we all agree to always tax ourselves in order to pay off someone who would come pack them for discard in the evening. So, we each pay a thousand naira every month in order to take care of sanitation (FGD/Scrap Merchant Actors/2013).

It can be argued that the used electronics end-of-life merchandise consists of potentially specialized forms of social relations between actors, and in this case, scrap-traders. Apart from observing various rituals of interaction as stated, this code of interaction depicted above suggests that the meanings attached to things are also core in shaping the meanings attached to inter-personal action. To be part of the informal business of scrap-trading both intending and actual members must first of all be honest and reliable or face sanctions ranging from expulsion to payment of fines as the case may be. It is also imperative that membership must be drawn through referral not from strangers but from actual or initial members of this group. An intending member is also required as a matter of necessity to possess an agreeable attitude that would uphold the group's image and standards of honesty and integrity. Hence, members have zero tolerance for tendencies of theft among members. As with formal professional businesses, the scrap-trade also requires a mini-training span of at least a week or two for its intending member who is expected to properly socialize with other members to learn the trade and its dynamics. Observance of hygiene and sanitary standards remain are also crucial standards of behaviour of the scrap-trader by members of his group.

The observances and standards identified in these interviews suggest that the social relations of scrap merchandize are predicated on a code system that facilitates further the protraction of end-of-life in the market. This peculiar relations buttress the position of Hogan (2009) who defines a code as any system of group standards (for example, beliefs, rules, laws) that tends to regulate and integrate the behavior of group members. This unwritten but extant codification also suggests that the commodification of end-of-life is formalizing rather than waning a process which only promises to perpetually adjourn the life of used electronics within the context of merchandize. Hence, the existing social relations of scrap-traders can only sustain an

‘indeterminate’ social life of used electronics rather than guaranty their pure-scientifically proposed ‘terminal’ end-of-life. Beyond the contextual conceptualization of episodes of values, the code-oriented social relations of scrap-trading depict yet another form of value describable as an ‘entrepreneurial value’. Unlike previous episodes predicated on subject-object relations, the entrepreneurial value is intrinsically social relational and interpersonal in nature. A cumulative understanding of these values would require a holistic theorizing of all the levels of social relations highlighted in this section towards the used electronics end-of-life.

This study also identifies that in reconstructing waste electronics as sellable goods, scrap-traders also derive self-transformational value from the framework of meaningful social relations sustaining used electronics end-of-life merchandize. Hence, the assignment of reuse value leads to a derivation of self-value from scraps. A crucial fact about this nature of social relations is that through buying and selling which the economic construction of scraps enables, scrap-traders are able to acquire economic self-transformation. A scrap-trader explains self-transformation further, saying:

> Yes, I get to make some money for myself from this vocation. For instance, whenever I buy and sell scraps, I can make a gain of at least N100 (One hundred) or N200 (Two hundred naira) on each sale. And when the sale is high, I can have as much as N500 (five hundred naira) (FGD/Scrap Trader /2013).

Yet, another scrap-trader presents the scrap-trade as an answer to his initial economic plight when he said:

> The truth is that previously, I used to come to this market to buy used electronics from the north but when I lost my father, things changed and surviving became more difficult at home. I was also into Islamic schooling but being the first child I decided to come over to Lagos in order to make ends meet. That was the genesis of my journey into buying and selling scrap electronics (FGD/Scrap Trader /2013).

The assignment of commercial values to used electronics scraps as explained above indicates first a tendency to deconstruct the notion that electronics have end-of-life. It also shows that change in economic situations of an actor(s) is very much connected to the nature of social relations sustaining this value. The major source of economic improvement and hence of self-transformation in this case is the livelihood which scrap-trading affords to its traders. This

finding also buttresses Woodward's (2011) position that one of the rationales behind subject-object relations is the promise of self-transformation which such objects afford to the subject. The finding also substantiates views in e-waste literature that e-waste (which includes scrap electronics) trade now in developing countries like Nigeria and Ghana provide opportunities for livelihood among youths drawn from the northern parts of both countries (SBC, 2011; Oteng-Ababio, 2012). Hence, electronics scrap trade evolves as very timely alternative to poverty and depleting agriculture opportunities prevalent in those northern parts of both countries. The term '*aboki'* as popularly used in the market and in the interviews is a Hausa term which literally means 'friend'. In the social relations of used electronics EOL merchandise however, the term is subjectively used as a social designation for the actors involved in 'scrap-trading'.

The prominent involvement of the *Aboki* or the Hausa in the merchandise of scrap EOL suggests that the enterprise of waste is clearly a social relational context of ethnic specificity in which different aspects of used electronics merchandise are mastered by ethnic specific norms and actors. As with the context of gatekeeping characterized by actors controlling and superintending over specialized sections of social relations of IUE merchandise, such as the *Alaye (Yoruba)* in the brokering of space and regulation of order, the *Oso afia (Igbo)* in the brokering of patronage between buyers and sellers, the social realtions mediating the waste electronics scrap enterprise presents the context of specialization in which the *aboki* evolve as principal actors.

4.4 Gatekeepers and Imported Used Electronics Merchandise

This section examines social relations of IUE merchandise in light of possible roles which gatekeepers play in imported used electronics merchandise. An operational definition on the concept of gatekeeping is subsequently advanced in terms of two definitions drawn from literature. Campbell, Gray, Meletis, Abbott and Silver (2006) define gatekeepers as those who directly or indirectly provide -access to key resources needed for a system to optimally function. These resources could be logistical, human, institutional, or informational in nature. Contesting the view in market and business studies that gatekeepers are single individual actors, Tuch (2010) argues that literature on gatekeeping has overlooked the multiple gatekeeper phenomenon, or simply failed to account for it. He therefore defines gatekeepers as individuals or multiple distinct actors who while participating in business and business transactions, form an

interlocking web of protection and securities in market administration. In essence, gatekeeping is potentially collective but also a dual role that can be assumed side by side another. A gatekeeper could also be a participant in the social relations sustaining the organization or a setting where his or her service is required.

Collapsing these two perspectives in one, this study operationally defines gatekeepers in two forms: individual(s) or a category of persons who define and determine access to material and non-material resources required for IUE merchandise market. Individual or select stakeholders whose individual or collective, active or passive roles in merchandise, evolve to oversee, control, regulate, protect and determine directly or indirectly the existence and functioning of IUE merchandise (importation, retail and consumption) in Lagos, Nigeria. This study identifies the formal and informal gatekeepers. Formal gatekeepers comprise of government officials who regulate and determine importation of used electronics. The informal gatekeepers consists of key 'market officials' who regulate and determine the organization of merchandise, and 'aboriginal actors' who regulate other spheres of socio-economic relations such as the *Pako,* the *Oso afia* and the *Alaye* in the market.

Among several actors saddled with import regulation, the notable formal gatekeepers involved directly with used electronics importation include official actors such as National Environmental Safety Regulatory Agency (NESREA), the Nigerian Customs Service and local representatives of the Basel Convention on the control of hazardous substances among others. Khan (2014) espouses on formal gatekeepers when she argues that trade legality remains at the core of regulatory debates on used electronics, particularly those defined as wastes. As noted in the first section of the study, the role of formal gatekeepers derives largely from the material-oriented interpretation of IUEs as wastes (e-waste). Thus, these actors act and socially and officially interact principally based on the designation of IUEs as potential and actual carriers of hazardous metal substances. Their roles revolve around active, intermittent and collaborative control of importation of goods, including the entry of used electronics at the border and off the border. An agent of the Nigerian Customs highlights on the evolution of formal gatekeeping on used electronics importation in Nigeria and the partnership approach saying:

> When you speak of laws guiding the import of used electronics, we call them Used electronics here. Before now Federal Environmental Protection Agency

> (FEPA) was in charge but of recent the government came up with NESREA (National Environmental Safety Regulatory Agency) headed by the DG, Dr Mrs Benebo. In fact I can authoritatively tell you, although I hold no brief for them that we have been collaborating and synergizing to complement their effort. 'The fear of NESREA by any Used electronics importer is the beginning of wisdom' because before now sincerely it had been so lose but NESREA has come out smoking with fire. They have been mandated by law and when it comes to imported used electronics they are very specialized (KII/PRO Nigerian Customs Service/2013).

The collaboration role of formal gatekeepers and the social relations of used electronics importation in general are explained below:

> As we work hand in hand with NESREA our manifest is usually transmitted online. A manifest is an inventory of all cargo and consignment on board a ship. It is a document showing the volume and quantity of items coming into the country through a ship. On finding any manifest online involving Used electronics we alert NESREA and once NESREA finds the same they alert us. So we would be on the look out and the moment the agent comes forward to make declaration and request for customs examination, we invite NESREA. NESREA comes in, checks their list. If anyone item therein is not part of the laid down requirements or conditions of Import, the importer pays direly for it. We generally enjoy good relationship with NESREA (KII/PRO Nigerian Customs Service/2013).

The above interviews establish that the activities of formal gatekeepers towards used electronics importation revolve centrally around NESREA and the Nigerian Customs. The NESREA may be foremost in evolution and in administration of gatekeeping, yet the Nigerian Customs remains its strategic 'eyes' at the port. These two work inextricably as formal gatekeepers at the port and off the port using latest digital technology apparatuses such as mobile cargo scanners, sophisticated chemical detectors, nuclear diagnostics, and the internet to monitor and to track the activities of importation. Evidently too, importers of used electronics have agents standing in-between them and formal gatekeepers. They only come in after cargoes -goods have been examined, certified at the port and handed over to agents, or when contents of a cargo negate the standard stipulation. It also means that insofar as formal gatekeeping is concerned, the port remains the only social-relational node between formal gatekeepers and the merchants of IUEs, and in this case, importers. Although they act outside the market, formal gatekeepers regulate and determine IUE entry of IUES into Nigeria and hence, too, access to these goods for IUE merchants. In essence the possibility of merchandise in itself and merchandise in general, notwithstanding that these

goods are variously sought depends on formal gatekeeping. Formal gatekeepers simply suggest that legality is central to both new and used goods alike.

As far as the entry of used electronics into Nigeria is concerned, these actors potentially determine and shape not only what comes in, but also how these goods come into the market. Their (NESREA, Nigerian Customs and Basel Convention) strategic interposition between goods and their intending recipients –agents, importers and IUE traders suggests that access to Imported used electronics, as far as the merchandise is concerned, is controlled and determined by the three officials mentioned above. Hence, merchants of IUEs –importers and retailers as well as consumers must depend on them to have access to these goods.Given tendency for formal gatekeepers to be compromised, through corruption, as noted in earlier section, this study argues that the circumvention of anti-e-waste conventions ensues as collaboration between formal and informal gatekeepers. The role of formal gatekeepers identified here buttresses the view of Boatright (2007) that the service of gatekeepers and their cooperation is needed for the optimal functioning of any system.

Turning to the informal gatekeepers whose roles find expression mainly within the purview of the IUE market, the study identifies other -stakeholders who control, regulate and oversee the trade and consumption of used electronics. These actors include the 'market officials' who regulate the organization of merchandise, and the 'aboriginal actors' who regulate other spheres of socioeconomic relations. Aboriginal actors include the *Pako* (Toll-gate Keepers of wooden passages erected as entry and exit points for sellers and buyers), the *Oso afia* (interlinks between Buyers and sellers) and the *Alaye* (unofficial market wardens who moderate social relations of IUE merchandise) in the market. Key 'market officials' include the chairmen, the male and female market representatives, the importers, and the elderly or gerunds. The roles being played by these actors are crucial, particularly in regulating activities of traders in the market. An official of the market ascribes the role of gatekeeping to the chairman when he said:

> The people I consider as gatekeepers in this market are the executive chairmen of the market. Though they are not regarded as security officials but by virtue of their position, they take supreme charge of trade in the market (IDI/Associational Market Head/2013).

