

Corporate Branding and Customer Evaluation: Synopsis of Made-In-Nigeria Products

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between corporate branding and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. The aim was to examine the relationship between corporate branding and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products using brand communication and brand competence as dimensions. The study adopted cross-sectional research design. 316 copies of questionnaire distributed. The Simple Regression Analysis Statistical tool was used with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23.0), discriminant validity (AVE) and Cronbach Alpha verified the internal consistency and validity status and the results were positive. The findings of the study showed that corporate branding significantly related with customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. The study concluded by saying that corporate branding positively and significantly related with customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. Based on the findings, the study, recommends that, Organizations in Nigeria should focus on other methods such as corporate branding, communication, and marketing mix in order to increase brand awareness and image among customers.

Keywords: Corporate Branding, Customer Evaluation, Made-in-Nigeria Product.

Introduction

Globalization and competition have increased the need to attract and retain customers (Catteeuw et al., 2007) by organizations through exceptional branding strategies. The globalization has led to the emergence of certain consumers' behaviours across countries while there are opposite customers' behaviours, such as the tendency to buy domestic products rather than foreign products, which contribute to the global economical crises as well as the rise of nationalism. Customer ethnocentrism and animosity have influence willingness or unwillingness of customers to purchase made-in-Nigeria products from companies based in or associated with an opposed country in the international market place. In fact, customers can form certain feelings toward the Country-Of-Origin resulting in positive or negative biases (Hamzaoui, 2006), customer can also develop feelings superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture (ethnocentrism) or have positive attitudes toward specific countries (Consumer affinity) or negative attitudes toward a specific country (animosity), which affects the consumer behaviour when it comes to buying a product. This can be attributed to the comprehensive knowledge and treatment of corporate branding.

Firms find it increasingly desirable to develop and promote their corporate and product-level brands, to use trademark laws to protect the equity in their brands, and to adopt what has come to be referred to as "brand equity strategy" (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). Likewise, customers find it increasingly desirable to develop relationships with corporate brands, to become loyal to their favorite brands, and to participate in brand communities. Indeed, some customers identify so

strongly with particular corporate brands that they become a part of consumers' "extended selves" (Belk, 1988). Despite the growing importance of brands to both firms and consumers, the subject of brand as an organizational practice, corporate branding, brand equity strategies, and branding as a societal institution has become so controversial that an anti-branding movement has become widespread across several continents (Johansson, 2021; Klein, 2019; Lasn, 2020).

Corporate branding refers to a systematically planned and implemented process of managing and maintaining a favorable brand identity and image to eventually create favorable reputation in customers' eyes and with all stakeholders (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). Failure of a corporate branding to meet customer expectations may have severe repercussions, such as creating negative publicity about the brand and its associated sub-brands where customers might switch to competitive brands or even boycott the original brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2010; Hsiao et al., 2015; Sichtmann, 2017). Indeed, successful corporate brands are built by corporations able to make valuable positive connections with their customers, that is, their primary stakeholders (Kay, 2016). Thus, building trust through creating strong corporate branding and customer relationships needs to be one of the main issues of concern for companies. Product brands can be easily replaced, corporate brands have a longer life span and therefore constitute a more reliable source of reference for product quality expectations (Sichtmann, 2017). Nigerian customers tend to have a long-term orientation and thus tend to assign ultimate importance to a corporate brand's reputation when choosing made-in-Nigeria products or any other products. Corporate branding experience can occur through a customer's direct experience with the brand, and through indirect experience by exposing customers to the brand through advertising, public relations and virtual media experiences (Brakus et al., 2019).

To generate customer evaluation, corporate branding needs to convince customers to engage in direct experiences. Forming a mind-set with respect to a brand includes cognitive and affective states, and specifically what a customer knows and how they feel about the brand (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Şahin et al., 2012). Thus, a positive corporate branding experience would be more likely to develop customer loyalty if it affects both reasoning and emotion. Further, repeated exposures to a corporate branding create personalized brand information for consumers and increases their cognitive and affective abilities to analyze, evaluate and trust (or not) the brand (Kuhlmeier & Knight, 2015). Corporate branding can improve customers' rational assessments by showing their reliability and integrity through delivering repeatedly satisfactory corporate branding experiences (Conn, 2015). Similarly, to build affective trust, corporate branding and their employees need to show genuine care and concern through culturally and emotionally compatible experiences.

