

CORPORATE BRANDING STRATEGIES AND SUBSCRIBERS SERVICE EVALUATION OF MOBILE SERVICE FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

OKO, WILLIAMSON KUE
Department of marketing,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Port-Harcourt,
Nigeria

And

KALU, SYLVA EZEMA
Department of marketing,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Port-Harcourt,
Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between corporate branding strategies and subscribers service evaluation. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The concept of corporate name, corporate image and corporate reputation were discussed. The study adopted correlation design, the population of the study consists of subscribers of MTN, Airtel, Globacom and 9mobile. Sample of 100 subscribers were conveniently drawn from the population. Structured questionnaire of 20 items were administered to respondents and their responses were analysed as well as the hypothesis tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) technique at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that corporate branding strategies in terms of corporate name, corporate image and corporate reputation have significant relationship with subscribers' quality service product evaluation.

Keywords: Corporate name, corporate image, corporate reputation and consumer service evaluation

Introduction

Consumers are often faced with different substitute products having a set of attractive attributes in many purchase situations that requires evaluation to determine the best choice option (Liu & Dukes, 2015). Branding is one of the most valuable marketing strategies for clarity of product quality and difference among rival offerings (Ogunlade, 2007). Consumer product evaluation is influenced by multi-attributes of a corporate entity like price, variety, design, brand name, and country of origin (Hilgenkamp & Shateau, 2010). Affirming that companies' relevance and competitiveness in the market place to a large extent depend on corporate branding because of its capability to direct brand preference (Wani & Agarwal, 2017). Nevertheless, customer value perception varies in line with individual evaluation pattern hence; firms need to take a conscious step to building company customer relationship via corporate branding (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012), since consumers' choice of what they buy depend less on the evaluation of the functional benefits of the product or a service to them rather more on the assessment of the people in the company behind it, their skills, attitudes, behaviour, design, and the total company's culture (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009).

Corporate brand cover the internal (employees and managers) and external target (buyers/subscribers) as well as corporate strategy (Gray, 2003) but its strength lies in the

alignment of a company's vision, culture and image which induce consumers positive evaluation of a corporate brand (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009) affirming that brand-oriented company add value and build product brand confidence (Loken, Athuwalia & Houston, 2010). The establishment of a profitable relationship with the chosen target customers of a corporate entity and its offer in relation to its rival is a function of the corporate brand (Wani & Agarwal (2017). Branding is a strategic business tool that serves as a signal for brand recognition and acceptance through creating customer value better than competitors (Wani & Agarwal, 2011; Holt, 2015). The connect between a corporate brand, its offer and customers emotional perception is driven by their evaluation of the corporate brand and its product/services (Wani & Agarwal (2017). They opine that branding creates and reinforce quality but (Shende, 2014) argues that customers/subscribers evaluation and perception of a corporate brand determines its viability to them while Edvardson & Enquist (2006) asserts that the excellence of a brand lies in delivering customers/subscribers perceived benefits consistently.

To keep pace with the changing customer evaluation of service values in the telecommunication industry, branding is an invaluable strategy (Wani & Agarwal, 2017), because corporate brand adds value to mobile firm's offerings, its policy and individual product/service that influences customers service evaluation via corporate name, corporate image recognition and corporate reputation (Souiden, Kassim & Hong, 2006). They added many companies including mobile firms are appreciating the essence of their names and consciously building and creating a strong link between their corporate name and product to gain subscribers favourable assessment of their services/product (Souiden, Kassim & Hong, 2006).

From extant reviewed literature, works have been done on corporate branding, branding, corporate rebranding, corporate reputation and internal corporate branding (see: Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012; Le Cheng, Kuntjara & Lin, 2014; Garas, Amira & Mohamed, 2018; Perez, 2015; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009; Souiden, Kassim & Hong, 2006) but none was done in Rivers State and varies in focus with this study. Again, the researchers do not used spearman rank correlation as a statistical test tool. This paper focuses on examining the relationship between corporate branding strategies: corporate name, corporate image and corporate reputation and subscribers' service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the influence of corporate name on subscribers service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State,
2. Evaluate the effect of corporate image on subscribers service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers and
3. Determine the effect of corporate reputation on subscribers' service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers state.