The *male* and *female* market heads as well as the *taskforce* are presented by another interviewee as crucial gatekeepers in the market when he said:

> Those we consider as the powers that be in this trade are the *Baba Oja* (Male market head) and the *Iya Oja* (female Market head). Others include the chairman, the vice-chairman and the taskforce chairman (IDI/Technician/2013).

Considering that they supply the goods being merchandized, an official of the market also identifies *importers* of used electronics as strategic stakeholders below:

> The people we consider strategic stakeholders are the importers, of course we have a forum for them. We call that forum the 'importers forum of electronics dealers association. We refer to them as the big fish among us. In other words, if they do not bring in their goods, the dealers, the seller, retailers might not have something to do (IDI/ Associational Market Head/ 2013).

Elders, owing to their wisdom are also considered as strategic stakeholders particularly in regard to administrative decision making. An interviewee sheds light on the elderly saying:

> We have those we call the elders of the market and the founding fathers who are rewarded or compensated yearly with gifts by the market through the executives of the association. You know they are the people that instituted the market and formed the union. Although they are mostly above 50 years of age or sometimes below, but what we know is that they are those who founded this market, who said let there be and there was (IDI/Seller/2013).

Still another market official buttresses the centrality of the elderly noting that:

> You see, there are things that most of these elders have known as a result of having spent so many years on this earth that did not come from schooling nor from any lecturer but from their experience. That is why in most cases you hear people say can you not make use of the benefit of experience? They have seen it all. Therefore in our administration of this market, we try to have as many of them as possible. Their experience is always very important. For instance from their wealth of experience, they will be able to tell you let us do it this way. They could even say in so and so year and in so and so place, this was what happened in terms of seemingly, so we can do it better. We can follow this part. And most of their advice has been working. So elders are very very important (IDI/Market Official/2013).

The forgoing suggest that a gatekeeper arises either by design -through official administrative arrangement of the market or by 'subjective ascriptions' of this status by members of the group. The chairmen of the market are considered as gatekeepers because as interviewees reveal, they control entry and retention in the market. It is required of every intending and existing member

to have their approval to trade in the market. Chairmen therefore provide oversight functions without which the market activities would scarcely unfold. In essence, they regulate and determine the social composition of the market. The role designations of *Baba Oja* (Male market head) and the *Iya Oja* (female Market head) evince the subjective ascription and installation of them as informal gatekeepers in the market. Although not included on the officially list of the market executives, occupants of these two positions are often elected into being by merchants who accord them with high esteem, dignity, respect. These two actors are gatekeepers because they determine and influence the intrinsically social affairs of IUE merchants.

Importers are construed as gatekeepers because they control and determine whether or not goods flow into and circulate within the market. In essence, the economic existence of the IUE market rests squarely on them and to remove them from the market would be to shut down the market's overall economic activities, hence the symbolism of 'big fish' and that of 'strategic stakeholders'. As discussed in the opening section of the analysis, the interaction between formal gatekeepers and importers suggests that, informal gatekeepers work with formal gatekeepers to circumvent anti-e-waste import conventions.

The association of age with experience is strategic in placing *elders* of the market as informal gatekeepers along with others highlighted. It is believed as official interviewees note that the elders, particularly those in IUE business, possess rich information about the market. In essence, an important resource which enhances the designation of the elderly as gatekeepers is their access to narratives and biographies of the market's past. To have as many of them as is possible is seen as an asset that prevents error among officials charged with market administration. In other words, the more of the elders there is, the more the chances of success and vice versa, and the more likely the prevention of potential errors and pitfalls. Reverence for them and reliance on their wisdom is indicative of their strategic status as informal actors in the market. These elders in question are also seen as founders or foundational actors of the existing IUE market. The testament that elders have always said "We can follow this part… most of their advice has been working" (IDI/Market Official/2013) suggests that elders and their inputs supplied to the process of administration also determine key decision making processes of the market which eventually bind on all. Their presence as informal gatekeepers is therefore symbolic of success.

The indigenous African relevance of regard for the elderly in among the Yoruba in Nigeria is captured more aptly in 'An Ethnographic Textual Analysis of Aging and the Elders in South Western Nigeria' by Omobowale (2014). He relates with two key concepts to explain the elderly namely *Agbalagba* and *Agba Langba.* These concepts draw from Atari Ajanaku's poems. Whereas *Agbalagba* signifies the 'nobility' of the aged, the *Agba Langba* signifies the 'ignoble' elderly within the context of southwestern Nigeria. Whereas the *Agbalagba* commands 'awe' and 'appreciation' being assigned to old age, *Agba Langba* signifies 'social bewilderment' and the stigmatizing disdain being assigned to misnomer of character of the aged. Apart from providing comfort and consolation in moments of sorrow and bewilderment, the aged symbolizes benevolence, patience and protection. Above all the aged is seen as the 'epitome of wisdom' and the 'proponent of impeccable character' due to his experience and 'likely internalization of social normative'. He argues that

> "the indigenous social thought describes the aged as sources of discernment and direction for societal good. In the main, the aged have the capability, charisma and discretion to lead, decide, direct and guide without objection from the younger followership…. The aged are reposed with the responsibility of calling individuals and the society at large to order when socially impairing decisions or actions are to be undertaken or have been undertaken..:" (Omobowale, 2014:220).

This study argues in essence, that what contextually distinguishes the elderly as informal gatekeepers is their indigenous and cultural custody of wisdom and experience which projects them as a charismatic agency determining major policy and directional matters of the market. The loyalty which they enjoy on account of the subjective and symbolic local appreciation of them as the noble and reliable agency - *Agbalagba* whose presence and advice assures and ensures success in IUE market administration strengthens their significance as gatekeepers. In strategically mediating the decisions that later become binding in the market, the *elders* somewhat control and determine what happens in the market, at least as far as market administration is concerned.

The next category of informal gatekeepers includes those identified earlier as 'Peri-peasant actors' who include the *Pako,* the *Oso afia* and the *Alaye.* These three actors acquire the status of gatekeepers mainly through the offer of their resourcefulness in exchange for survival as market-actors. Literally, the term *Pako* is a Yoruba word that simply means wood. The bearers of this

name acquire the designation of gatekeepers from the fact that they construct, operate and control a toll-gate system. These toll-gates are wooden in nature and are erected as walkways `over a canal, hence serving as entry and exit passages for both sellers and buyers of IUEs. On the significance of this the *Pako* as informal gatekeepers a seller notes:

> We call them *Pako* and that is because they made that bridge with wood. And they collect money from anyone who passes through that same bridge. The government ought to fix that road but since government is nonchalant these people did it to help everyone. In the past you could not pass that road at all. You would have to turn all around before you ever gain entrance into the market. You would have paid ₦200 to come in, but these guys just take ₦10 (Ten Naira) and then you come in. They collect this money from everyone including buyers and sellers alike. We call it *Pako*. Those who collect it are indigenes and settlers in that part of the market (KII/Merchant/2013).

While serving as a solution provided for patronizers of the market, the service of the *Pako* which is aims at of shortening the distance rout into and out of the market, turns into an informal system of governance. The form in which this service is rendered and coordinated designates the role of the *Pako* as *entry-brokering.* The legitimation of the service as a form of administrative control is depicted by the fact that these agents charge each user of the wooden passage a mandatory token of ₦10 (Ten Naira) for every use of the bridge putting the total charge to ₦20 for both entry into and exit from the market at only ₦20. In essence, the toll-gate system and the resourceful service rendered indirectly ascribe on these actors the status of informal gatekeepers, who particularly define and determine entry into and exit from the market. If they feel strongly enough, these gatekeepers are powerful enough to prevent to prevent anyone from coming into the market with₦ no one stopping them, suggesting that they are somewhat unchallenged. The submission that this agency are actually indigenes of and sellers in the selected areas of the market also suggests that, these actors utilize the toll-gate system as an indirect but functional medium for extracting tribute from every user of their land. One can argue too that the *Pako* contribute in their own social relations with 'transactors' to the overall regulatory process of the market.

The second category of informal gatekeepers is that described popularly as the *Oso afia.* Although they go by several names ranging from *Apricos, Ijawos, Baranda,* they are more

popularly regarded as the *Oso afia* because this designation is Igbo and the Igbo noticeably form the larger trading population of the market. The *Oso afia* derive their designation as informal gatekeepers because they serve as interlinks between sellers and buyers of imported used electronics in the market. Whereas the *Pako* acquire the status of informal gatekeepers through the design of a wooden walkway over a canal into the market, the *Oso afia* emanate as informal gatekeepers by interconnecting sellers with potential and eventual buyers of their IUEs. Their role can therefore be described as 'patronage brokering'. As middlemen, the *Oso afia* engage extensively in information gathering about IUE merchandise in the market so as to enhance their service as middlemen. As such they acquire and possess extensive catalogues of information on the possible range of IUE goods available, their costs, as well as the locations where these goods can be found. Below a seller explains how the *Oso afia* enter into social relations with sellers to effectively emerge as middlemen, and hence too as informal gatekeepers in the market:

> Before they set out in the morning they come to inquire for the cost of items available for sales. You as a trader must also know the amount to give them, and you must give it, otherwise they will come and rob your shop in the night, so you give them (IDI/ IUE Merchant/ 2013).

Another seller describes the rituals involved in being an *Oso afia* when she said:

> We call them *Oso afia* and when you see them you will know. They usually say to customers, my brother what do you want? I have this one I have that. But before they go, they tell you they are bringing customers. Sometimes they do not even pre-inform you (shop-owners), they just bring them and use signs to communicate to you using their eyes, their mouths and sometimes their hands. So when you see them you will know. For instance, If he comes now I will be discussing and my ears will be with the customer but my eyes will be looking out for signs and signals from the hustler (*Oso afia)*. If the price of my electronics is N4000 (four thousand Naira), for the sake of that man (*Oso afia*), I will call it ₦4,500, ₦5000 or ₦6000 (six thousand Naira) to the customer he brought (KII, IUE Merchant /2013).

As noted in the previous section, the *Oso afia*, often engage in collaborative melo-dramatic social relations with sellers in order to seductively lure buyers to sellers. Once a potential buyer has been brought over to a shop, two dramatic forms of interactions are staged. Whereas the *Oso afia* uses open verbal words to converse with the buyer, he concurrently engages in non-verbal gestures with the seller who in most cases is the actual owner of the shop. The unfolding non-verbal gestures of interaction between the *Oso afia* and the seller often takes the form of

whispers and series of hand-motioning. The interaction is also symbolic of a conscious attempt to maneuver the process of transaction in favor of the *Oso afia*. Hence, as the seller notes, "If the price of my electronics is ₦4000 (four thousand Naira), for the sake of that man (*Oso afia*), I will call it ₦4,500, N5000 or ₦6000 (six thousand Naira)" (KII, IUE Merchant /2013). This implies that it is also common for the *Oso afia* to go as far as feigning as co-shop-owners or in fact as actual shop-owners, just to build trust that wins a buyer over. Once a transaction is concluded and sealed, the seller, depending on the quality and quantity of purchase made, is obligated to pay a prearranged and stipulated commission to the *Oso afia* for the service rendered. But if a seller fails in part or fully to keep such terms agreed upon before or during the concluded transaction, he or she risks losing his or her goods overnight to theft. It means that for the seller, the fear of the *Oso afia* is simply the beginning of wisdom. The tendency to pose as threats to sellers who fail in keeping deals suggests that the *Oso afia* are potential hoodlums in the market. The tendency for merchants to fail or not to succeed in their business when *Oso afia* fail to link them up with potential and actual buyers illuminates the powers of the *Oso afia* as informal gatekeepers. This view is supported by Boatright's (2007) definition of gatekeepers are key actors whose refusal to act or to provide certain service or whose decision to withdraw cooperation can lead to failure in a business.

