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RHINO HORN CONSUMERS, WHO ARE THEY?

Demand for rhino horn as a luxury purchase by upper-middle class citizens in Viet Nam, including professional businessmen, celebrities and Government officials, has been identified as the strongest driver of the current rhino poaching crisis. More than 500 rhinos have been killed in South Africa alone within the first half of 2013.

DID YOU KNOW?

Main users of rhino horn tend to be men over the age of 40

Buyers of rhino horn are often women in their 50s who are supplying their families

Only 35% of the people surveyed said they would never buy or consume rhino horn

The most popular perceived benefit of rhino horn use is emotional; this symbol of wealth and power is also strongly associated with success and therefore asserts one's social standing

A consumer research study, conducted in 2013, surveyed 720 individuals in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and discovered that rhino horn users value this item because of its significance from a social point of view. Buyers and users of rhino horn form a powerful social network consisting of important individuals with whom it is crucial to maintain good relationships. Rhino horns are sometimes bought for the sole purpose of being gifted to others; to family members, business colleagues or people in positions of authority. Those purchasing rhino horn believe that owning rhino horn, as well as being able to purchase it for others, reaffirms their social status and strengthens the bonds among peers within their particular network. People involved in these activities are usually familiar with each other and trusted within their social circle even though they are engaging in an illegal activity.

Rhino horn consumers are currently seen as influential people within Vietnamese society. Educated, successful and powerful individuals are the main market for the horns which come all the way from Africa to satisfy high local demand.

Users of rhino horn are generally health conscious and want to maintain or enhance a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their loved ones. While their main reason for purchasing rhino horn is to reaffirm their social status, this is supported by an underlying belief in health benefits. Users believe rhino horn possesses properties that detoxify the body and can therefore cure anything from a hangover to serious illnesses. Consumers feel that having rhino horn at home ensures the well-being of their families.

(Results from consumer research commissioned by TRAFFIC, completed in 2013 under the WWF/TRAFFIC Illegal Wildlife Trade Campaign)

WHO IS BUYING AND USING RHINO HORN? Results from the consumer survey

- 41% of those who admitted to buying or consuming rhino horn were buyers only. The majority of these buyers acquire rhino horn for their family, including parents or spouse.
- 39% of those who admitted to buying or consuming rhino horn were consumers only. This group said they had never bought rhino horn, but had used it after receiving it from friends, family or business partners and colleagues.
- 16% admitted to purchasing it as a gift for their boss, friends, colleagues or government officials.

Among traditional medicines, rhino horn is considered to be ‘the best of the best’ so the purchase also brings peace of mind and confidence that they have made the right choice in case someone becomes unwell. Rhino horn consumers also use other illegal wildlife products like bear bile and tiger bone, among others.

Many rhino horn consumers are aware that the animals are killed so they can have a rhino horn. But they feel very disconnected from this and so do not see themselves as the catalysts for the current rhino poaching crisis. Others feel that even if the species were to be lost forever, they personally will not be affected and so do not care.

In Viet Nam, many wildlife products are perceived as valuable and rare, but rhino horn is probably the most desirable. Rhinos are thought to be unconquerable in nature, “the strongest animal there is”; the current poaching crisis and extinction of the Javan rhino in Viet Nam in 2010 illustrates this is no longer true. In some ways, the rarity of the product adds to its appeal since one must be part of an exclusive network of people who can get in touch with suppliers.

Consumers spend a fortune every time they buy rhino horn despite the lack of conclusive evidence of its medical properties. Just one study of the use of rhino horn to treat children’s fever, led by Tsai F.J. in Taiwan in 1993, has been published using widely accepted, rigorous methods and standards and it did not recommend the use of rhino horn when compared to acetaminophen. Spending money on this product does nothing more than encourage the poaching of rhinos and the illegal trade of wildlife products which endangers countries and their citizens. Additionally, all rhino species are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which prohibits commercial international trade in rhinos and their products and derivatives, including hunting trophies.

WWF and TRAFFIC are dedicated to keeping track of the changes in rhino horn demand to be certain which niches in the market need to be targeted to decrease this driving force behind the current poaching crisis.

Consumer Archetype: Mr. L

A 48 year old property developer, married for 24 years with a mistress. His family lives in a large four-bedroom house in the Ciputra area of Hanoi. He has two children who are 19 and 21 years old

He is focused on his social status and is therefore potentially vulnerable to outside influences

He wants to be seen as a leader. However he puts the good of his peer group above himself. Recommendations from his social/business circles are extremely influential

Mr. L

Career, success, financial security, family preservation, social status and peer lifestyle are top priorities for him

He believes that rhino horn is a badge of wealth, power, social status and hard work

He believes rhino horn use gives him peace of mind and happiness

WHO ARE THE BUYERS OF THE FUTURE?

Of those not currently using rhino horn, 16% are “intenders”, individuals who said they wanted to buy or consume rhino horn in the future. It is believed that with the increase of wealth in Viet Nam’s upper-middle class, this group will soon become rhino horn consumers. Even though only 5% of the people surveyed admitted to buying or consuming rhino horn, this percentage is expected to keep growing as intenders acquire the economic power to become consumers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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