Based on the above objectives, the following research questions were raised

- i. How does corporate name influence subscriber's service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State?
- ii. What impact does corporate image has on subscribers service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State?, and
- iii. What is the effect of corporate reputation on subscribers' service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers state?

Drawing from the research questions, we formulate the following hypotheses. Thus:

- H₀₁:** Corporate name has no significant relationship with subscriber's service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State
- H₀₂:** Corporate image has no significant relationship with subscribers service quality evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State, and
- H₀₃:** Corporate reputation has no significant relationship with subscribers' service quality evaluation of mobile service firms.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the increasing relevance and adoption of branding as one of the key valuable marketing strategies for gaining desired product perception and customer acceptance in a wider scope, Nigerian business organisations are yet to fully embrace it. American and Japanese companies successes in the business world is attributed to corporate branding but with divers approach (Souiden et al., 2006).

Recently, it is established that a leading corporate brand can command a 10% price premium over the number-two brand and a 40% over the store brand (Ogunlade, 2007). Would one say, local companies do not have the vision of expanding their marketing scope or are skeptical about the benefit of corporate branding since most local product like Garri, etc. are not branded let alone packaged but are more valuable in the market? Again, could it be that local organisation lacks branding knowledge and its ability to influence consumer quality product/ service evaluation and perception.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The baseline theory for this study is the theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975). The theory holds that human behaviour is determine by the intention to engage in it based on the fellow's cognitive strength, which in turn is explained by his/ her attitude (the fellows positive or negative evaluation of doing what he/ she did) and the subjective norm which relates to what the fellow feel others think about the behaviour. That is, consumer intention towards a particular behaviour towards a brand is a function of his attitude toward engaging in such behaviour as well the subjective norms which relates to the performance of such behaviour.

The Reasoned Action theory is ideal in this study because it is prominent in consumer attitude (internal evaluation of an offer) and in consumer decision making. Consumers evaluation of any object or situation originates from the mind (attitude) thereby making it a necessity for corporations to be mindful of their choice of corporate branding attributes that influence consumers branded product evaluation (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2014). The relevance of a brand corporate reputation, image and name depends on consumers' internal evaluation (Souiden, Kassim, & Hong, 2006).

Corporate Name

Corporate name otherwise called corporate brand measures how the target market widely recognised a brand and the extent to which its familiarity impact on consumer product/service evaluation (Souiden et al., 2006).

Corporate name is the making of a corporation's name distinct and synonymous with its product class which could be offered by the corporation in an extended market (Souiden et al., 2016). They assert that corporate name represents both the company and its array of products in the mind-eyes of consumers, which serves as indices for consumer evaluation for purchase intention (Keller and Richey, 2006). This necessitates the need for carefulness in choosing and designing a corporate name (Grace & O'Cass, 2005). Because it is an

increasing tool used to attain competitive edge in the face of competition (Souiden et al., 2006). They added that corporate name creates an image in the mind of consumers which in turn affect how they evaluate their offerings. Corporate name influences how consumers perceive and evaluate a product or service quality (Sugrova et al., 2017), hence, it is critical to brand awareness (McCabe, 2006), and serves as a source of information about service firms used by consumers for pre-purchase evaluation (Grace & O'cass, 2005). Corporate name serves a vision, identity and means of communication to the target (Vanka, 2011).

Corporate Image

Shirin & Kambiz (2011) assert that image is an object that emanates from peoples 'perception and the phenomena that surround them. Is the instant mental mirror of the target market of a firm that shows their stand for the firm (Souiden et al. 2006). Kotler & Armstrong (2010) describe corporate image as the overall impression a firm creates on the mind of the public that influences consumer loyalty and Isham (2010) sees it as physical evidence and behavioural attributes of a corporation such as name, architecture, variety of products or services and the impression of quality communicated by the company. However, corporate image is often used interchangeably with corporate identity (Hsieh et al., 2004) but some scholars argue that the former is the reality or factors concerning the company while the latter is the perception held by stakeholders of the company (Souiden et al., 2006).