The forgoing discussion establishes the reality and strength of the *Oso afia*. It shows that the *Oso afia* emanate as informal gatekeepers because they determine who sells and who does not sell, they determine who buys what IUEs from which seller' and hence too, 'how much a beneficiary-seller makes at the end of the day'. They turn out as advertising and marketing agents and they of course collect commission. In essence, though the *Oso afia* are peri-peasants in socio-economic terms, they are very much powerful, in determining the success of a trader and the market. The role of *Oso afia* as informal gatekeepers substantiates Sato's (2012) position that gatekeepers are intermediaries. Whereas gatekeepers mediate between production and consumption in Sato's (2012) argument, *Oso afia* as identified in this study intermediate and interlink buyers with sellers and vice versa, hence determining what IUE is bought and from whom it is bought. But it is also evident that despite their strengths as gatekeepers, and despite the opportunities they have to succeed within the IUE market, the *Oso afia* manifest notable contradictions. Further interviews reveal that besides their potentiality to be hoodlums as noted in preceding interviews,

this category also manifest other contradictions. This includes the failure to convert commissions, incomes and resources made from interlink services for self-development. Their weakness in terms of inability to appropriate income for family upkeep and the consequent tendency to resort to begging from sellers is highlighted below.

> When I was coming here now, an *Oso afia* was asking me for money and he said: "*chairman e no easy, I don hustle hustle, no way!"*. (Chairman, it has not been easy, I have struggled and struggled without success). And the wife is asking for money at home accusing him of lavishing money on women, when in reality he does not even have anything to eat. So it is survival of the fittest (IDI/Trader/2013).

The ironic abject situation of the *Oso afia* despite being gatekeepers is buttressed below by yet another merchant who observes that:

> Another one of them told me that it is not easy for him as he finds it difficult taking home at least ₦1000 or ₦500 at the end of the day. In fact he said, if I am not careful another man will win my wife's heart (IDI/Trader/2013).

In the explanation that follows, another seller explains the reason(s) why it seems difficult for the *Oso afia* succeed and why they continue to experience abjectness when he said:

> Most of these boys are not disciplined, they go out with girls, and they spend their money carelessly in bear parlors. At the end of the day they lose everything, and you will always have to start afresh. So how can such a person have money? My believe is that if anyone must survive in this market, he must put his head down, humble himself and be hardworking, then the market will help him. I must also tell you that most of us who own shops today started as *Oso afia* in this market but we know what we wanted and today we are here. They just have to be serious (IDI/Market Official/2013).

Despite the gains made from gatekeeping, the foregoing narratives from sellers indicate that the situation of the *Oso afia* generally remains abject. In the narrative presented by the seller, the *Oso afia* remain poor as they often lack money. Rather making do with what incomes they make from serving as interlinks, they always seem to have little or nothing to show for their work at the end of the day. It is ironic that they even go as far as begging from sellers of IUEs just to make up for their lack. The customary presentation of the pitiful conditions of their homes and the distressing complains of their wives in order to appeal to the sympathy of sellers presupposes an attempt to moralize their act of begging from sellers. It also depicts an attempt to erase the

meanings of shame which people socially attach to the act of begging. The *Oso afia* who claims to have "*hustled (struggled) and hustled (struggled) without success"* and the one who "*finds it difficult taking home at least ₦1000 or ₦500 at the end of the day*" (IDI/Trader/2013) buttress the puzzling contradictions of these informal gatekeepers. While they play a very strategic role in the market, as interlinks and determinants of the fate of IUE sellers, it is puzzling that they still find it hard to succeed at the home front as breadwinners. The irony in this case is their tendency to beg even when as gatekeepers they should have enough from their daily income as key influencers of sale in the market.

A closer look at narratives on the *Oso afia* also reveals that their ironic weakness is not imposed or caused by a force external to them but by the meanings which they subjectively attach to livelihood –that what gains they make can be wastefully and lavishly spent. Their potential and actual abjectness derives primarily from these meanings and it is manifest in the forms of social actions and social relations which they enter into with others in the market namely the sellers. The relative ostentatious spending of the *Oso afia* is instrumental in subjecting them to the mercy of those whose fate, in regard to trade they ordinarily determine and influence. A seller castigates their ignoble outlook and habit when he affirms that anyone including the *Oso afia* could succeed in the IUE market with diligence and focus. This view is premised on the belief that several successful IUE merchant rose through the same experience to become successful today, including the serving Chief security Officer of the market interviewed earlier and who is also an IUE trader. The key argument here is that as interlinks and as informal gatekeepers influencing sale in the market, the *Oso afia* have all they need to succeed but failure by them to harness these resource for success with a right mind explains their poverty and thus too, their weakness. One can argue that the inability of the *Oso afia* to account for the gains made in the market remains a factor behind their ironic abject situations. To this end, another interviewee observes that "they (Oso afia) could be bad indeed (as they pose potential threats to sellers)". And this is because "you know, a hungry man is an angry man" (KII/Official and Seller/2013).

The last category of the 'peri-peasant actors' in the market is the *Alaye. 'Alaye,'* in Yoruba etymology, simply means a 'powerful' actor who wields some control. More specifically, it is usually used to describe overbearing hoodlums (Aiyejina, Gibbons and Sam Phills, 2009). Not

only does the term *Alaye* deify persons as super-humans, it also ascribes to persons power of control. The term depicts such humans as controllers of a given course. Interviews that follow present subjective views about what the term *Alaye* stands for. For instance an interviewee argues that:

> Only God is *Alaye* and *Alaye* simply means 'owner of the world'. However some of us call some people *Alaye* due to how they behave. This is either because they are extremely tough or because they are often unchallenged. Sometimes it is used to refer to someone who enjoys the protective rights of a top-shot who is hidden somewhere (KII/Technician/2013).

Another interviewee explains the deific significance of the reference among humans when he said:

> Going by the literal meaning of the '*Alaye'* –'owner of the world', I think that not even Obasanjo (the then rulling Nigerian president), Obama (the present American president) can refer to himself as that. I think if anyone is described as '*Alaye',* it simply means that those people have no boundaries, they are lawless. In fact they are lawless elements (IDI/ Market Official/2013).

Indeed, the term *Alaye* as shown has a deific significance for its bearers. The term also represents the subjective imagery and representations of some persons in the market. Contextually, *Alaye* subjectively describes men, particularly those who bear attributes perceived to be somewhat extreme for humans. As far as the IUE market space is concerned, the term *Alaye* is reserved for the earthly powerful, who in this case, have attributes such as toughness, tendency to act with impunity and to be unchallenged by others.

Turning to the day to day application of the term in the market, further interviews affirm that indeed, the term *Alaye* is a representative symbolism used to *subjectively* describe a category of action and behavior by a set of practices. Bearers of this designation are so-designated because they considerably exhibit unofficial but overt power and control over others with respect to certain activities in the market. Initial interviews conducted reveal that social relations of the *Alaye* like those of *Oso afia,* manifest notable contradictions and ironies. These ironic relations are depicted in the three major ways in which their perceived value by others is discussed in the market. In the first set of interviews, *Alaye* are valued as informal gatekeepers because they exhibit control over and determine how space is taken and occupied in the market. Hence they determine access to space and hence too, who trades where, within the physical market setting.

Coupled with this is the tendency for them to also demonstrate the power to ensure orderliness in the market as wardens or moderators of daily social relations and interactions. An interviewee notes for instance that the *Alaye* are accepted and related to in the market because they:

> often clear all the trucks that come into this market. In other words, without them no container brings in any loads into the market. They also punish thieves and anyone caught stealing. You need to see them in action when thieves are caught, they drill defaulters like soldiers (KII/Scavenger/2013).

Another interviewee substantiates the above saying that:

> The truth is no one confronts them and they are like securities in this market. Once you mind your business you will have no problems with them. They sometimes ask us for money like one thousand naira and we give them. This money creates a relationship between us. Tomorrow when someone fails to pay us our money we invite them and they ensure that such monies are paid back to us (KII/IUE Market-Actor/2013).

In essence the typical social relation which earns them the deific symbolism of *Alaye* is the fact that control access to space, sanction defaulters as well as the tendency for disorderliness. One can therefore argue that those who go by the designation *Alaye* -as informal gatekeepers emerge in this first set of narratives as 'informal police' in the market. The deific value and meaning attached to occupants of this symbolic designation is indicated by the fact that others pay tributes and royalties to them as marks of respect and regard. In this first value of the *Alaye,* it can be inferred from the interviews that they acquire the symbol of informal gatekeepers because they control and broker space to intending sellers seeking to have one and because they generate orderliness within the market through their powers to sanction crimogenic behavior and deviant behaviors in the market.

The payment of royalties and tributes to them by members of the market in return for their service establishes a degree of commonality in the contextual social relations characterizing interactions of the 'peri-peasant actors' with the rest of the market in general. Their abilities to naturally exact obedience in others, to be construed as unchallengeable, and to be paid royalties in return for their service as gatekeepers of orderliness legitimizes the contextual deific designation of them as *Alaye*. They may not be gods in the literal sense, but to be called *Alaye* in light of the explanations presented by interviewees denotes a social designation of them as demi-

gods who create fear around others and who express coercive power through problem solving. The interpretive meaning of the *Alaye* represented in these characteristic social relations justifies why in this interviews they emanate as 'informal Police' of the market. Boatright (2007) classifies gatekeepers as parties whose cooperation is essential for the functioning of an organization and whose service as securities can prevent misconduct. In the context of IUE merchandise and transaction, the *Alaye* potentially emerge as parties to sellers and buyers. Yet their role as informal police and their capacity to control access to space and to ensure orderliness as informal security agents aptly illustrate Boatright's (2007) classification of gatekeepers as agents who prevent individual or corporate misconduct within an organization.

In the next interviews, bearers of *Alaye a*re also construed and valued as providers of self-protection to IUE merchants who employ them for various subjective personal interests. Given the slight variation of this value of the *Alaye* with the one just discussed, one can argue that the term is a subjective and shifting label which is fluid rather fixed in its application. In other words, the name *Alaye* may be constant but its behavioral and social relational significance remain subjective as far as meanings attached to the value of the term within the IUE market is concerned. To therefore think of the *Alaye* as providers of self-protection is to also offer explanation on this subjective representation for their role as informal gatekeepers. Whereas the value assigned to *Alaye* in the previous interviews derives from the service offered by its bearers as informal police who ensure orderliness and who control, broker and determine who occupies what space, in the succeeding interviews *Alaye* emanate as gatekeepers who owing to their perceived wildness are employed to forcefully safeguard access to political offices for desperate merchants of IUE merchandise while equally disadvantaging others.

Whereas in the initial value, the service of the *Alaye* is open to everyone interested, in this current value the service of the *Alaye* and their value are enjoyed mostly by the very influential and rich category of IUE merchants –desperate political figures. In essence, the social relations sustaining *Alaye's* service of self-protection depends chiefly on the socio-economic placement of the potential or intending beneficiary. A market official sheds light on the meanings and value attached to *Alaye* as sources of self-protection by political office seeking merchants when he said:

> Some market leaders in attempt to intimidate their opponents politically use them as political instruments. Within this market for instance there are little political blocs in which former ex-chairmen, ex-vice-chairmen; ex-secretaries seek relevance through membership in caucus. Once they have that caucus, they use it to exact their influence within the political space of the larger market leadership. In pursuit of that goal they try to liaise with *Alaye* (IDI/Market Official/2013).

Describing patronizers and beneficiaries of this value of the *Alaye* as 'wicked elements', still another official said:

> There are some wicked elements (that is leaders) in this market who hire their services. This is because they know that the officials of the Nigerian police cannot be used in achieving their aims. So they believe that the only way to do it is to hire the service of the A*laye* (IDI/Market Official/2013).