Numerous of studies have been conducted on corporate branding and customer evaluation, among them are Christopher and Aiswarya (2019) who studied on corporate branding: perceived organisational support and employee retention – the mediating role of organisational commitment in New Zealand; Iglesias and Ind (2020) investigated on towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: the next key challenge in brand management; Ilyas et al. (2020) investigated on the effect of corporate branding on repurchase intention; Ozdemir et al. (2017) studied on the effects of trust and peer influence on corporate brand—consumer relationships and consumer loyalty of national dairy products in China. None of this study combines corporate branding with customer evaluation of product in Nigeria. It against this backdrop, the researcher seeks to investigate on corporate branding and customer evaluation: Synopsis of made-in-Nigeria products.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has undergone crucial economic, political and social changes from the past decades. One of the results of Nigeria's relatively new market economy is abundant access to foreign products and services. Faced with a wide selection of different commodities, customers may rely or boycott on various product information cues to assist them in their purchasing decisions. Success of each business depends on purchasing its products by the customers. Accessing global markets has increased the number of potential buyers from local to international levels. Presently, many indigenous entrepreneurs or importers in Nigeria are in foot wears business established through either the government micro credit scheme or operating mainly as small scale business ventures and are scattered all over the country. The major ones are located at Onitsha and Aba and cities such as Benin City, Ibadan, Lagos, Kaduna and Kano.e.t.c. Their products are looked down upon and contemptuously termed "Igbo-made", Aba-made indicating a mark of inferiority. This very perception in our local scene has affected the acceptance of our local produce in international market. If this misconception is not nip in the bud, it will in no small measure stifle all effort geared, towards self-reliance, economic growth and development. It is in this light that the federal Government had often urged the citizenry to patronize made-in-Nigeria product.

However, corporate branding through brand communication and brand competence could salvage solution on customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria product. Even when there are standardized products from Nigeria, the customers' attitude towards it is still not encouraging. The government and other stakeholders should jointly work in pari-pasu to curtail this perception uphold by the average Nigerian. This led us to investigate on corporate branding and customer evaluation: Synopsis of made-in-Nigeria products.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between corporate branding and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. The general objectives are to:

- i. Examines the relationship extent between brand communication and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.
- ii. Determines the relationship extent between brand competence and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.

1.4 Research Questions

Prior to the aim and objectives of this study, the following formed our research questions in this investigation:

1. What is relationship between brand communication and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.
2. What is relationship between brand competence and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on the above research questions, the following hypotheses are as follows:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between brand communication and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between brand competence and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: The social identity theory (SIT) is the primary theoretical foundation of identification in both marketing literature and organizational studies (Lam et al., 2013). The SIT advocates that people usually go beyond their personal identity to develop a social identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Based on the SIT, corporate branding explains why firms are able to relate to customers (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Drawing from the SIT, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) extended the concept of corporate branding to customer–brand relationships. Although, in spite of the theory enlightening relationship marketing success for several years (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and likely impacting on process through which consumer experiences unfold (Fujita et al., 2018), its (SIT) role in marketing has been mostly underexplored (Lam et al., 2013; Martinez & Rodriguez DelBosque, 2013). Corporate branding that is essentially a perceptual construct involves identity fit and identity matching (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Individuals likely go outside their self-identity to develop a social identity by classifying themselves and others into various social categories such as organizational membership (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Corporate branding, underpinned by SIT, is when an individual sees himself/herself as psychologically intertwined with the characteristics of a group (So et al., 2013).