Corporate image characterizes a company and serves as an aura that induces positive perception and evaluation of its offer by consumer (Sugrova, Sedik, Kubelakova & svetlikova, 2017). In same vein, kim and lee (2010) opine that corporate image impact on customers evaluation of service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Isham (2010) admits that it affects customer loyalty and Kotler & Armstrong (2010) assert that a good corporate image is the highest influencer of customer loyalty because corporate image leads to positive corporate reputation and prestige. Souiden et al. (2006) established that corporate image has a direct effect on consumer product evaluation.

Corporate Reputation

Burke et al. (2019) define corporate reputation as a personal overall evaluation of major attributes, performance, and behavior of a company in a locality. Balmer (1998) describes corporate reputation as the perception one has of an organization based on what it does and its relationship and responsibility to the environment it operates while Souiden et al. (2006) sees it as the overall status a company earns through it responsibility within its constituents. Marketers admit that a key determinant of consumer purchase decisions is their perception of a firm's role in the society and how its stakeholders are treated (Kowalczyk & Pawlish, 2002). Consumers are interested in a firm's products and its historical social impact. Burke et al. (2019) company reputation direct product choices and serves as competitive edge giver in any chosen market because it induce quality perception and serve as a preference bond to both internal (employees) and external (customers) stakeholders. Gray & Balmer (1998) argues that company reputation can may produce consumer support for or withhold support from such company and its goods and/ or services but favourable corporate reputation helps in building consumers' trust and commitment to the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Concept of Corporate Branding Strategies

Corporate branding is a systematical process implemented by an organisation to create favourable brand image and maintain brand reputation through interaction with

internal and external stakeholders (Sallam, 2016). Therefore corporate branding focuses on the attributes of a company that support its range of products and services (Burke, Dowling & Wei, 2019). Corporate branding is the responsibility of a company's senior executives that reflects what the organisation seek to project itself to be and its actual position as perceived by external stakeholders. Therefore Keller & Richey (2006) assert that corporate brands comprises of the values, capabilities, culture and action of the entire company and its employees and (Souiden et al., 2006) assert that corporate brand is a symbol of attributes that can add value to a firm's product policy, individual products and link the corporate and product brands to produce a bundle of benefits to the stakeholders, the corporation and individual products. This bundle of benefit are perceived and evaluated by consumers putting into consideration the price, variety, habit, quantity, design, brand name, country of design, image and reputation that effect consumer purchase intention (Hilgen, Kamp & Shateau, 2010; Souiten, Snelders & Hultink, 2011; Souiden et al., 2006).

Owing to the increasing competition in the business arena, corporations are strategically branding to meet the perception and evaluation requirements of consumers (Uehling, 2000). Since invaluable corporate brand that is familiar can create a positive image that influences consumers' evaluation of goods and services (Novenla, Anselmi, Taglibue & Vidotto, 2014).

The Concept of Product Evaluation

A product brand is a bundle of multiple attributes such as price, variety, habit, quality, design, brand name, and country of origin capable of satisfying consumer requirements (Hilgenkamp & Shanteau, 2010) but as rational being, consumers assess/ evaluate them to determine whether they meet their needs (Liu & Dukes, 2015). They described consumer product evaluation as a discreet process in which consumers consciously acquire available information for purchase behaviour.

Consumers' evaluation of individual brand is a function of their perception on a set of product characteristics like quality, price and risk level (Benke & Carter, 2015) and brand owners advertisement (Bouten, Snelders & Hultink, 2011). Bouten et al.(2011) assert that consumers evaluate goods and services in the context of what the brand stands for.

