

## **CORPORATE STRATEGY AND BRANDING IN NIGERIA: IS THERE A LINK?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**T**he study critically examined the relationship between corporate strategy and branding. To do this a sample of 450 were drawn from selected food companies' executives in Lagos and its environs being the nerve centre of business in Nigeria. The data were analyzed using regression and Pearson correlation analysis. The result showed that corporate strategy has a positive relationship with branding. Based on findings, salient recommendations were made.

## INTRODUCTION

Very limited literature exists on corporate strategy and branding. In fact, there is a widespread disagreement among researchers as to the appropriate definition of the brand construct, conceptualizing and measuring brand equity and establishing the relative importance of tangible versus intangible or emotional brand elements. The American Marketing Association (1960) defined a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. In spite of its popularity, the AMA's definition is often criticized as too preoccupied with the product, too mechanical (Arnold, 1992), deconstructionist (Kapferer, 1992), reductionist and restrictive (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). In the opinion of Gardner and Levy, a brand name is more than the label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes. More recently, Bearden and Ingram (2004) maintained that a brand is not the name of a product. It is the vision that drives the creation of products and services under that name. That vision, a key variable of the strategy and is called brand identity in branding. It then follows that being able to sustain consumer perceptions of a brand's differential value is key to successful strategic management. For the firm, therefore, a well-managed brand becomes an important instrument of differentiation and of competitive advantage (Hamel and Prahalad, 1996; Porter, 1976). Furthermore, the differentiation achieved through branding constitutes a barrier to entry, by making it difficult for competitors to emulate the company's offerings (Jones, 1986; de Chernatony and McDonald, 2003). A "small b" brand notion focuses mainly on the firm's input activity (de Chernatony, 1993) of differentiating its offering by means of a name and a visual identity, enabling consumers to recognise different brands at the point of purchase. This is akin to the interpretation of the brand as a "logo". According to this perspective, there is little difference between a "brand" and a "trademark", as defined by the US Federal Trademark Act (Lanham Act): "*any word, name, symbol, or device, or any combination thereof adopted and used by manufacturers or merchants to identify their goods*" (Cohen, 1986: 62). As a matter of fact, the AMA Dictionary of Marketing Terms also notes that the legal term for brand is trademark. Thus, while the interpretation of the brand as a "logo" enables recognition, the brand as a "legal instrument enables prosecution of infringers. In either case, however, the brand concept is devoid of deeper meaning, hence its "small b".

In contrast, a "big B" Brand notion sees brands as more than mere identifiers and legal instruments, but as complex entities and value systems. As stated as early as 1955 by Gardner and Levy see a brand name as more than the label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes. However, a more holistic stance of the "big B" Brand blends the input of the firm (brand elements and brand identity), with the "output" perspective (de Chernatony, 1993) of the brand as an image, or set of mental associations in consumers' minds, which add to the perceived value of a product or service (Rao, Agarwal and Dahlhoff, 2004)). Taking this a step forward, the brand can be conceptualised as a value system which transforms the usage experience through the subjective meanings the brand represents for consumers (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998a). De Chernatony and McDonald (2003) define a successful brand as an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that a buyer or user perceives relevant and unique added values which match their needs more closely. Furthermore its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition; this reflects the holistic "big B" notion of the Brand. While retaining the input (what the company does) perspective of the brand as an identifier, De Chernatony and McDonald introduce the notion of the brand as adding value to a product and, importantly, that a brand's success is dependent upon consumers' perceptions of whether the brand matches their needs better than other brands in the product category. It then follows that being able to sustain consumer perceptions of a brand's differential value is the

key to successful strategic management. Furthermore, the differentiation achieved through branding constitutes a barrier to entry, by making it difficult for competitors to emulate the company's offerings (Jones, 1986; De Chernatony and McDonald, 2003).

Noting from the above, it is important to establish the link between corporate strategy and branding empirically, specifically the paper will determine if there is a relationship between strategic vision and organizational culture and building company image, ascertain if proper implementation of SWOT analysis could help to create customer loyalty.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

Bearden and Ingram (2004), identifies the following importance of branding: Branding facilitates buying, it provides psychological benefits to consumers, it makes it easier to differentiate a company's product from competing offering and it also facilitates and focuses on the firm's marketing efforts. Branding is of benefit to the customer and supplies as identified by Aaker (1996):

- Brands can assist the identification of preferred product.
- Brand can reduce levels of perceived risks.
- Brand is easier to gauge the level of product quality.
- Brands provide psychological re-assurance or reward.
- Brand can reduce the time spent making product based on decision and in turn reduce the time spent shopping.
- Brand provides cues about the nature of the source of the product.