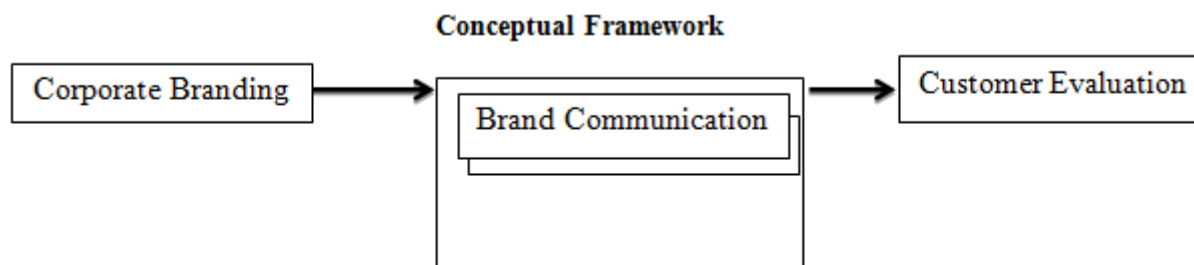


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework on Corporate Branding and Customer Evaluation
Source: Adopted from Yeh & Li (2019); Berthon et al. (2009)

2.2 Corporate Branding

The American Marketing Association defines “brand” as: A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. The legal term for brand is trademark. A brand may identify one item, a family of items, or all items of the seller. If used for the firm’s a whole, the preferred term is trade name (Bennett, 2018). Drawing on Tierney et al. (2016), we define brand meaning as “an idiosyncratic and evolving emotional and cognitive understanding attributed to a brand as a result of a socially negotiated process”. Thus the meaning attached to corporate branding is the embodiment of phenomenological interpretation in a broader cultural context (Edvardsson et al., 2011). The concept of corporate branding has conventionally been defined in the branding literature as a stable entity, which is internal to the firm and the source of influence on consumers’ perceptions and interpretations of the brand meaning (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2012). According to this perspective, corporate branding lives in the minds of individuals and groups. Corporate branding is a perceptual/cognitive identity type” (Balmer, 2010) and refers to “perceived attributes and associations that are linked to a corporate name and, secondary, to an institutional marque” (ibid). In this version of corporate branding, a well-defined brand identity is critical for the long-term building, differentiation and management of the corporate brand (Aaker, 2004).

Recently, however, the managerially oriented assumption of corporate branding as a static managerial creation that is unilaterally developed, maintained and strategically managed through conventional brand alignment frameworks (Balmer, 2012; Kapferer, 2012) has been challenged on the grounds that it does not reflect brand management practice in today's increasingly complex market environments where corporate branding is no longer stable (da Silveira et al., 2013). Corporate branding can occur through a consumer's direct experience with the brand and through indirect experience by exposing consumers to the brand through advertising, public relations and virtual media experiences (Brakus et al., 2019). To generate satisfaction and loyalty, corporate brands need to convince customers to engage in direct experiences. Forming a mind-set with respect to a brand includes cognitive and affective states, and specifically what a customer knows and how they feel about the brand (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Şahin et al., 2012). Thus, a positive brand experience would be more likely to develop consumer loyalty if it affects both reasoning and emotion. Further, repeated exposures to a brand and brand experiences create personalized brand information for consumers and increases their cognitive and affective abilities to analyze, evaluate and trust (or not) the brand (Kuhlmeier & Knight, 2015). For the benefit of this paper, corporate branding is operationalized using brand communication and brand competence.

2.2.1 Brand Communication

Brand communication may inferentially be regarded as formal and/or informal interactive dialogue between a corporation's brand and its consumers and wider stakeholders. This study suggests that to create consumer loyalty, a corporation's communication activities need to build both cognitive and affective trust. Importantly, corporate brand communication can be assessed in terms of attributes such as quality, frequency and interactivity. When consumers perceive that the quality of information provided by a brand is reliable, unbiased and credible, they increase their awareness and knowledge of the brand, and positively increase their cognitive assessments of the brand's trustworthiness (Guenzi et al., 2019; Yeh & Li, 2019). However, if a corporate brand shares inaccurate or out-of-date information, or falsifies customer reviews, the evaluations of the brand's reliability and integrity through diminished cognitive trust would decrease loyalty among its customers (Garbarino & Lee, 2013). Affective trust would also be reduced in such cases by the resulting negative opinions formed about the brand's benevolence and care and concern towards its consumers' well-being.