Yet another interviewee notes that the fearsome nature of the *Alaye* can also explain why the more influential merchants of IUE patronize them to pursue personal interests:

> For example I know of a case where a businessman within this market was able to acquire a property for over ₦30 million. And that property happened to be a residential property that has more than 50 tenants, room and parlors. And when he took possession of this property, there was commotion between the old and the new tenants, seeking for a time period between which they will have to evacuate their belongings. And the period of six months was given. Between that time span, some of them were reluctant and the man invited the police. The police came and opted for the court rather than eject the tenants forcefully. So the man knew that the cost of involving the police was high and he hired the services of the Alayes. So upon being invited, they went there with about 10 cartons of beer of which only two were not empty. This was just to prove to these unyielding tenants that there was trouble. So after consuming the wine, they started breaking the bottles within the premises of that same compound. They ended up beating women, pregnant women, children and such like. And suddenly these tenants started running, moving out and seeking for how to evacuate their items and their personal belongings. That was how the man successfully got rid of them. This is clearly something that the police would not have been able to do except through court process. So what makes you think that such a group would not remain in business? They are in business because they have patronizers (IDI/Market Official/2013).

In highlighting the value of *Alaye* as providers of self-protection in the market, these interviews present a consensus on the meanings attached to this category. Two dynamics of the *Alaye* issue from these narratives. The first is that of the *Alaye* as fearsome and unchallenged category who cannot be deterred by others and who can therefore be used to advance self-seeking ends in the

market. In this case, the deific significance of the *Alaye* presents the power and supremacy of its bearers in terms of thuggery –a value which disadvantages many to favor a few. Their value as almighties is construed and exploited by this few as a resource for exacting their influence within the political space of the larger market leadership. Hence, one can argue that the *Alaye* as sources of self-protection ironically only enhance nothing but the oppression of others in the market. The preference for them rather than for the official state police further buttresses the immoral and criminal intent characterizing this aspect of social relations with them. Notwithstanding that only a few -influential of the market, rather than all, derive the value of self-protection from the *Alaye*, it can be convincingly argued along with Campbell et al (2006) that the service of offering self-protection also buttress the status of the *Alaye* as gatekeepers. This is because they directly or indirectly provide -access to particular resources needed to self-actualization by some, within the political and power space of IUE merchandise.

As sources of self-protection, the presence of the *Alaye* is significant in creating social differentiation between those who patronize their service and those who do not, and this effects a social class system within IUE merchandise. Their common methods in offering self-protection to some IUE market actors as against others clearly disparages their initial significance as informal gatekeepers in the market. Intoxication with alcohol to oppress others on behalf of an individual shows that even the very process of helping those whose legitimate rights are denied – Land Lords, relies upon vice. The value derived from *Alaye* in terms of self-protection buttresses the irony and contradiction(s) of this category as informal gatekeepers -perceived otherwise as informal IUE market police. As with *Oso afia*, this ironic representation imagery of the *Alaye*, suggests that the service of 'peri-peasant actors' is characterized by a common tradition. A common symbolism across both the *Oso afia* and the *Alaye* is that of a constant contradiction of strengths and weaknesses suggesting embedded and changing social relations of role playing within the market. In view of the study's focus on social relations, the various values assigned to the *Alaye* enhance a wider understanding of the dynamics of social relations of IUE merchandise in general.

The views stated above are just but one position on the value of the *Alaye* in the market. There is in fact a contrary position, which insinuates the fact that they may not have any value at all. This

is because contrary to the view that they are valuable for all - because they resolve conflict and because they enhance orderliness in the market; and contrary to the position that they have value for some –because they offer self –protection, further interviews present them within social relations of thurgery since their activities are about chaos. As interviewees explain, *Alaye* create disorder and also exploit it. They would do all within their reach including the manufacture of conflict and the exploitation of it to achieve their aims and personal ends. An interviewee presents below, the *Alaye* as 'vultures' see conflict as a means to an end:

> I will like to refer to the *alaye* as *Vultures in conflict.* They come in with the intention to reap from a conflict. And in most cases they themselves try to originate conflict or they try to blow up conflict. When it does not exist they try to act it up to create a conflict situation (IDI/Market Official/2013).

The propensity to maneuver conflict to their own advantage is buttressed by yet another interviewee who said:

> If there is a fight between Mr A and Mr B over any major or minor issue. You see them coming there to prey on the situation. They would either want to side Mr A so that at the end of the day you get them something or vice versa. Besides they carry out diverse sorts of heinous activities (IDI/IUE Merchant/2014).

Still another interviewee highlight on how they manipulate confusion from ongoing conflict to perpetrate crime by stealing from others as he asks:

> How else do you explain this? When there is a dispute between two people, they would not examine the nitty-gritty of the whole issue. The first thing they do is to throw a slap on that person. Yes! That is to create confusion and fear and in that ensuing confusion, you are likely to lose valuable personal properties, handsets, laptops and other electronic gadgets. They have no powers in a calm environment; they reap where there is commotion (IDI/Market Official/2013).

The one aim of the Alaye in cases of conflict is not to resolve it but to reap from it by terrorizing the disputants as another interviewee explains:

> Once they arrive at any venue of conflict, the disputants are not even given any fair hearing. The 'alaye' would want to unleash terror with the intention to instill fear on the disputants and then see what could come their way from the dispute. So they blow up conflict to their own economic advantage (IDI/Market Official/2013).

Alaye's chaotic tendencies towards others may even take the form of calculated accidents in which conflicts are manufactured to the disadvantage of naïve and unsuspecting patronizers of the IUE market as yet another interviewee notes:

> What real *alaye* do when they operate is to hold a defective phone and pretend as though receiving or making a call. And while the call is on, they loosen the grip of the handset. They hold it so loose that if you are trying to pass, you hit them and they leave the handset. The design of the handset is such that the moment it falls, it scatters and breaks into pieces and they ask the person to pay back (IDI/Market Official/2013).

Conflict can also be created to forcefully extort money from others as yet another interviewee notes when he said:

> There was an importer that brought in some used electronics (IUEs) and they (alaye) actually went there to negotiate with the intention to buy. When they got there they had a problem with the importer with regards to price. The importer stuck to the price and at the end of the day they could not agree. So they left and went somewhere to reposition themselves watching for who would buy that item at a much higher price. Later on a higher bidder eventually came and offered to buy at the importer's price. While he was on his way, these guys (alaye) accosted him, threatening him that this was the good they actually negotiated and were actually coming to pay for. And to have gone to buy it at a much higher price than theirs, he was asked to pay them the difference of the price. When they intimidated the man he told them no one had informed him that they had been there before. He said he had no knowledge of their interest in the good at all. He asked "so why are you asking me to make any payment or contribution to you"? And while the man watched, they raised their clothes to show him weapons they concealed in their clothes. They told him the best he could do was to make payment to them. So out of fear, and not knowing where to run to, the man had to meet one of them who called him to a corner and they began to negotiate (KII/Market Official/2013).

These narratives on the *Alaye* present them as a chaotic and disagreeable. Their tendency to be forceful, domineering, and oppressive portrays them as thugs who prey on others in IUE merchandise space for personal gains. Their description as 'vultures' who take sides with a disputant against another suggests that the *Alaye* simply maximize conflict for profit. For them meanings attached to social relations of conflict in the market is that of self-transformation. Whereas Woodward (2011) identifies self-transformation as a form of meaning mediating subject-object relations, the manipulation of ongoing conflict to acquire profit - monetary and

material gains suggests that, contextually, 'self-transformation' can also derive from social manipulative actions and social relations between actors. In essence, for the *Alaye* conflict emanates as *a*n opportunity rather than as a problem. Various forms of actions reflecting these meanings include arbitrary siding with one against another disputant, physical intimidation of disputants with the aim of instilling fear and confusion from which they can reap. They also steal properties from disputants by aggravation ongoing conflict to derail attention from their mission. The use of charms and crude weapons to oppress and to instill fear in unsuspecting others enfaces their social actions as thuggery. It also suggests that the *used* merchandise market, particularly the IUE marketplace is characterized by various levels of creative but clever social relations, not only between sellers and buyers but also among market-actors (gatekeepers and traders alike). In essence both consumers and sellers are potentially vulnerable to social relations and actions of others within this marketplace.

Indeed, the tendency to manufacture accidents and victims through the use of fake phones appearing as the actual Global Systems Mobile (GSM) phones, to feign calls presupposes attachment of exploitative meaning to enactment of social action. One of Weber's types of actions - the social action, is carefully employed here. That is, action that is meaningfully oriented in its course towards others (Warriner, 1969, Tunstall and Thompson, 1976). In this case, even what appears initially as the mere action –dramatized action towards things – feigning calls' using fake phones, is creatively programmed to deceive unsuspecting potential victims to believe that, in truth a call is being made. And when finally the preconceived accident is acted out, and conflict is successful manufactured with the victim, the sociality action and by extension too, a programmed social relation is born. In this example, the meaning attached to action (conflict) by the *Alaye* is that of self-transformation. It can therefore be argued that the values of the *Alaye* which stand would depend on the meanings assigned to them and who is assigning these meanings either as beneficiaries (of self-protection) or as victims (brutally treated and oppressed). The *Verstehen* -subjective understanding of the *Alaye's* action in this case the second type of Weber's *Verstehen* namely erkldrendes –explanatory understanding (Heap, 1977, Hall, 1981).

The current discourse of *Alaye* as a 'de-value' category, presents conflict and disorderliness as ironic antithesis of the 'valued' *Alaye* who are ascribed with the capacity to ensure orderliness by solving people's problems. The potentiality of *Alaye* in their current value for conflict and disorderliness presents a counter discourse to that which initially portrays them as informal police bringing peace and orderliness into social relations of IUE merchandise. As for the symbolism of the *Alaye*, this study argues that, *Alaye's* manifest ironic social relations in the IUEs space presents them as actors who bear negative but deific attributes of super-humans identified in (Aiyejina, Gibbons and Sam Phills, 2009). This argument is affirmed by Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun (1989) who note that gods, like humans, possess both positive and negative values – differing strengths as well as foibles, which are the actualizations of their distinctive life force as expressed by their natures or personalities. In essence, even as deities venerated by men, gods and in this case, subjectively depicted gods –*Alaye* can manifest both positive and negative attributes. Hence, for their superiority to ensure orderliness as informal police, and for their capacity to present or deny access to space as space-brokers, the *Alaye* are widely valued and venerated by IUE merchants as informal gatekeepers. Secondly, they are also partly valued by a few (political and influential self-seeking merchants) rather than all, as mediums of 'self-protection'. On the other hand however, they are also unwillingly accepted in the market for their mostly brutal, thug-like, and criminal self-assertion on and social relations with others. These three ways in which the 'value' and 'de-value' of the *Alaye* are portrayed by interviews represent the potential contradiction(s) of even the deific gods, and in this case the *Alaye* in question.

The reality of *Alaye* can be linked to the wider ironies of Lagos itself as a megacity and as a space of polycentric contradictions. While it is celebrated for its rich life, and ethos of hard work, ingenuity and capacity for local technological innovation and adaptation, Obono (2007) argues that Lagos as the largest modern metropolis in Nigeria could also be a crimogenic space. This virtual, industrialized and modernized necropolis can be ironically replete with corruption, poverty, crime, and sprawling corpses. He calls this contradiction the 'enigma and stigma' of the megacity Lagos. Poverty, high youth unemployment, slum concentrations and financial struggle remain catalytic to the rise of Area boys –bands of loosely organized hoodlums who harass residents and visitors with the aim of extorting money, cell phones, and jewelry. This tendency

he associates with the traumatizing psychic conditions inflicted by the encroachment of suburbs by 'cittiness' in which the poor are generally dislodged from the mainstream resources of this society. Altogether, he argues that in Lagos, this mixture of ethnic norms, lower class consciousness, and internally derived world view produces a freak moral order that helps in understanding the social chaos of the city.