Business and marketing experts urge business owners to "brand" their businesses with a logo and a set of consistent marketing materials i.e. a brand identity system. But they rarely explain the reasons behind this advice. A logo and consistent marketing materials can increase your sales and revenue, because they convey the following impressions that :

- You are established: a logo and professionally-printed materials show that you are committed to both your business and your clients. It also makes you look like you have been around for some time, and that you're stable.
- Can attract more clients: some clients look for a well-defined company, "look and feel" may be one of their criteria in making a purchasing decision. Others are "wowed" by professional-looking and your logo may impress them into buying.
- Increase your credibility: a logo makes you look experienced and professional, and can go a long way towards making your business appear credible. And, if you would like to be known as an expert in your field, this type of credibility is the first thing you have to establish.

According to Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) brand provides a platform for developing, growing and strengthening brand equity. Aaker (1996) highlights that the brand is often an organization's most valuable asset because it provides customers with a way of recognizing and specifying a particular product if they want to choose it again or recommend it to others. Companies with strong brands are increasingly exploring how to quantify their value. Some companies want to place these brand value on their balance sheets to emphasize the company's asset strength and the strategic direction (Bearden and Ingram, 2004).

Andrew (1980) viewed strategy as the matching of the activities of an organization to the environment in which it operates. Organization's public relation with its environment, to a large extent determines its corporate strategy. In essence, strategy of an organization will be affected not only by environmental forces and resources availability, but also by the values and expectations of those who have power in and around the organization. It is an integrated approach to managing an organization.

Mintzberg (1980) defined strategy as the direction and scope of an organization over the long-term; which achieves advantages for the organization through its configuration of resources within a changing environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectation. That is, strategic decisions are primarily concerned with external rather than internal problems of the firms and specifically with the selection of the product mix which the firm will produce and the markets to which it will sell. Therefore, strategy is a market driven process of development that takes into account a constantly changing business environment and the need to deliver superior customer value. The focus of strategy is on organizational performance rather than on increasing sales.

Corporate strategy consist of the analysis, strategy development and implementation of activities needed in developing a vision about the markets of interest to the organization, selecting market target, developing, implementing and managing the marketing program to meet the value requirements of the customers in each target market (Drucker 1979). According to Ansoff (1976) corporate strategy consists of the decisions made by top management and the resulting actions taken to achieve the objectives set for the business. Essential to corporate success is matching the capabilities of the organization with opportunities to achieve long-term customer satisfaction. Corporate strategy is the way a company creates value through the configuration and coordination of its multi-market activities.

Since corporate strategy is an organization sense of purpose and purpose changes as the organization grows larger and develops. The sense of purpose is therefore, essential in corporate strategy. Porter (2002) explained that, purpose alone is not strategy; because plans or actions need to be developed to put purpose into practice. Corporate strategy is therefore important because it deals with the major, fundamental issues that affect the future of organizations. He shows that a company that develops a viable corporate strategy is able to prosper. He provides some indications of the nature of corporate strategy and why it is important as follows:

- Corporate strategy involves the entire organization as it covers all areas and functions of the business.
- Corporate strategy is central to the development of distinctiveness. By comparison, some of Hewlett – Packard's products had superior performance and attractive prices. It is not enough in strategy to be 'Good'; it is vital to be better than competitors.
- Corporate strategy directs the changing and evolving relationship of the organization with its environment. It creates capabilities for organizations to cope with changes. When an organization needs new processes and values because it needs new capabilities managers must create a new organizational space where those capabilities can be developed.
- Corporate strategy is likely to concern itself with the survival of the business as a minimum objective and the creation of value added as a maximum objective. it covers the range and depth of the organization's activities. And that Corporate strategy development is crucial in adding value, rather than sales, profitability and market share.

Porter (2002) further identified three areas of corporate strategy as:

**Strategy Analysis:** which implies that the organization, its mission and objectives have to be examined and analyzed. Corporate strategy provides value for the people involved in the organization e.g. stakeholders.

**Strategy Development:** To be successful the strategy must be built on the particular skills of the organization and the special relationship that it has or can develop with those outside i.e. suppliers, customers, distributors and government. This will mean, developing advantage that are sustainable over time. There are usually many options available and one or more will have to be selected.