However, some brands can weather reputational storms. Frequent communication between a corporate brand and its employees and consumers create a sense of closeness, familiarity, sincerity and ease. The social bonds developed through these interactions occur at an emotional level that results in relationships more resistant to intermittent failures (Sharma & Patterson, 2019). Indeed, when corporate brand communications include regular follow-up to explore consumer satisfaction, it signals the brand's care for its consumers, which in turn develops affective trust and can eventually generate increased commitment to the relationship (Sharma & Patterson, 2019). In addition, a brand that gives frequent, accurate, timely and ongoing information, and responds quickly and satisfactorily to consumer concerns, can eliminate misunderstandings or doubts and diminish customer anxiety or disputes, which in turn increase customers' cognitive assessment of the brand's trustworthiness and consequently enhances brand loyalty (Mukherjee & Nath, 2017).

2.2.2 Brand Competence

In this business environment under high complexity, brand competency is often derived from two or more erewhile different sector becoming participants (Lee & Olson 2010). Such convergences often occur and boast of high brand competency, such as improved revenue (Berthon et al., 2009).

Brand users' perceptions in the brand competency rely on strategic positions of the brand and match the resources of the brand to the needs of the brand users in the target markets (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). And competency includes brand characteristics and brand value. Brand competence refers to a brand's innate, life-long tendency to seek feelings of effectiveness, achievement, and challenge in its activities (Thomson, 2006). Brand competence is the values, advantages and distinctive competencies offered by a brand in solving brand users problems, which enable them to get benefits because their needs, desires, dreams and obsessions manifested by what it got to offer. Values and benefits here can be functional (Keller, 1993), emotional, symbolic or social (Wijaya, 2012), such as product brand of a clothes detergent with benefits and competences are being able to clean clothes to be cleaner (functional benefit/ value), make the wearer more confident and feel comfortable (emotional benefit/ value), be a symbol of a clean lifestyle of modern society (symbolic benefit/ value), and inspire greater community to care about a healthy lifestyle and environmental preservation (social benefit/ value).

Benefits, advantages and distinctive competencies of a brand will affect the brand image of the product, individual or institution and company. A competent brand is one that has the ability to crack a customer's problem and to meet the need (Butler, 1991). Every business establishment wants to institute their competence in a few key areas, and deal with their brand within these realms. It is a duty of every marketer to find out exact demands of their customers which are related with their brand. Business enterprise should not create doubt in the mind of its brand user about brand competence. Brand users must be persuaded regarding the brand competence. Marketers should make well-judged use of key opinion leaders, who are viewed as authorities in specific areas, and to present them a persona of the brand. Highly qualified engineers for technical equipment and well-known physicians for pharmaceutical products are examples of key opinion leaders. Competent brand includes crucial elements for solving consumers' problem. Utilization of brand is only one way to find out brand competency (Christou, 2004).

2.3 Customer Evaluation

The evaluation of customer is a fundamental challenge for organizations due to the complexity of customers' experience. Researchers have highlighted a gap between firm's perceptions regarding the attributes of customer evaluation and what exactly customers believe is essential when they patronize and evaluate their products of a firm (Lockyer, 2005). Traditional survey methods cannot help better understand this research field. Thus, it is crucial to develop new measures and research frameworks to examine the factors that affect customer evaluation. An interesting avenue for further research is to use new data sources and innovative research methodologies to increase knowledge about customers' evaluation (Xiang et al., 2015). As corporate branding has become a key tool in the economy and marketing, advertising, and customer service, more and more studies have been done on this subject (Kitsios & Kamariotou, 2021). Customers often make a decision to purchase/repurchase after evaluating whether their experience with the product/service has been satisfactory/pleasurable (Ali et al., 2016). The customer satisfaction model based on the expectation disconfirmation theory advocates that customers are satisfied when actual firm performance confirms or outperforms past expectations (Oliver, 1997). Disconfirmation occurs when there are differences between expectations and outcomes. Negative disconfirmation occurs when product or service performance is worse than expected while positive disconfirmation occurs when product or service performance is better than expected. Confirmation or positive disconfirmation results in customer evaluation of satisfaction while negative disconfirmation leads to customer dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1997).