It can be argued from Obono (2007) perspective that contradictory social relations of the *Alaye* as informal gatekeepers – custodians of orderliness on the one hand, and potential thugs and hoodlums on the other, are direct evidences of the 'valued' deific - enigma –and the 'de-valued' deific stigma of the *Alaye* in a Lagos order. The routine of ensuring orderliness and expressing conflict side by side within social relations of IUE merchandise presupposes that indeed, they are both behavioral symbols of gods (See Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun, 1989) in the world view of the market's interaction, as well as reflections of the larger moral, social and economic order of Lagos as a megacity hosting both the rich and the poor alike. Given the spread of these contradictions across both the *Oso afia* and the *Alaye* as informal gatekeepers, this study posits that the IUE merchandise space in general represents a dynamic order in which the larger Lagos order is creatively played out along with a deific order assigned to ordinary humans by their fellow men.

The discourse in this section has explained the social relations of IUE merchandise at two main levels namely: the formal and informal levels of gatekeeping. The reality of 'formal gatekeeping' is explained in regard to key official state actors such as NESREA, Nigerian Customs and the Basel Convention. These three agencies, particularly NESREA and the Nigerian Customs are identified as formal gatekeepers because they control, regulate and determine whether or not used electronics are imported into Nigeria and in what forms too. Essentially, they stand between the origins of IUEs and the IUE merchandise and market actors in Nigeria. As interviews with them suppose, it is difficult and almost impossible to import used electronics without their permission or approval. Whereas 'formal gatekeepers' socially relate indirectly with IUE market-actors only at the port, 'informal gatekeepers' whose social relations are domestic to the market enact social relations mainly within the IUE market space. Those identified as 'informal gatekeepers' exist in two forms namely as 'key market officials' and as 'peri-peasants'. 'informal

gatekeepers' identified include the chairmen, the *Baba* and *Iya Oja,* the taskforce, the importers and the elders or gerunds, all of whom regulate and determine directly and indirectly the existence and order of the IUE merchandise. The 'peri-peasants' as already shown include the *Pako, Oso afia* and the *Alaye* who in their characteristic social relations also play crucial roles as gatekeepers concerned with 'entry-brokering', 'patronage-brokering;' and 'space brokering' respectively among other roles. By and large, social relations of gatekeepers, both formal and informal show that, IUE merchandise is enmeshed within a multi-level social organization to be discussed in the next section.

4.5 Social Organization of Imported Used Electronics (IUE) Merchandise

This section discusses the social organization of imported used electronics merchandise. Geddes (1953) defines social organization as the directional activity which maintains the form(s) and serves the end of social relations sustaining interactions in a group. The principles which sustain the formation of social relations within a social organization depend on the principles underlying social structure. Groves (1966) identifies various yardsticks for understanding the concept, of social organization and its relevance for the comprehension of IUE merchandise. He argues that a social organization can be defined as:

> 'ordered action', 'concrete social activity arranged in interrelated sequences'; 'the working arrangements of society'; 'the processes of ordering of action and of relations in reference to given social ends, in terms of adjustments resulting from the exercise of choices by members of the society'; 'that continuous set of operations in a field of social action which conduces to the control and combination of elements of action into a system by choice and limitation of their relations to any given ends' (Groves, 1966:113).

He describes social organization, as the visible patterns and regularities which result from the process of decision-making and allied processes. The study of social organization is therefore a study of social groups and social relations of a relatively permanent kind, expressed in a very systematic, highly abstract form', and 'the study of how social relations actually work out over time'.

Drawing from these two broad definitions, this study argues that social organization is a 'structural', 'ritualized' and a 'relational' phenomenon that is characterized by specialized individual as well as collective action, corporateness and goal orientation of actors who share

common values. In the interviews which follow, this study discusses the structural aspects of the social organization in which interdependent set of actors sustained IUE merchandise. These actors include 'official gatekeepers', 'administrators' (administration/leadership), 'actor-merchants' who consist of 'importers', 'retailers', 'interlinks-security', 'merchantabilizers/ resuscitators', and 'scrap-traders' who themselves consist of 'scrap-collectors', 'bulk-buyers' and 'exporters'.

The 'official-gatekeepers' who are identified earlier in this study as 'legal-rational governance' agents include NESREA, officials of the Nigerian Customs Service and country representatives of the Basel Convention. As stated they determine whether or not used electronics are successfully imported into Nigeria and in what forms too. They have as their central roles, the verification and ascertainment of all used electronics being imported into Nigeria. They do this through the practice of material and physical 'functionality- testing' of all used electronics designated for importation into Nigeria. Their centrality to the existence of IUE merchandise explains why they constitute part of the interdependent actors who sustain the existence of this *used* merchandise of electronics.

'Administrators' are the next in this structure and they have the obligation of providing administrative and leadership roles that regulate day to day activities underlying IUE merchandise. These administrators include chairman, the vice chairman, the secretary, the financial secretary the treasurer, the provost, the welfare officer, the assistant secretary and the office of the PRO. The interview below explains that indeed the merchandise of IUEs operates as an association run and coordinated by key actors whose roles and functions define specific aspects of IUE merchandise:

> Of course we have an association and we have various categories of executive members and even heads of departments. Among those we call the electable executives we have the office of the chairman, office of the vice chairman, office of the secretary of the association, the financial secretary the treasurer, the provost, the welfare officer, the assistant secretary and finally the office of the PRO. In all we have 9 electable officers (IDI/ASSOCIATIONAL HEAD/2013).

An interviewee explains below how the administrative association functions as a problem solving agency that advances the interest of its members through frequent interactional social relations saying:

> When anything happens we always go to our leaders to present our reports and complaints.… We always have meetings every first Thursday of the month. So if you have anything disturbing you, you can make it known and they will correct it and if by the next meeting that problem is not solved, you bring it up again during the next meeting and it would be resolved (IDI/IUE Seller/2013).

The significance of elders or gerunds in the IUE market administrative structure, and that of other notable actors of the administration is buttressed by an interviewee who notes that:

> We also have departments such as the founding fathers departments, the elders' forum and then the executive. Then also we have heads of committees, sanitation department, security department, taskforce department and monitoring units and these are all subordinate to the 9 electable executives (IDI/Market Official/ 2013).

These interviews substantiate the position of Geddes (1953) who had defined social organization as the directional activity which maintains the form(s) and serves the end of social relations sustaining interactions in a group. The potentiality of the market administration to regulate, coordinate and oversee the organization of IUE merchandise is indicative of directional relevance of this category in the structures already highlighted. Reliance on these actors for problem solving by members of the organization –merchants /sellers suggests trust between the two actors. The supremacy assigned to elected officials over other non-elected members of the executive is also symbolic of the supremacy of members and their choice in the wider decision making process. These altogether affirm Geedes' (1953) definition of a social organization. As with the discourse on gatekeepers, these interviews also acknowledge regard for gerunds or elders in decision making. Owing to their foundational significance to the inception the trade and the physical marketplace they are accorded regard by members along with heads of other committees listed in the interviews.

In the earlier part of this section the study had identified several actors who constitute the social organization. These actor-merchants include 'importers', 'retailers', 'interlinks-security', 'merchantabilizers/resuscitators', and 'scrap-traders' who themselves consist of 'scrap-collectors', 'bulk-buyers' and 'exporters'. However, before highlighting on the significance of importers and retailers and other related actors, the role of 'interlinks-security' will be discussed

to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the social organization of IUE merchandise across structures. It is noteworthy to mention again that the role(s) of informal gatekeepers, especially the 'peri-peasant actors', emanate not by formal design of the market, but as products of unfolding processes of adaptation to social relations in the IUE market. The three notable actors in this regard include the *Pako,* the *Oso afia,* and the *Alaye.* Through the practice of 'entry-brokering' administered through the toll-gate system, the *Pako* acquire considerable influence, control and superintendence over entry and exit into the IUE market, and hence too participation of users of this toll-gate in the economic life of IUE merchandise. On their part, the *Oso afia* acquire control and superintendence of over patronage as they resourcefully offer themselves as interlinks between merchants and consumers. Hence, the *Oso afia* strategically shape and determine the sale of IUE goods in the market as well as mediate indirectly and directly social relations between actual sellers and buyers of IUEs. The *Alaye* through the practice of 'space-brokering' and through their service as 'informal police' acquire considerable influence, control and superintendence over IUE market space and its potentiality for orderliness. While the *Pako* emanate as informal regulators of entry, the *Oso afia* as interlinks determining sales, the emergence of the *Alaye* as informal police is crucial for the understanding of this element of the IUE merchandise structure as the informal security agents of the market. Along with leaders of the market who play administrative roles, it can be argued that, informal gatekeepers play coercive and economic functions that sustain the social organization and order of this market.

Importers also form part of the social structure of the IUE merchandise and they have been identified in preceding sections as strategic stakeholders. Interviews that follow present their centrality to the social organization of the market in two ways: in terms of IUE sourcing and in light of the dynamics of importation practices which they commonly adopt. In other words, focus of discussion is on –'where they source IUEs from' and 'what particular rituals characterize the act of used electronics importation into Nigeria'. An importer explains below where used electronics are sourced from and how it is equally possible to have and trade imported goods by depending on a fellow importer:

> We import these electronics from the United Kingdom (UK), some other importers go to Singapore, Switzerland, Germany. Apart from importing, sometimes I buy locally from others who have imported. For instance I just called

> importer from another market who just arrived. He imports refrigerators and LCDs, but because I deal in used electronics like LCDs I buy from him. So it is all about contacts, we importers know ourselves (IDI/Importer/2013).

From the above, two main dimensions of importation exist namely: the possibility of importing by travelling and that of importing without necessarily travelling. An interviewee discusses the two types of importation practices when he said:

> You can be an importer who travels out without owning an outlet of your own and all you do is to sell to those with outlets. You can also be an importer without travelling out and without having an outlet, all you do is simply order from abroad and sell to owners of outlets and you make your money within one week or two weeks. Your brother can be sending those electronics to you. And as an importer you have to be straightforward to control your price for all, so that at the price you sell out, such people can also make their own sale. The wholesalers can still come to you and get it the same price; the traders can then get to you and also sell it the same price. You just have to sell cheaper otherwise everybody would run away from you (IDI/ Seller/2013).

It is also possible for an importer who has a shop but does not travel to depend upon kins abroad who themselves, rely on transfer of used electronics to Nigeria as an extra source of income when he said:

> I do not often go there, my elder brother stays there. He often sends them to me. What I do is to send the money to him. Some are living there, some work there. When they work, they get money, they load and then ship them down here and once the goods arrive we clear them. So when the electronics are sold the money is sent back to them and they buy and so on (IDI/Importer/2013).

While it is established that importers and importation of IUE remain strategic to the survival of IUE merchandise in general, the study also argues that in itself, importation as a practice is a multifaceted ritual. Depending on the subjective meanings attached to this role within the market, the term importer assumes a fluid and shifting form rather than a fixed application. The above interviews reveal that an importer who travels out of the country to buy used electronics but still lack a personal retail shop of his own. Someone who bears the name importer can also be a non-traveller as well as a non-shop owner at the same time and yet be called an importer. In the first case, such an importer would often resort to the use of warehouses to assemble his supply until they are completely bought.

In another sense, an importer who neither travels nor owns a personal shop of his own could engage strictly in supplies to shop-owners and retailers as he depends on kins living or working abroad for his IUEs. It is also customary, as these interviews show that, importers whatever their type must always sell at cheaper prices their goods in order to reorder for new imports. An importer could also have a shop but not be involved in travelling at all. In this case, he or she would usually rely on the help of family members living abroad to purchase these goods and ship them over to Nigeria where he receives them and sells them in his shop. On their part, these kins could also utilize this relations with the importers based at home to supplement their running income.