**Strategy Implementation:** There may be major difficulties in terms of motivations, power relationships, government negotiations, company acquisitions and many other matters. A strategy that cannot be implemented is not worth the paper it is written on. If a valuable corporate strategy is to be developed, each of these areas should be explored carefully.

Collins and Porras (1994) defined vision as what the organisation aspires to be in the future. However, the research conducted by these authors demonstrated that successful companies build their visions from redefinitions and reinventions of core values rather than revolutionary shifts from one value set to another. This suggests that although vision can stretch the company toward new goals and levels of achievement, it must also connect authentically with the heritage of the company. By implication, strategic vision and organisational culture are strongly linked and there is a need for perceived long-term mutual support between them. Balmer and Soenen's (1999) study of identity management practices among leading UK identity consultants confirms that attempts to manage corporate identity are driven by relating vision to changes in corporate strategy. However, in line with the concerns of Collins and Porras (1994), Balmer and Soenen (1999) also showed that most consultants have a rather simplistic understanding of the relations between vision and the values embedded in the organisational culture. In the area of organisational culture and identity, scholars have long made distinctions between values based on normative versus behavioural contexts. For example, Schein's (1992) widely recognised culture concept originates in the distinction between espoused-values and values-in-use (i.e. basic assumptions). Within the field of organisational identity, scholars such as Dutton and Dukerich (1991) and Hatch and Schultz (2000) have made similar distinctions between different perceptions of identity constructed by insiders and outsiders. Balmer and Soenen (1999) and later Hatch and Schultz (2000) have similarly generated a range of corporate identities from actual to ideal identity based on the recognition that how people act in organisations does not always correspond with their stated intentions or aspirations. Based on these insights, we find that the concept of organisational culture held by most corporate branding practitioners is rather naive. For the most part they fail to distinguish between desired values (such as those contained in many vision statements), and the emergent or practiced values at work in the organisation (current organisational culture). Organisational culture may be a source of competitive advantage, but only when brand values are respectful of organisational culture and its core values. This requires careful reflection of the organisational culture and an awareness of the tension between how this culture has been expressed historically, and strategic visions for its future. So we hypothesize that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between strategic vision and organizational culture and building company image.

Developing the corporate brand usually involves articulating a strategic vision. As in the relation between organisational culture and corporate images, the challenge in corporate brand building is also to align strategic vision with corporate image. Compared with product brand thinking, corporate branding puts

stronger emphasis on the role of strategic vision as it requires top management's reflections on who the company is and what it wants to become. A corporate brand cannot be merely deduced from a desired market position or brand image, but must be grounded in core company values and the paths for the future unfolding from its heritage. This does not imply that strategic change or reinventing corporate brands is impossible, but such dramatic changes demand a comprehensive effort and risk loss of credibility. However, as shown in studies of relations between identity and image (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Hatch and Schultz, 2000), corporate images feed into strategic vision serving as a mirror in which top managers can reflect on who they are. This implies that, instead of using stakeholder images as exact assessments of brand performance compared with strategic vision, images held by stakeholders of who the company is and what it stands for (e.g. by using metaphors, key words, personality comparisons) can become part of the strategic envisioning process. We thus hypothesized that:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between corporate branding and strategy

Furthermore, strategic vision is interpreted in relation to images held by external stakeholders who will use information about the organisation that goes beyond what the corporation provides. Because of this outside influence, the branding process involves elements that lie outside the direct influence of management. However, one of these elements does lie within the influence range of the organisational contact between organisational members and the stakeholders of the organisation through responses to requests for information or service. But other influences, such as those of the media, business analysts, competitors or special interest groups, may cause stakeholders to form opinions of the corporation that conflict with those desired or expressed by the strategic vision. Managers who are sensitive to the images that others form of their organisations will be better at developing successful, sustainable corporate brands because they will benefit from recognising tensions or discrepancies that arise between strategic vision and the corporate images held by key stakeholders. We thus hypothesize that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between proper implementation of SWOT analysis and customer loyalty.