The extent to which customers are satisfied with the service may contribute to their future commitment to the service provider. Satisfied customers may become more committed to the service (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Prior research has identified that a customer's evaluation with his/her consumption experience leads to a positive influence on his/her states of commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). High levels of evaluation have been linked to the development of enduring relationships (Sui & Baloglu, 2003). Prospective customers use online rating sites to search for information and read both negative and positive reviews before deciding where to book (Llodra-Riera et al., 2015). Customers will focus on reviews and ratings to choose a brand. Online reviews describe customer evaluation of a brand and dissatisfaction more coherently and comprehensively because the text is unstructured. Prior studies Ling et al. (2010); Wu et al. (2018) stated that customers evaluate their brand experiences according to their perceptions of visual appeal, privacy, personalization, product information, and entertainment. So, the availability of a company's information can significantly help in formulating customer's previous purchase experience. Less experienced customers tend to be more risk-averse than those who are highly experienced (Lee & Tan, 2003).

2.4 Corporate Branding and Customer Evaluation

Organizations in other words, a purpose is concerned with the way in which a corporate brand creates value for all its diverse stakeholders. It should both provide clarity so that managers can use it as a filter for strategic decision-making, and be dynamic, in that it can inspire and engage different stakeholders to further develop and elucidate a shared and evolving understanding of the corporate branding (Iglesias et al., 2020a). Surprisingly, there is a gap between the managerial discussions around purpose, which have become main-stream, and academia, where there is an inexplicable lack of research on how corporate branding should build a purpose and what the benefits of doing so are (Golob et al., 2020). The focus on purpose also implies a new model of brand governance (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). Rather than managers seeing themselves as brand custodians, who rigidly try to preserve the integrity of the corporate branding, they should see themselves as 'conductors' (Michel, 2017) who allow the corporate branding to adapt to the needs of multiple stakeholders, while being true to its purpose, and appreciating and celebrating history and heritage (Iglesias et al., 2020c).

However, even if the co-creative approach to corporate branding signifies a relevant paradigm shift in brand management, it is still a nascent field of study and demands many more empirical studies, and further theoretical development. More precisely, most of the research in the area has been conducted in B2C contexts (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Black & Veloutsou, 2017). Additionally, more research is needed in the flourishing this arena (Mingione & Leoni, 2019). In parallel, there is a need for empirical studies with a more balanced perspective of different stakeholders (von Wallpach et al., 2017a), as most of the studies either focus on customers, or do not take into account all the relevant internal and external stakeholders (Iglesias et al., 2020a). Finally, more research is needed that adheres to a performative perspective that derives from Goffman (2016), which suggests that if corporate brands are co-created in a continuous process, research should focus on understanding stakeholders' performances in the co-creation of corporate brands (da Silveira et al., 2013; von Wallpach et al., 2017b; Iglesias et al., 2020a).

2.4.1 Brand Communication and Customer Evaluation

Consumer experiences with corporate brands are social in nature and influenced by peers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Kim & Hanssens, 2017). Wang and Yu (2015) argue that this influence can be seen in two different forms of interaction. The first form is through opinion based communication, when

peer referents disseminate their own knowledge of and experiences with a corporate brand. Peers are regarded as credible sources, therefore consumers integrate this information into their own decision making. Second, peer influence occurs when consumers observe others' behavior in an attempt to gather information to reduce the risk associated with a relationship scenario with a corporate brand (Bandura, 2017). With observational learning, it is known that consumers regard others' information more heavily than their own (Banerjee, 1992). That is, whilst brand experience contains affective and cognitive elements to induce affective and cognitive trust, respectively, information from peer experiences will have the same effect, reinforcing consumers' own brand experiences.

The above type of social interaction with peers usually involves opinions on a brand's reliability, fairness, honesty and benevolence. When peers communicate a brand's altruistic motives to others, it demonstrates positive perceptions of the brand's honesty and benevolence, and in turn generates affective trust through indirect brand experience (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2018). When a peer's experience is similar to that of one's own, an affective trust link will be reinforced. Similarly, when a peer has had a negative experience with a brand, affective trust diminishes or does not occur. For example, if a peer thinks that the corporate brand has not offered enough promotional deals considering the amount of time and effort he or she had put in researching the brand, this would likely create a similar negative opinion of the brand's fairness for the consumer who observes or is told about this situation (Chen et al., 2013). Thus, these social interactions not only develop a deeper knowledge of a brand but also build expectations of the brand's ability in delivering similar experiences or in dealing with problems that may arise in experiencing the brand. Such interactions affect consumers' 'cognitive evaluations of a brand's trustworthiness (Lobschat et al., 2013). Consumers' own experience and trust attainment of the corporate brand would be strengthened when peers' accounts are in parallel with their own, however when they are contradicting, this would weaken the effect of corporate brand experience over cognitive trust. When peers' positive accounts are in contradiction with an individual's negative experiences, a conflict is likely to be created that consumers may try and resolve by mitigating their own experiences.