Retailing is another ritual which is significant to the social organization of IUE merchandise. Since all merchants of IUEs depend on imported goods to thrive in the market, retailing remains strategic and essential for understanding the wider social organization of IUE merchandise. Initially, it seemed puzzling how importers without shops cope with their merchandise, but this discussion on IUE retailing sheds some light on how they cope with goods in the absence of a shop of their own. A market official comments on IUE retailing among importers when he said:

> Their container comes after been cleared by agents at the port. It stands in front of the importer's shop or warehouse. Even when they have no shops they have shops. What I mean is that, as an importer he can rent a building called a warehouse. His items can remain there as long as buyers come to buy. After selling the goods, he vacates the warehouse(IDI/former Market Official/2013).

Other rituals annotating the social structure of IUE merchandise is the belief in Bulk-buying from importers and the practice of marking goods by end-users to separate their choice selections from selections of others. This duo ritual is explained by a merchant who explains that:

> When the importer container arrives into the market we organize the goods, minus how much we pay him. We must buy everything from him. Later on other petty traders would come to buy from us… when we were offloading there were people who were using marker to mark the ones they like. After we settle on cost with the importer, they remove the ones they have marked and we resell it to them. If any other thing is left and if we are up to two or three buyers, we often divide the cost among ourselves and we pay the importer. That is how we do it here. The importer does not sell in singles otherwise it would waste his money and time (IDI/IUE Merchant/2013).

The patronage of importers by retailers is also potentially specialized as an importer notes below saying:

> Once we offload of goods you find that those dealing in sonny will buy sonny, someone who buys Panasonic buys the whole Panasonic, the one dealing with JVC buys up the whole JVC. When you look closely at them you will find out that in a particular shop, you will meet with just a particular product (IDI/Importer/ 2013).

A market official also buttresses the social relations between importers and retailers saying that "He sells to retailers who later sell to shop owners, and these shop owners resell it to end-users" (IDI/former Market Official/2013). The foregoing interviews altogether present retailing as the very next practice that succeeds the importation of used electronics. Once their cargos have been cleared from the port, importers who trade in the absence of a shop usually rent spaces described in the market as warehouses. These warehouses can then serve as temporary shops to house these goods until they are eventually sold out. As noted earlier, it is collectively believed that, to successfully trade out one's used electronics on time, a very cheap price tag must be placed on goods to attract rapid purchase. A customary practice which distinguishes retailing from other structures already discussed is the ritual of endorsing goods to indicate interest in the retailer's interest in an importer's goods. This practice in fact goes on while retailers are still negotiating with importers. And once negotiations are concluded, such items are sorted out, classified and sold out to retailers accordingly. In essence, as with 'merchantabilizing' (repairs) in which repair or IUEs unfold along specific brands, practices sustaining retailing are also potentially specialized in nature.

It is also important to note the significance of resuscitators – merchantabilizers to the social organization of IUE merchandise. Their relevance draws from the various roles which they play relative to specific aspects of the IUE merchandise and from the significance of their social relations with other actor-merchants. Merchantabilizers (repairers) assist consumers to successfully build and effect their fantasies and flattering affections for IUEs as '*resuscusitable' goods.* In other words, rather than becoming disappointed when they encounter non-functional IUEs, consumers still prefer to patronize the service of merchantabilizers to fulfill their prophetic interpretations of IUEs. Hence, merchantabilizers are crucial part of the IUE social organization because they facilitate consumer demand for IUEs. Merchnatabilizers are also significant to the

larger social organization of merchandise because they facilitate the trade of otherwise non-working IUEs classified as 'non-tested'. As a matter of fact, it is with merchantabilizers that the adjoining commodity of this market –'tested' –functional is born. Hence, their presence facilitates consumer confidence to patronize imported *used* goods in the market but also sellers' chances of selling 'non-tested' products that are supposedly presumed to be non-functioning.

Apart from the bringing extra income to IUE sellers who employ their services, merchantabilizers are also instrumental to the rise of the *Offersumption* as a form of transaction peculiar with the *used* market, and *Offersumers* as key actors in the *used* market space. With the rise of *Offersumption,* the presence of Merchantabilizers also enables the surreptitious reconstitution of goods in this market space. This is because otherwise locally used but disdained electronics –a*loku* are thus made to creep into a market that is supposedly a purely *imported-tokunbo* market. Given their multilayered relevance, this study argues that merchantabilizers occupy a seemingly covert but strategic position in the social organization of the IUE merchandise at large. Theoretically, one can argue that merchantabilizers as resuscitators of 'dying' goods are strategic agents whose service and role in IUE merchandise ensure the adjournment of otherwise end-of-life of 'non-working' goods. In a word, their specialization in this social organization symbolize a deconstruction of the throwaway society and fractures the thesis altogether.

Scrap-traders are the last agency in the social structure under discourse and they are equally relevant to the social organization of IUE merchandise. Component actors in this regard include 'scrap-collectors', 'scrap-assemblers' and 'bulk-buyers' and 'scrap-exporters'. They come in at the point when otherwise traded used goods are clearly creeping out of their utility regime. Like merchantabilizers who delay electronics EOL through repairs services, scrap-traders postpone electronics EOL by reassigning scraps with 'commercial values' which imputes on them new lives. Although they could occasionally encounter 'good ones' - functional used electronics from IUE sellers, 'scrap traders' derive their name from the very fact that they deal in electronics that have been branded as scraps. The significance of scrap-traders to the IUE merchandize is that they also extend the chain and 'episodes of values' which electronics witness. These 'episodes of

value' are represented in the *actions, practices and social relations* underlying electronics scrap-trading.

Turning away from the structures of the social organization of IUE merchandise, we proceed to discuss the membership dynamics as a 'ritualized' dimension of the social organization of IUE merchandise. Some criteria of membership into a social organization highlighted earlier include sex, age, community of language and custom, possession and occupation of a territory. As a community of actors, IUE actor-merchants also have a shared understanding about membership and requirements for involvement in the merchandise of IUEs. Contextually, acquisition of skill is a major prerequisite which can come through experience gained from direct or indirect learning from veteran and successful IUE merchants. In literature, skill acquisition is generally construed as apprenticeship. Ryan and Unwin (2001) define apprenticeship as a structured programme of vocational preparation, sponsored by an employer juxtaposing part-time education with on-the-job training and work experience, leading to a recognized vocational qualification at craft or higher level, and taking at least two years to complete, after requisite general education.

Apprenticeship is also a system of training in which young men, and much less often young women, entered contracts to work for established craftsmen and merchants for a lengthy period, generally of some years, in exchange for instruction in a craft or trade. Beyond this common core, the terms of service and the manner of its arrangement differ across human groups and is governed by a mix of law, custom, and individual inclination (Wallis, 2008). Interviews held present apprenticeship as a fundamental in the social organization IUE merchandise which can unfold non-rigidly. Below an interviewee elaborates on the necessity for experience and training to become a successful IUE importer –merchant when he said:

> The purpose is to make money; it is not just to bring the goods into the country. If you go there and pack basically wastes, you would not make your money. The person must have basic ideas of what it entails. Some people might have the money but they would not understand or know the way to start the business of used electronics. As such sometimes they will liaise with some of our colleagues who know much about it to assist them in terms of buying and loading or importing of electronics into this country. The individual cannot do it in isolation because this is purely business (IDI/Importer/ April 2013).

Below yet another interviewee explains the non-rigid access to training and also infers on the potential dynamics of apprenticeship within the context of IUE merchandise when he identifies the possibility of learning as an observing-participant:

> Most of these importers graduate from ordinary retailing to importation. After a prolonged experience of buying from those who import, they get the skill, get the necessary knowledge needed to do the trade and then they travel. They now go to Europe and get their own electronics and because of the background they already have they know what they would bring (IDI/IUE Market Official/2013).

Apprenticeship is also inaugurated by a merchant's deliberate decision to mentor and develop a novice in the business based on personal philanthropy and commitment to the cultural value of helping to develop others. This view is highlighted by a merchant who said:

> Based on the Igbo ideology you can bring in a boy from the village to serve you. But maybe at the end of the year or at the end of five or six years you now establish him. By the Igbo culture, that is an ideology of building others. You give him money; he goes to rent his own shop and starts his own business (KII /IUE Merchant/2013).

Another means by which apprenticeship is instituted is through referral from parents, friends and kins. Below an interviewee identifies parental referral as one of the means through which a novice can acquire the skills of merchandizing IUEs saying:

> The parents of the boys here bring them here to serve us and for us to settle them. They say 'train my child on this', 'train my child on that'. The parents may see you as a successful business man; automatically they will want their children to be successful as well. So the child spends a particular number of years sometimes as long as four or five years as the case may be. Depending on the kind of service the boy offers to you, you settle him with a particular amount or when your container comes, you release some goods to him to settle him with. Then you rent a shop for him and he starts. Some of them will be buying and selling and when they gather money gradually, they will travel abroad as well and start importing. And I have had so many such boys pass through me (IDI/Head of Importers' Association/2013).

Still another interviewee identifies the possibility of apprenticeship commencing through referral from friends when he said:

> Sometimes request come through someone I know. Someone I know may come and say 'my sister is looking for work o'. When we take them we agree to pay them an agreed amount at the end of the day (KII/IUE Merchant/2013).

The foregoing interview establish that, indeed as Ryan and Unwin (2001) argue, apprenticeship is a programme of vocational preparation, which an employer sponsors and which affords the apprentice opportunity to acquire on-the-job training, education and work experience. IUE merchandise might appear to be an informal business that departs subtly from formal apprenticeships highlighted in literature (See for instance Booth and Stephen, 1994), but these interviews reveal that experience is quite germane for the individual seeking to become a successful merchant of IUE with time. What is important first is for such an individual to have sufficient information about the business ranging from those on capital, the right source for good used electronics, the right and reliable business network to cultivate. An upcoming IUE merchant who lacks experience and training is bound to experience loss. In essence, it is possible to proceed into the business without adequate experience but it is not possible to avert the inevitable failure that comes with inexperience. As noted earlier, such an individual, owing to inadequate information would end up packing basically wastes and end up losing his money.

It is also possible as the interviews reveal for one to be an apprentice not directly under the instruction of a merchant but indirectly through 'observation–as- a- participant'. In this case, the leaner takes lessons and acquires experience by simply watching and observing the activities, and procedures adopted by an already successful merchant. This study refers to apprenticeship through 'observation–as-participant' as a type I form of apprenticeship in the IUE merchandise. This initial type of apprenticeship challenges the literature conception of apprenticeship in terms of formal or informal agreements between the employer and the apprentice (Booth and Satchell, 1994). The type I apprenticeship suggests that insofar as IUE merchandise is concerned, acquisition of skills is not protected, rigid or inaccessible. If anything it is completely liberal but also very requisite for involvement is the social organization of the market. This apprenticeship also challenges Sigaut's (1993) view on apprenticeship as a formal process. He argues that apprenticeship is predicated on an agreement between a master and an apprentice. This agreement (contract) conforms to the customs of the professional group involved. The view also holds that access to apprenticeship must be gained by negotiations, in which the apprentice must learn by himself; sometimes stealthily, because what he has to learn is concealed from him. .

A type II apprenticeship represented above is that which springs from or is motivated by personal commitment to one's cultural values. In the case in view, the interviewee speaks of deliberateness of a merchant to choose to socialize a novice 'boy form the village'. This can be construed as a philanthropic action towards others in one's immediate circle of influence. Reference to this as an 'Igbo ideology' suggests that it is only normal among the Igbos to engage in assisting their fellow men, and as a cultural baggage, this ideology is transported by the Igbo merchant into his merchandise of IUE. The significance of referring to the Igbo Ideology as the motivation for the type II entrepreneurship is strengthened by the interviewee who said that "of the several tribes which make up this market, people of Igbo extraction represent 65 or 75% of IUE businessmen. Hence they dominate this business environment as traders as importers, as businessmen and as dealers (IDI/Associational Head/March/2013). It can therefore be argued that the type- two- apprenticeship finds its root in an individual's subjective personal observance of and commitment to his/her ethnic cultural ideology in the secular marketplace. The fact that this form of apprenticeship is initiated voluntarily by the master not necessarily the would-be apprentice is indicative of Ryan and Unwin's (2001) argument that apprenticeship is principally sponsored by the employer.