### 3.0 RESEARCH METHOD

The research design is explanatory in nature and has been used to generate primary data from organizational members. The population of study is restricted to both the consumers and employees of selected food companies in Lagos state, Nigeria. The respondents are selected using the simple random sampling from the list of employees of the selected companies. This questionnaire is constructed in simple and clear English for easy understanding. A total of 450 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents but only 418 copies were filled and returned which is 92.9% response rate which is sufficient for an applied research of this nature. The details of the questionnaire issued and returned are shown in the table below:

**Table 1: Response to the Questionnaire Distributed to Customers and Employees.**

Questionnaires	Responses	Percentage (%)
Number of filled	418	92.9%
Number of Unfilled	0	0%
Number Not Returned	32	7.1%
<b>Total</b>	450	100%

**Table 2: Confirmatory Cronbach Alpha Analysis Result**

Measurement of Variables	Range of Cronbach Alpha	Cronbach Alpha
Strategic vision and organisational culture	0.423-0.798	0.789
Company image	0.744-0.869	0.804
SWOT analysis	0.692-0.787	0.756
Customer loyalty	0.428-0.856	0.793
Corporate Strategy	0.541-0.824	0.805
Branding	0.744-0.869	0.867
All Variables	0.705-0.941	0.934

Company image have the value of 0.804, strategic vision and organisational culture having a value of 0.789, whilst SWOT analysis and customer loyalty have the values of 0.756 and 0.793 respectively. Also, branding has a value of 0.867 and corporate strategy of 0.805. The overall Cronbach for all the variables is 0.934. Therefore this shows that there is less internal consistency of the overall homogeneity of all the variables comprising the scales.

#### 4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Table 3: REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRATEGIC VISION AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND COMPANY IMAGE.**

Products	R	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig	H <sub>0</sub>
All	0.322	0.098	18.573	.000	Reject
Indomie	0.028	-0.017	0.043	.837	Do not Reject
O!	0.564	0.301	18.194	.000	Reject
Mimie	0.609	0.330	19.513	.039	Reject

The table above reflects relationship between strategic vision and organizational culture and company image for all products, Indomie, O! and Mimie products. It reveals that 9.8% of the variation in company image is caused by strategic vision and organizational culture in all the product investigated, -1.7% of the variation in company image is caused by strategic vision and organizational culture for Indomie noodles. Also, 30.1% of the variation in company image is caused by strategic vision and organizational culture for O! noodles and 33% of the variation in company image is caused by strategic vision and organizational culture for Mimie noodles.

**Table 4: REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORPORATE BRANDING AND STRATEGY.**

Products	R	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig	H <sub>0</sub>
All	0.650	0.382	10.656	.001	Reject
Indomie	0.687	0.431	11.042	.029	Reject
O!	0.566	0.303	18.395	.000	Reject
Mimie	0.143	0.014	4.268	.265	Do not Reject

The table above reflects relationship between corporate branding and strategy for all products, Indomie, O! and Mimie products. It reveals that 38.2% of the variation in corporate strategy is caused by branding in all the products investigated, 43.1% of the variation in corporate strategy is caused by branding for Indomie noodles. Also, 30.3% of the variation in corporate strategy is caused by branding for O! noodles and 1.4% of the variation in corporate strategy is caused by branding for Mimie noodles.

**Table 5: REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROPER IMPLEMENTATION OF SWOT ANALYSIS AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY.**

Products	R	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig	H <sub>0</sub>
All	0.514	0.224	8.513	.000	Reject
Indomie	0.567	0.281	9.730	.005	Reject
O!	0.739	0.506	17.062	.030	Reject
Mimie	0.225	0.010	1.964	.330	Do not Reject

The table above reflects relationship between SWOT analysis and customer loyalty for all products, Indomie, O! and Mimie products. It reveals that 22.4% of the variation in customer loyalty is caused by SWOT analysis in all the products investigated, 28.1% of the variation in customer loyalty is caused by SWOT analysis for Indomie noodles. Also, 50.6% of the variation in customer loyalty is caused by SWOT analysis for O! noodles and 1.0% of the variation in customer loyalty is caused by SWOT analysis for Mimie noodles.

The positive and statistically significant relationships between the strategic vision and organisational culture and company image for all products (especially Indomie, O!, and Mimie noodles) in Nigeria show that the products strive to adapt or react to the prevailing variables in their business environment as these variables changes to ensure adequate performance. Also, Collins and Porras (1994), Balmer and Soenen (1999) worked to show the understanding of the relations between vision and the values embedded in the organisational culture. The results of this work on the product are consistent with their findings.