2.4.2 Brand Competence and Customer Evaluation

Brand competence is perceived as the ability to induce intentions. Brands that are capable of stimulating intentions are perceived as being competent, whereas brands that are unable to do so are perceived as being incompetent (Thomson, 2006). The knowledge-attitude-skill model identifies three components that underpin competence: cognitive or 'mental' skills, otherwise referred to as knowledge; affective skills, otherwise referred to as attitude; and psychomotor, manual, and physical skills, otherwise referred to as skills (Cutcliffe & Sloan, 2014). An engineer-like style of smart interaction endows a brand with professional and expert characteristics, and indicates that the brand (1) is armed with knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis, (2) is good at solving problems with plentiful physical skills, and therefore (3) is perceived as being efficient, dependable, and reliable. In contrast, when smart, connected products interact with users in a friend-like style and provide autonomous and personalised services based on deep customer insight, the brands act more like friends who (1) are sensitive to the customers' needs and always adopt the customer's perspective, (2) are willing to adapt and work together with customers in problem-solving, and therefore (3) are perceived to be helpful and trustworthy (Edelman & Singer, 2015; Huang et al., 2013; Kervyn et al., 2012).

Customers can find out brand's competency through directly using or word-of-mouth. Good brands are able to satisfy customer needs and their attributes must be compatible with customer needs.

Brand capability is the property of brand, value which is aware of customers (Hasan & Muhammad, 2010). Butler and Cantrell (1984), Butler (1991), Deutsch (1958), Cook and Wall (1980), and Sitkin and Roth (1998) estimated that it was a qualification to gratify customer needs. Therefore Brand Competence has two dimensions as follows: brand attributes and brand value. Brand attributes: Brand attributes consist of attributes, benefits, and attitudes. (Keller 1993, 1998) Attributes are explained to be characteristics that characterize products or services which customers think about them, and they are related to purchase or consumption (Keller, 1993). Attributes can be categorized in various ways (Myers and Shocker, 1981). In Keller's study (1993), attributes comprise both intrinsic and extrinsic brand attributes; they are differentiated and are based on how they are directly related to products or service performances. Brand attributes are product-related attributes.

2.5 Empirical Review

Christopher and Aiswarya (2019) studied on employer branding: perceived organisational support and employee retention – the mediating role of organisational commitment. The purpose of their paper is to examine the relationship between employer branding attribute of organisational support and employee retention in a government agency in New Zealand. Their study was cross-sectional in design, and an online survey method was used to collect data from 134 research participants. Research participants were recruited from a local council in New Zealand. The Process Macro Regression method was employed to analyse the collected data. Their main findings were: first, the study shows that perceived organisational support (POS) as an employer branding technique affects employee retention. Second, POS significantly influenced employees' organisational commitment (OC) as a predictor of employee retention. Third, the relationship between organisational support and employee retention was mediated by OC in this study. Research limitations/implications – This study examined POS as an employer branding strategy; the findings have a number of valuable implications for organisations. This study suggests that organisations should develop adequate organisational support mechanisms as a way of acquiring the status of a better employer among different stakeholders.

Iglesias and Ind (2020) investigated towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: the next key challenge in brand management. In this article we chart the evolution of corporate brand management from an organization-centric view based on control to one rooted in a participative co-created perspective where multiple stakeholders help to build and enrich the brand. This shift challenges many of the traditional models of corporate brand management and recognizes the importance of meeting the needs and desires of stakeholders through the adoption of a conscientious approach built on responsibility and a commitment to fairness. We illustrate our argument with such examples as Danone, SAP, Tata, Unilever and Patagonia and conclude with research agenda to explore further the nascent field of conscientious corporate brands.