The type III form of apprenticeship identified above is 'apprenticeship by referral'. Apprenticeship by referral as explained usually comes from the merchant's own immediate circle of influence or significant others. A novice and apprentice could be referred from parents or from friends of a merchant. The decision of such parents often emanates from the desire to see their child become as successful as this successful merchant. Thus it can be argued that the social organization of IUE merchandise even goes as far as commanding attention to the public or to significant but spectating others who admire the business ethics and practice behind successful merchants. For such admirers, this organization emerges as a source socio-economic development and socialization for them as members of the wiser society.

Depending on the nature and quality of service rendered by the apprentice, the master in the type-II and type-III models, is expected as part of the terms of agreement, and after a service period of four or five years, to settle the apprentice in one of two ways. Either by giving him a particular amount to start his own personal business as a reward for his service or when the

merchant, in this case, the importer's container –imported cargo comes, such a merchant is expected to release some goods to the successful apprentice. This would encourage him to also commence his business, where he also moves into independent buying and selling to become fully established as an IUE merchant. The type III apprenticeship buttresses again Sigaut's view that apprenticeship transmits knowledge and skills, but also values, a social identity and a tradition while giving access to professional life. Within the Nigerian economic system, characterized by massive unemployment, the promise of economic freedom that succeeds apprenticeship, is indicative of Winkelmann (1996) view that apprentices experienced fewer unemployment spells in the transition to their first full-time employment than did non-apprentices.

Whereas in formal social organizations of the state, corporate systems apprenticeship centers are called to give or supply apprenticeship services (Thérien, 1952), in the informal social organization of IUE merchandise, apprentices are informally drawn into training and skill acquisition through variable means as indicated in the type I, II and III forms of apprenticeship models discussed. The ongoing discourse of apprenticeship also buttresses the position of Breslau (2003) that apprenticeship is a form of situated learning characterized by three main features namely: 1) the services of novices within ongoing institutional activities are considered legitimate within those institutions despite their lack of prior qualification or certification. 2) The roles of novices are peripheral to, neither too close nor too far from, the ongoing activities of the organization, and 3) Novices are eventually transformed through their participation in organizational activities; this is because they learn not simply through doing, but through participating in all aspects of the organization as needs arise.

Having examined the 'structural' and 'ritualized' dimensions, the study turns to examining the social organization of IUE merchandise as a 'relational' system that is characterized by specialized individual as well as collective action rooted in corporateness based on shared understanding and common values. Verdon and Jorion (1981) buttress this view when they argued that a social organization is characterized by elements of 'corporateness', 'common ownership', 'collective action' and 'solidarity'. The next interview highlights the potentiality for

the IUE market-actors to share and to exhibit a highly specialized division of labor in their business social relations:

> Here nobody tries to do two people's job. This is like a specialized unit. Sellers are very specialized. Like I can decide to lift this thing myself, they would not do it, I would not do it. They would instead call the 'kaya' (truck-pushers) people because this is where they earn their living. I can sweep this place but I would not instead I would call someone who is to be paid to do it. So it is like everybody has a job, everybody shares their resources and everybody is happy at the end of the day. To me people should learn from them, they are very specialized (KII/ Assistant IUE Merchant/2013).

Although informal, the social relations between IUE merchants also remains highly organized and this sense of social organization exists as a value that is commonly and collectively shared not by some but by all. And this reflects in everyday market life and interaction as the interviewee below notes:

> Interaction in this market is like a code, a sort of brotherhood, a kind of culture. Three people want this particular thing. What do you expect from them? They are humans. I think they have their own way of honor. You see they mark things; so it is marked, and you respect that. One way to describe humans is that in whatever situations they find themselves, they always define the way to organize things and make it work for them. So I think they have found a system that works for them. They (IUE sellers) really make things work for them in a creative and orderly fashion. So there is a code of conduct it's beautiful so you respect each other (KII/ IUE Merchant/2013).

The highly specialized social relations of actor-merchants as expressed above suggest that interaction and role taking are not simply arbitrary. Instead they unfold in conformity with collectively understood standards of behavior. The 'corporateness' of the social organization is depicted in the shared consensus about division of labor. Even when tasks are menial enough to be undertaken by just anyone, they are left for only those vocationally designated to do them. Hence, each actor avoids "doing two people's job". The custom of asking "someone who is to be paid to do it" suggests first that, the specialized organization of social relations aims at nothing but the satisfaction of specific needs of the collective rather the needs of some. With this style of dividing labor, each actor-merchant is given an equal level of access to livelihood with others. Thus, each actor returns home satisfied at the end of each day's business.

As the second interviewee observes, the nature of social relations between actors also suggest that the social organization lives by a code. Hogan (2009) has defined a code as any system of group standards (for example, beliefs, rules, laws) that tends to regulate and integrate the behavior of group members. With this code the need to survive using the market space as platform is construed as a collective pursuit of all rather than an individualistic objective of some. Hence, the patterned ordering of social relations between IUE actor-merchants through a system of established observances - a code symbolize an existing institution. These institutions are formulated by a system of joint adherence to a set of standards which must be collectively adhered to. Jonathan Turner (1997) defines an institution as "a complex of positions, roles, norms and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organizing relatively stable patterns of human activity with respect to fundamental problems in producing life-sustaining resources, in reproducing individuals, and in sustaining viable societal structures within a given environment" (Turner 1997: 6). As an institution, the social organization of IUE merchandise ensures the resuscitation of IUEs, production of livelihood as it empowers the economically disadvantaged through the provision of a suitable system of survival for various actors of IUE merchandise.

The ordered nature of action, social activity roles arranged in structures in IUE merchandise are indicative of Groves' (1966) description of a social organization as 'the working arrangements of a group; the processes of ordering of action and relations in reference to given social ends, and in terms of adjustments resulting from the free exercise of choices by members. For him, to attempt to study social organization is to attempt to understand the regularities that arise from the process of decision-making and related processes within a group. In a word, he describes the study of social organization as the study of social groups and social relations of a relatively permanent kind, expressed in a very systematic, highly abstract form, and the study of how social relations actually work out over time.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

In the legal-rational governance, IUEs are materially but also ambiguously defined as 'Imported Used Electronics' and 'E-waste'. On the one hand, officials charged with the governance and regulation of used electronics importation define them as potential and actual carriers of 'toxicological' metal substances which pose human health and environmental threats. Merchants on the other hand, construe IUEs and their importation as mediums of economic salvation that are instrumental to local processes of self and collective survival. Whereas officials designate IUEs as e-waste, merchants construe them as simply tradable and reusable electronics. This begets a dialectics of interpretation representing two opposing worlds of meanings on used electronics importation. In framing them as 'resuscitable' objects and mediums of 'economic salvation', various 'techniques of neutralization' are employed by merchants to shift attention from evils of e-waste to other evils as poverty and unemployment at home. This has developed narratives that basically seek to justify the importation of prohibited e-waste and the circumvention of e-waste laws.

The narratives focus on 'disparaging e-waste policies', 'condemnation of condemners', otherisation of responsibility' all of which are 'rationalization of the e-waste as evil'. By and large, IUE merchants' argument is that circumvention of e-waste law is a justifiable action, especially given its benefit of providing economic salvation to the unemployed and the poor. While an overt impression of effective governance is presented by legal-rational official, low-level narratives from merchants establish that in reality, circumvention of governance covertly ensues. Corruption and definitional ambiguity are identified as serious challenges confronting e-waste governance in Nigeria. All parties trade blame each other as corrupt in what, this study describes as otherisation. The placement of responsibility of the proposed evils of e-waste on any of the parties means that everything else, except the self and merchants, take responsibility for merchandise of prohibited e-waste.

Demand for IUEs is sustained by peculiar social relations of consumption and merchandising which rationalize IUEs within the construct of the desired and affordable *material modernity*. The notion that IUEs originate from across the sea (mostly Europe and America) where everything is perceptually good, informs rather uncritical and flattering interpretations towards these goods among consumers. The same notion encourages perceptual disdain towards perceived fake Asian new and locally used electronics - *aloku.* Notwithstanding the occasional flaws of partial functionality or outright non-functionality of IUEs, consumers resiliently prefer to see them instead as resuscitable, reworkable, and hence, 'reconsumable' goods.

Consequently practices such as 'product-reworking', 'simulate-branding', among others are employed as mediums for assigning commodified values to potentially defective used imported electronics. The acquisition of IUEs becomes as a medium for an elitist modern construction of the self by which consumption and acquisition provide a 'rout out of shame' and a means for equalizing the self with users of using brand new electronics perceived as superior. Demand for IUEs therefore hinges on peculiar social relations of between consumers and merchants which rationalize IUEs within the construct of the desired and affordable *material modernity*. Sellers exploit vulnerable consumer meanings to enact social relations in which non-available brands are simulated and sold to consumers. Consumers are thus made to live under the illusion that certain goods exist when in actual reality they do not. Hence, otherwise "waste" objects are contrived into consumable commodities embedded with deluxe values and *class-leveling* potentialities. Consumers generally emerge in the unfolding social relations of demand as a potentially vulnerable category.

In literature, it is posited that we now live in a 'throwaway society' because IUEs have terminal lives imposed by production-programed-obsolescence which shortens the lifespan of things. But in this study we show that in fact, the life of things is progressive and contingent on subjective meanings of humans rather than on a predetermined production criterion of a product. Whereas the assumption of throwaway society is sustained primarily by discard upon initial use, this study argues that 'latter use' and 'second-party' meanings for used electronics actually extend the lifespan of supposedly EOL electronics. It also challenges the thesis of throwaway as the social relations sustaining used electronics end-of-life merchandise reveal that people reinvent

meanings for their depreciating scrap components, and so they can reuse them. So, we now live instead in a constructive society, - a society where discard culture is replaced by the culture of construction wherein values and new lives are assigned to otherwise waste objects -electronics. The study identifies some 'episodes of value' through which end of life is adjourned and delayed, and through which otherwise waste electronics assume new lives.

The first episode the practice of *pseudo-packaging* among sellers aids the creative packaging, incorporation of locally used *aloku* into imported – *tokunbo non-tested* goods to make them appear as actual *tokunbo* electronics; after which they are eventually sold to unsuspecting consumers. The success of *pseudo-packaging* relies on affectionate consumer meanings of unsuspecting buyers who through 'speculate-buying' ignore potential non-functionality and actual flaws of *used* electronics. In episode II, the patronage of *merchantabilizers'* (repairers/resuscitators) begets *Offersumption* –a practice which entails consumer presentation and exchange of non-functioning for functioning electronics at some token. Thus, non-functional local used electronics are again presented to naïve consumers along with electronics that are actually imported as *tokunbo* non-tested. In episode III, disposition of otherwise waste electronics scraps is 'moralized' through philanthropic 'selling-on' of supposedly waste electronics to scrap-traders. Episode IV reveals how scraps are ritually commodified through 'weighing and pricing' and transformed into tradable goods through the assignment of commercial values to them by scrap-traders. In episode V, electronics scraps, through the aid of scrap exporters acquire the reuse value through their geographic mobility to other countries where they acquire new lives. The last episode of value emanates from the social relations unfolding between scrap traders towards scraps. In this case, entrepreneurial social relational values, founded on unwritten but observed standards and norms are evolved making it difficult and almost impossible to track the exact point where electronics actually attain their end-of-life.