Bouten et al. (2011), the compatibility between a brand and its image affect consumers' evaluation. Moisescu (2007) opines that one of the key consumer assessment factors is brand knowledge (i.e., brand awareness and brand image). The former is the ability of a consumer to identify, recognise and recall the brand under varying conditions while the latter is consumer perception held on the brand benefits and brand name that enhance the value of a product beyond its functional purpose. Consumer perceive brand name as higher quality and better than non-branded product (Ogunlade, 2007).

Research Methodology

This study adopts deductive thinking in looking at the social world. A sample size of one hundred (100) GSM subscribers in Rivers state were selected in equal proportion from MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile respectively. To test the hypothesized relationships, data were generated from field survey through a randomly administered questionnaire. The convenience sampling method was used in selecting the study elements (respondents). Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to ascertain reality. The constructs were validated by my supervisor and marketing experts in marketing departments. The constructs were subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach Alpha and the results were greater than the threshold of 0.70. The measurement items were rated in a 5 point Likert scale ranging

from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the study variables.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1:

How does corporate name influence subscriber’s quality service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State?

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
1) The name of a company determines its popularity.	100	1	5	3.76	.878	-.240	.241
2) Services that carry the name of the company attract positive impression.	100	2	5	3.32	1.014	.267	.241
3) The product/ services that carry the company name induce positive customer perception.	100	1	5	2.85	1.366	.107	.241
4) Companies that extend its name to all its services reinforce customer loyalty.	100	1	5	3.33	.726	.535	.241
5) Brand names add value to the brand in the eyes mind of consumers.	100	1	5	3.26	1.050	.151	.241
Valid N (listwise)	100						

From the table 1 above, we have a minimum statistical response of 1-2 and a maximum of 5. But, with a statistical mean value of 3.76, 3.32, 3.33, and 3.26 which are greater than the criterion mean value of 3.00, except item 3 that has 2.85. Meanwhile, it can be reasonably concluded that corporate name influence subscriber’s service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State.

Research Question 2:

What impact does corporate image has on subscriber’s quality service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State?

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
• Corporate image denotes innovativeness	100	2	5	3.79	.832	-.015	.241
• The image of a company determine success and self-confident	100	2	5	3.80	.791	-.125	.241
• Company image serves as persuasive appeal	100	2	5	3.68	.839	.248	.241
• Company image shows business ethical compliance.	100	2	5	3.17	.682	.746	.241

• Company's responsiveness to customers is dependent on corporate image.	100	2	5	3.25	.999	.221	.241
Valid N (listwise)	100						

From the table 3 above, the minimum statistical value is 2 and a maximum of 5. Therefore, with a statistical mean value of 3.79, 3.80, 3.68, 3.17 and 3.25 which are greater than the criterion mean value of 3.00; it obvious that corporate image influence subscriber's service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State.

Research Question 3:

What is the effect of corporate reputation on subscribers' quality service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers state?

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
A company's reputation serves as an emotional appeal.	100	2	5	3.79	.832	-.015	.241
Consumers partner more with a company that has good reputation.	100	2	5	3.80	.791	-.125	.241
Consumers have high regard for companies that undertakes social responsibilities.	100	2	5	3.68	.839	.248	.241
Good corporate reputation shows high quality service/ product.	100	2	5	3.60	1.025	.241	.241
Consumers' patronage companies that redeem their promises to target market.	100	3	5	4.01	.759	-.017	.241
Valid N (listwise)	100						

From the table 5 above, the minimum statistical value is 2 and a maximum of 5. Therefore, with a statistical mean value of 3.79, 3.80, 3.68, 3.60 and 4.01 which are greater than the criterion mean value of 3.00; it is clear that corporate reputation influence subscriber's service evaluation of mobile service firms in Rivers State.