Ilyas et al. (2020) study aimed to analyze and confirm brand awareness' role in influencing the repurchase intention both directly and indirectly on customer satisfaction variables and repurchase intention variables. The number of respondents in this study was 200 samples using the online survey data collection method (Google form), while the research approach is quantitative explanatory. The data analysis test tools include the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach with AMOS as a statistical data analysis software and Sobel test to indirectly test the relationship. This study consists of four hypotheses, of which three hypotheses are positively and significantly related (brand awareness on repurchase intention, brand awareness on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction on repurchase intention). Through indirect relationship, namely, brand

awareness on repurchase intention through customer satisfaction, the study showed no significant effect.

Ozdemir et al. (2017) studied on the effects of trust and peer influence on corporate brand—consumer relationships and consumer loyalty in China. Using survey data from 600 consumers, the study shows that while cognitive trust mediates the relationships between certain corporate brand and consumer constructs, including corporate brand competence and corporate brand communication and loyalty, affective trust mediates the effect of loyalty on corporate brand and consumer relationship constructs, including corporate brand communication, corporate brand liking and corporate brand similarity. Peer influence is found only to have a positive moderating effect on corporate brand communication regarding affective trust.

3.0 Materials and Method

This is an empirical paper, which seek to evaluate the influence of corporate branding on customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. This paper adopted quasi-experimental design which means that the researcher has no influence on the studied elements. Cross-sectional survey was used to gather data from different point in order to draw logical conclusions. The population of this study is made up of the lecturers in University of Port Harcourt which are 1500 lecturers (Researcher's field desk, 2018) . Using Taro Yamen's formula to determine the sample size, we had 316. Therefore, 316 became our sample size. The paper adopted non probability sampling through the use of convenience sampling method. Well constructed questionnaires were used to administer to the respondents. The instrument adopted a five-point scale which includes: SA=Strongly Agree(5), A=Agree(4), U=Undecided(3), Disagree(2), Strongly Disagree(1). Simple regression analytical tool was used to analyze and test the formulated hypotheses.

Table 1: Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity for BCM, BCP, and CE

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE	α
Brand Communication	<i>BCM1</i>	0.845			
	<i>BCM2</i>	0.921	0.95	0.80	0.832
	<i>BCM3</i>	0.894			
	<i>BCM4</i>	0.911			
	<i>BCM5</i>	0.888			
Brand Competence	<i>BCP1</i>	0.899			
	<i>BCP2</i>	0.847	0.94	0.77	0.793
	<i>BCP3</i>	0.798			
	<i>BCP4</i>	0.901			
	<i>BCP5</i>	0.931			
Customer Evaluation	<i>CE1</i>	0.873			
	<i>CE2</i>	0.855	0.92	0.76	0.803
	<i>CE3</i>	0.844			
	<i>CE4</i>	0.802			
	<i>CE5</i>	0.841			

Source: SMARTPLS Result Output

As evidenced in Table 1, the paper witnessed all the observed variables (statement items) factor loaded was high against their elemental factors (latent variables), owing to factor loadings ranging

from 0.798 to 0.944. These values are all above the suggested threshold of 0.6, implying that they were valid measures of their latent factors. Also, for all cases, CR, AVE and Cronbach Alpha (α) were higher than their suggested threshold values of 0.5 respectively. All these imply that our data achieve convergent validity. For discriminant validity, we follow the usual procedure by comparing the Cronbach Alpha (α) with the multiple regression coefficients between the constructs. All in all, our measurement analysis shows that brand communication, brand competence and customer evaluation are all objectively and validly measured by their respective statement items contained in our research instrument.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The data analysis was done using simple regression.

Table 2: Regression Analysis showing the relationship between corporate branding and customer evaluation

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted (R ²)	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.908 ^a	.824	.811	.14787	1967.248	.001**
2	.790	.625	.620	.30450	136.121	.000**

Regression Model 1: CE = 0.192 + [(-0.037BCM)]

The model 1 revealed the linear relationship between brand communication (BCM) and customer evaluation (CE). The result indicated a regression relationship (R) = 0.908 as well as regression square (R²) = 0.824 which was equivalent to 82.4%. This showed that a positive and strong nexus existed between the variables as indicated in the decision rule. This further explained that 82.4% variation can be explained by factors within the model used for the study while the remaining 17.6% can only be suggested by other factors in the model used for the study. The f-ratio (F1, 316=1967.248) showed significant effects in existence and this revealed the strength of the model used for the study. The t-ratio statistic revealed significant impact of brand communication on customer evaluation. This analysis outputs revealed that brand communication made significant contribution to customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. Furthermore, the (p-value) is less than (<) 0.05, we therefore rejected the established null hypotheses one that no significant relationship between brand communication and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.