The social relations and organization of IUE merchandise also predicates on the systematic activities of gatekeeping. Gatekeepers emerge at two levels as 'formal' and the 'informal' gatekeepers. The formal category is characterized by activities of state actors such as NESREA and the Nigerian Customs who chiefly regulate and control used electronics importation into Nigeria. They are formal because their activities are supported by the authority of the federal and

state government, and the laws enacted. The informal gatekeepers consist of key 'market officials' who regulate and determine the organization of merchandise, and 'aboriginal gatekeepers' who regulate other spheres of socioeconomic relations in the market. The 'market officials' are so called because they are officially recognized in the market as leaders capable of influencing and determining access to social and material resources and opportunities of the market. Their recognition as gatekeepers is validated by their election into political market offices based on the will of the majority. In this category are the elected executive members including *Chairman, the Importers, the elderly or gerunds and the market taskforce* and the other offices of unit heads as well as the *Baba Oja, the Iya Oja,* among others. The role of these actors is to ensure existence of the socio-political and socio-economic order in the market.

'Peri-peasant actors' emerge as gatekeepers not by original market design but through deliberate offer of resourcefulness to address specific needs of the market or sometimes by self-assertion. By adding some value to the socio-economic order and social relations of the market, these actors acquire influence and superintendence which bestows on them recognition. The three main actors in this category are the *Pako, the Oso afia and the Alaye.* By inventing a mini-bridge which aids, regulates and controls entry into and exit from the market, the *Pako* acquire superintendence over entry into and exit out of the market. They are embodiments of the interlink between consumers and merchants. The *Oso afia* secure considerable superintendence over the fate of sale among IUE merchants on a daily basis as they broker patronage and determine 'which consumer buys from which merchant' any time.

Through cordial and sometimes violent practices, the *Alaye* emerge as gatekeepers with the capacity to resolve conflict and to ensure orderliness as 'informal police'. They also emerge as 'space-brokers' who determine 'who takes what space in the market at any time'. Ironically, their forceful tendencies towards others in order to secure considerable relevance and to be patronized for self-protection by those seeking influence and political relevance designate the *Alaye* as potential thugs and hoodlums. Occasional offer of royalties to these gatekeepers is indicative of some relevance which they enjoy in the market. In effect, their continuing relevance has depended largely on self-invention and the helpless acceptance of them as 'informal police' in the market. in contrast to others informal gatekeepers, *Alaye's* flare for conflict situations

provides strong support for the proposition that exhibit an ironic deific image among other actors in the IUE market.

Altogether, the study reveals a social organization of IUE merchandise that is basically 'structured', 'ritualized' and 'relational' in nature. The following actors are identified at the structural level: 'official gatekeepers', 'administrators' (administration/leadership), 'actor-merchants' who consist of 'importers', 'retailers', 'interlinks-security', 'merchantabilizers/ resuscitators', and 'scrap-traders' –comprising 'scrap-collectors', 'bulk-buyers' and 'exporters'. The 'ritualized' dimension of the market establishes how the necessity for experience and skill-acquisition necessitate both direct and indirect forms of apprenticeships in the market. These include apprenticeship through 'observation-as-participant' (type I), 'mentoring novices as personal commitment to ethnic cultural ideals of a merchant' (the Igbo in particular) (type II); and 'apprenticeship through referral' from a child's parents, from kins or from friends (type III). The 'relational' dimension of the social organization reveals how the tendency for 'corporateness' encourages a collective sense of shared values among actor-merchants. By this token, merchants along with all other actors of the IUE market work together as a specialized system of actors who divided labor chiefly for the economic and social benefit of all rather than some. The common aim of preserving the interest of all suggests that the IUE merchandise is sustained and bound together by a code –a system of collective observance presupposing that the social organization itself is an institution characterized by patterned activities and relations.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that social relations of IUE merchandise rest on a structured system of active players ensuring contrived consumer utility supplied through an intricate system of actor-merchants. These active players ensure and sustain the influx of used electronics despite international conventions and official policy against them. Demand for IUEs was hinged on peculiar social relations of consumption and merchandising which rationalized and constructed IUEs as desirable and affordable modern material objects. The nature of consumer meanings for IUEs and consequent social relations of merchants with consumers render consumers as vulnerable agents in the IUE marketplace.

The discovery of interdependent but specialized social relations of apprenticeship, entrepreneurship and services such as *brand-manufacturing, entry-brokering, patronage brokering, and space-brokering,* present IUE merchandise as an informal but systemic social organization. The organization's provision of administrative, economic and coercive functions, through a structure of interdependent actors, that sustain the market relations, presents IUE merchandise as a specialized and developmental social organization that ensures apprenticeship training, economic emancipation and capacity building for most Nigerians involved.

The careful programing and reprograming of transaction using the terms *non-tested* and *tested* to suit the interests of sellers, and to advance the course of 'simulate/pseudo-commodity', and to exploit unsuspecting consumers of IUEs, present transaction as a flexible market order within the *used electronics* merchandise space. The consumer and indeed the potential consumer, emerge in this *used* market order as *imported* commodity-optimists but hence, too, as a vulnerable agency. This discovery extends the assertion in Wiseman (1979) that transaction in the *used* and *second-hand* trade customarily promotes bonding as posited.

The identification of *tokunbo non-tested* and *tokunbo tested* as symbolisms of a programmable transaction order extends the discourse on *tokunbo* (See Omobowale, 2009 and 2013) which presents *tokunbo* as a symbolism of local reuse value and social appreciation for *used* goods from *across the sea* in which the locally used *-aloku* goods are averred. In this study, the terms evolve as depictions of *non-warranty* and *warranty* respectively, and of *low-cost* and *high-cost* of *IUEs* respectively.

The discovery of meanings and social relations which adjourn and progressively postpone the end-of-life of used electronics, query assertion in Puckett (2002) and Cooper (2012) that we now live in a modern throwaway society orchestrated by fear of manufacture programmed obsolescence, which prompts a culture of premature discard of goods. Instead, this study presents modernity as a constructive society in which the fate of end-of-life is not fixed or determined by technological determinism or discard by initial users, but is contingent instead on the meanings and 'episodes of values' attached to goods in latter use. This position affirms but also extends counter-end-of-life assertions that things posses 'social lives', social relational 'tournaments of

value' (Appadurai, 1986, Setiffi, 2011), the 'cultural biographies' (Kopytoff (1986), 'transitional lives' (Woodward, 2011), 'moral economies of value' (Ture, 2013) among others.

This study therefore criticizes material –conception of IUEs as potential wastes as weak, owing to the ambiguities and inconsistencies of such conceptions. The widespread critique of used electronics end-of-life in this study does not presuppose at all that end-of-life does not exist. Rather it posits that insofar as the context of subjective latter use meanings and social relations of IUE merchandise are concerned, it is difficult to speak of product's end-of-life. At best an 'indeterminate lifetime of things' as posited in this study is more appropriate for description of what is commonly called the 'terminal lifespan of things' in pure-scientific literature. It is also to this end that the study queries the thesis that we live in a throwaway society, marked by massive discard of objects occasioned by fear of rapid-product-obsolescence. The episodes of values which used electronics experience in this study are instrumental for what emanates in the study as delay and postponement of end-of-life. The services of *merchantabilizers* and *scrap-traders* are also quite strategic not only to the delayed fate of used electronics lives, but also to the enactment of new forms of transaction that potentially guarantee the adjournment and postponement of end-of-life as a continuum. In essence, *Merchantabilization* as resourceful service for resuscitating non-working IUEs back to life, for reworking and cannibalizing IUEs to meet consumer demands, and for facilitating *Offersumption* – 'offering' (non-functional used electronics) and 'consumption' (receiving a product in return for both a product and little money), extend prevailing knowledge and discourse on market cultures (See Warde, 2005; Arnold and Thompson, 2005).

The social relations of IUE demand emanate as a systematic cultural practice rooted in subjective meanings behind demand that serves to create all kinds of used electronics into 'real IUEs' albeit 'fake ones'. Demand is thus presented with the challenge of sorting and separating between the 'fake' and the 'real' IUEs. In effect, IUEs, especially as non-functional and scraps emerge as tradable commodities not because they are commodities in reality but because they are subjectively conceived as commodities.

5.3 Recommendations

Government should accommodate local realities in order to proffer inclusive and robust IUEs policy. This will entail a joint assessment of the pains, costs and benefits of waste importation from both ends not only from the perspective of legal-rational governance. This move can be spearheaded by the 'Solving the E-waste Problem' (STEP) agency of the United Nations University.

Corruption is a major challenge confronting effective legal-rational governance against importation of prohibited electronics. Beyond narratives on overt successes of governance presented by officials in this study, evidences on covert circumvention of governance by merchants aided by corruption, suggest the need to have self-corrective legal-rational governance whose narratives match with their actions.

The tendency for 'definitional' and 'conceptual ambiguity' on waste and non-waste electronics to breed '*guess regulation'* among import officials urges international, regional and state agencies charged with regulation of movement and importation of goods such as *used electronics* to evolve a concise and comprehensive definition on what exactly qualifies as waste and non-waste electronics.

Merchants must begin to see not only the benefits of used electronics importation - economic-salvation that are short term, but also the cost - the potential toxicological material human and environmental problems of IUEs that have long term effects. Both IUE merchants and officials regulating importation must therefore eschew the tendency to 'otherise' responsibility on circumvention of IUE /waste conventions considering the potential and actual evils of importing waste electronics.

The discovery of waste electronics 'episodes of values' obligates waste research to begin to move beyond devotion to materiality of things to the interpretive-social-materiality of things. It will therefore become easy to comprehend the context of indeterminate values and meanings which challenge finite-material-designation of used electronics as end-of-life objects.

Ongoing practices of ‘pseudo-waste-packaging’ suggest that consumers need to be more conscious and less passive in their meanings and outlooks towards IUEs. This will prevent them from falling victims to the crafty and deceitful packaging of both locally used and non-functioning electronics as real imported *tokunbo* commodities.

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW/DISCUSSION GUIDE (FOR IDI, KII AND FGD)

(FOR IDI and KII) among imported Used Electronics Consumers

1. Social relations of consumer demand for Imported used electronics (IUEs)

Probe for:

a. Reasons and motivations behind consumer patronage of IUEs?
b. Range and types of IUEs in demand
c. Consumer meanings attached to IUEs
d. Social relations sustaining consumer meanings for IUEs
e. Dynamics underlying consumer relations with IUE traders
f. Basis for re-use of second-hand electronics
g. Whether or not consumers construe IUEs as harmful (give specific reasons)

2. Possible social relations sustaining used electronics end-of-life merchandise

Probe for:

a. How used electronics end-of-life is subjectively constructed among consumers
b. How used electronics end-of-life is subjectively constructed among merchants
c. Possible networks and social chains sustaining constructed fate of end-of-life IUEs among merchants
d. Practices underlying subject-object relations with end-of-life stages of used electronics
e. Norms, values and interpretations behind constructed meanings for used electronics end-of-life

3. What roles do gatekeepers play in imported used electronics merchandise?

Probe for:

a. Nature and agency of gatekeepers in IUE merchandise
b. Forms of involvement of gatekeepers in IUE merchandise
c. Practices and social relations of gatekeepers in IUE merchandise
d. Gatekeeping episodes interposing import and merchandise of IUEs
e. Meanings behind relations of gatekeepers with IUEs, consumers and merchants

4. Social organization of imported used electronics merchandise

Probe for:

a. How imported used electronics merchandise is socially organized
b. Hierarchical and associational structure of imported used electronics merchandise organization

c. Whether there are formal or informal associations organized to this effect
d. How importers source for their second-hand electronics
e. Their criteria of involvement with used electronics merchandise
f. Whether or not importers' union exists
g. The function of the union or association
h. The forms of values upholding and sustaining interactions of merchants in the organization

5. How is legislative governance on used electronics importation locally constructed in merchandise?

Probe for:

a. Nature and agency of used electronics import governance in Nigeria
b. How legislative agency constructs IUEs and their importation
c. How consumers and merchants of IUEs construct IUE legislative governance of IUE importation
d. How merchants of IUEs construct the role(s) of legislative agency and agents
e. Possible social relations characterizing local construction of IUE import governance among merchants

APPENDICES II