According to Collins and Porras (1994), the research conducted by these authors demonstrated that successful companies build their visions from redefinitions and reinventions of core values rather than revolutionary shifts from one value set to another. This suggests that although vision can stretch the company toward new goals and levels of achievement, it must also connect authentically with the heritage of the company. By implication, strategic vision and organisational culture are strongly linked and there is a need for perceived long-term mutual support between them. A corporate brand cannot be merely deduced from a desired market position or brand image, but must be grounded in core company values and the paths for the future unfolding from its heritage. This does not imply that strategic change or reinventing corporate brands is impossible, but such dramatic changes demand a comprehensive effort and risk loss of credibility. However, as shown in studies of relations between identity and image (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Hatch and Schultz, 2000), corporate images feed into strategic vision serving as a mirror in which top managers can reflect on who they are. This implies that, instead of using stakeholder images as exact assessments of brand performance compared with strategic vision, images held by stakeholders of who the company is and what it stands for (e.g. by using metaphors, key words, personality comparisons) can become part of the strategic envisioning process.

It is surprising as to why Indomie noodles is not giving a statistically significant value and therefore does not agree with the works of Collin and Porras (1994), Balmer and Soenen (1999), Dutton and Dukerich (1991); Hatch and Schultz, (2000) who all believe strategic vision and organisational culture help build company image.

According to Aaker (1996) the main goal of every company is profitability and one method to achieve this for a company is to gain and maintain loyal customers. If a company invests resources to build customer loyalty without focusing on profitability it may lead to failure in the long run. The aim of customer loyalty is to build bonds between the brand and the existing customers. The SWOT analysis is an extremely useful tool for understanding the customers and making decision for all sorts of situations in business and organizations. The adaptation of customer loyalty programs among companies has increased over the years, and the customers have become the focus of attention. Customer loyalty programs offer financial and relationship rewards to customers with the purpose of making the customers' brand loyal (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978)). The authors further states two aims of customer loyalty programs, the first is increased sales of revenues through increasing purchases. The second aim is to build bonds between the brand and the existing customers to maintain the existing customer base. According to Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) loyalty programs are developed to reward loyal customers, generate information about the customers and manipulate their behaviour and benefits. The benefits need to be valuable and capable of creating an emotional connection between the customers and the company. the concept of benefits relies on the idea that the customers select brand on the basis of their desire. Bearden and Ingram (2004) further state that before customers consider joining a loyalty program they weigh their input such as membership fees and obligation against the output they will receive from the program such as benefits, image and special customer status. Aaker (1996) further suggest an approach to enhance the loyalty of the fence sitter and the committed. This approach is to develop or strengthen their relationship with the brand through brand awareness, perceived quality and a clear brand identity. Brand awareness reflects the presence of the brand in the mind of the consumers, perceived quality is the brands associations, and brand identity provides direction, purpose and meaning for the brand. Programs that can build this type of loyalty are frequent buyer programs and customer clubs which are becoming more common. Frequent-buyer programs are being adopted by many different brands in a variety of product classes; the program provides direct and tangible reinforcement for a customer's loyal behaviour. The program also enhances the value proposition of the brand, the brands

differentiation, and affirms the commitment between the companies and their loyal customers. It is surprising as to why Mimie noodles is not giving a statistically significant value and therefore does not agree with the opinion of Aaker (1996) and Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) who believe that proper implementation of SWOT analysis help create customer loyalty through effective monitoring of variables that are capable of ensuring continuous customer satisfaction and hence loyalty.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

This study shows that there is a relationship between corporate strategy and branding. To enable significant growth in the noodles industry, branding could present a new competitive edge that the industry should leverage. It is important to note that strategic vision is interpreted in relation to images held by external stakeholders who will use information about the organisation that goes beyond what the corporation provides. Because of this outside influence, the branding process involves elements that lie outside the direct influence of management. However, one of these elements does lie within the influence range of the organisational culture-direct contact between organisational members and the stakeholders of the organisation, for example, through responses to requests for information or service. But other influences, such as those of the media, business analysts, competitors or special interest groups, may cause stakeholders to form opinions of the corporation that conflict with those desired or expressed by the strategic vision.

Managers who are sensitive to the images that others form of their organisations will be better at developing successful, sustainable corporate brands because they will benefit from recognising tensions or discrepancies that arise between strategic vision and the corporate images held by key stakeholders. When they also learn to bring organisational culture into this equation, they will be in a position to better manage their corporate brands.

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