Regression Model2: CE = 3.017+ [(0.337BCP)]

The results of the simple regression variables indicated R = 0.790, R²=0.625 which is equal to 62.5% and this is the explanatory strength of the model used. It means that only 62.5% variation can be explained by factors within the model used while 37.5% can only be explained by other external quantitative and qualitative factors of the model used for the dissertation. The f-ratio (F1, 316=136.121) showed significant effects in existence and this revealed the appropriateness of the model used for the paper. The t-ratio statistic showed significant for the one dimension of the predictor variable to the present status of customer evaluation. These results revealed that the proxy of the predictor made significant contribution. Also, the p-value<0.05 for H₂ which means it was rejected as regard to customer evaluation.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

Positive significant relationship between brand communication and customer evaluation

Hypothesis one (Ho₁) aimed at examine the significant relationship between brand communication and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. The hypothesis was tested using Simple

Regression Analysis. Our analysis showed that, there was a strong and positive significant relationship between brand communication and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products ($R= 0.908$, $R^2=0.824\sim 82.4\%$). This reveals a strong and positive significant relationship between the two construct variables. Given the analysis output, probability value (0.000) is less than the level of significance, we rejected the hypothesis one, that there is was a significant impact of brand communication on customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. Some empirical findings were in line with our findings on brand communication and customer evaluation: Lemon and Verhoef(2016); Kim and Hanssens(2017). Wang and Yu (2015) results indicated that brand communication has a significant impact on firms' performance. Bigne-Alcaniz et al.(2018) found brand communication significantly impacted organization's success. Lobs chat et al.(2013) result showed that there was a significant positive relationship between brand communication and customer satisfaction which ultimately impacts on an organization's performance.

Positive significant relationship between brand competence and customer evaluation

Hypothesis two (H_{02}) aimed at examine the significant relationship between brand competence and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. The hypothesis was tested using Simple Regression Analysis. Our analysis showed that, there was a strong and positive significant relationship between brand competence and customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products ($R= 0.908$, $R^2=0.824\sim 82.4\%$). This reveals a strong and positive significant relationship between the two construct variables. Given the analysis output, probability value (0.000) is less than the level of significance, we rejected the hypothesis two, that there is was a significant impact of brand competence on customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. Some empirical findings were in line with our findings on organizational reputation and public acceptance: Hafeez and Essmail, (2007) study supported our findings that brand competence has a significant impact on customer acceptance. Chen et al.(2007) found that brand competence has positive and significant relationship with performance of an organization. Hussain et al.(2006) found that brand competencies in small manufacturing firms in Finland significantly correlated with business establishment's success.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The results on image management indicators, namely brand communication and brand competence, all contributed significantly towards achieving customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products. In light of this, the study therefore concludes that:

- i) The findings revealed that brand communication significantly influence customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products.
- ii) Furthermore, brand competence significantly relates with customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products positively.

Based on the results, the study concludes that corporate branding is strongly and positively relates with customer evaluation of made-in-Nigeria products as it creates a means of attachment with management which leads to customer evaluation that most times leads to satisfaction.

Therefore, the following recommendations are put forward:

- 1) Organizations in Nigeria should focus on other methods such as corporate branding, communication, and marketing mix in order to increase brand awareness and image among customers.
- 2) Firms need to understand customers' perception and ideology for maximum evaluation. Thus, firms should keep conducting regular surveys to understand customers' needs and expectations.

- 3) Brand competence should be inculcated in the planning, development and implementation stages of the marketing strategy of firms, as this will lead to appreciable growth in market coverage and profit maximization as customers taste appeal are met.
- 4) Firms should ensure they establish a perception of brand sincerity on their customers so as to maintain the loyalty of their customers as well as attract new ones.
- 5) Brand communication should be incorporated into the operational and strategic plans of political parties. This includes brand logo, brand personification, brand image, brand reputation and corporate communication.

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