Correlation Matrix on all Variables

Correlations

		CORPORATE NAME	CORPORATE IMAGE	CORPORATE REPUTATIO N	QUALITY PRODUCT EVALUATION
CORPORATE NAME	Pearson Correlation	1	.955**	.826**	.310**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.002
	N	100	100	100	100

CORPORATE IMAGE	Pearson Correlation	.955**	1	.865**	.361**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100
CORPORATE REPUTATION	Pearson Correlation	.826**	.865**	1	.565**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	100	100	100	100
QUALITY PRODUCT EVALUATION	Pearson Correlation	.310**	.361**	.565**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion of Findings

The result presented above shows that a strong significant relationship exists between corporate name ($r = 0.310; p < .05$), corporate image ($r = 0.361; p < .05$), corporate reputation ($r = 0.565; p < .05$) and product quality evaluation ($r = 0.310; p < .05$).

The null hypothesis was rejected because the calculated r -values of 0.310, 0.361 and 0.565 were found to be greater than the critical r -value of 0.205 given at .05 level of significance and 98 degrees of freedom. This finding implies that corporate branding strategies in terms of corporate name, corporate image and corporate reputation have a significant positive relationship with subscriber's service evaluation in term of product quality evaluation.

Conclusion

Corporate branding influences subscribers' service evaluation in the mobile communication industry. The dimensions of corporate branding were proven to have positive relationship with subscriber's quality service evaluation. Corporate reputation was found to positively affect consumers/ subscriber's quality perception and evaluation significantly more than corporate image and name.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made.

- Firms should make corporate reputation the hall mark of corporate operations and activities to attract and induce desired customer evaluation of its offers
- Corporations should uncompromisingly monitor what it does, its relationship with the target market and responsibility to the environment for quality value, and
- Corporate companies must see the need for investing in good reputation and its sustainability.

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Questionnaire

Instruction: Please tick the appropriate option.

- (1) What gender are you? (a) Male (b) Female
- (2) What is your marital status? (a) Single (b) Married (c) Divorce/Separated (d) Widowed/ Widower
- (3) What is your age category? (a) 18 - 25yrs (b) 26 - 35yrs (c) 36 - 45yrs (d) 56 – 65yrs
- (4) What is your educational background? (a) O’Level (b) OND/ND (c) HND/B.Sc/ B.ED (d) Masters (e) P.HD
- (7) How long have you been in business? (a) 1-5yrs (b) 6-10yrs (c) 11-15yrs (d) 15yrs and above

Instruction: Please note that assigned weights are given to responses below as filling guide.

Strongly agree (SA) = 5

Agree (A) = 4

Neutral (N) = 3

Disagree (D) = 2

Strongly disagree (SD) =1

S/NO	CORPORATE NAME (Souiden et al., 2006)	5	4	3	2	1
CON1	The name of a company determine its popularity					
CON2	Services that carries the name of the company attract positive impression					
CON3	The product/ services that carries the company name induces positive customer perception					

CON4	Companies that extend its name to all its services reinforce customer loyalty					
CON5:	Brand names add value to the brand in the eyes mind of consumers					

S/NO	CORPORATE IMAGE (Souiden et al., 2006)	5	4	3	2	1
COI1	Corporate image denotes innovativeness.					
COI2	The image of a company determine success and self-confident.					
COI3	Company image serves as persuasive appeal.					
COI4	Company image shows business ethical compliance.					
COI5:	Company's responsiveness to customers is dependent on corporate image.					

S/NO	CORPORATE REPUTATION (Souiden et al., 2006)	5	4	3	2	1
COR1	A company's reputation serves as an emotional appeal.					
COR2	Consumers partner more with a company that has good reputation.					
COR3	Consumers have high regard for companies that undertakes social responsibilities.					
COR4	Good corporate reputation shows high quality service/ product.					
COR5:	Consumers' patronage companies that redeem their promises to target market.					

S/NO	QUALITY PRODUCT EVALUATION	5	4	3	2	1
QPE1	Corporate name induces quality perception and evaluation					
QPE2	I have high regard for corporate image.					
QPE3	Corporate performance and behavior attract product quality evaluation					