

Audience Mindset and Influence on Personal Political Branding

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ABSTRACT In most researches that touch on consumer behaviour, the bus stops have always been consumer satisfaction and intentions. The intentions of a consumer will normally drive his behaviour on a particular product or service. This will ultimately lead to his satisfaction or dissatisfaction as the case may be. But the question is: if an intention is what you plan or purpose to do, what are those things that drive that plan or purpose? It is the job of this paper to make us understand that a successful branding or brand management does not emerge except the mindsets of the target audience are analyzed and acted upon. These mindsets form the force that propels the intention of a customer to buy or not to buy. This message becomes clearer when we transpose into personal branding, and more specifically, personal political branding.

INTRODUCTION

The world is in flux and everything therein. Change in all ramifications is constant. The seeming immutability of laws of nature offers a bulwark against paradigm shift but even then physical sciences are also subject to paradigmatic change, although this arises more from accumulating weakness in the explanatory power of a given paradigm than from changes in their object of study. The social sciences, by comparison, according to James Curran and Michael Gurrevitch (2000) clearly require greater theoretical and conceptual alertness. This is as a result of the fact that it is more difficult to discern enduring structures, rules and generalizations when the societal kaleidoscope keeps revolving, thereby confronting us with ever-changing, new and different patterns. Therefore the processes of socio-political and economic changes are bound to impact on the conceptual frameworks developed and deployed by social scientists since object and issues in their study are continually being transformed.

A case in point is taste. Manufacturers are constantly struggling to keep pace with the ever-changing tastes of their customers. Demand for improved products and services has elicited fierce competition. Therefore, advertising practitioners and marketers are ever busy with the responsibilities of packaging products, and services in such a way that fits into the needs and satisfaction of consumers. The result has been a highly dynamic research activity in marketing to conform to the changes in manufacturing process as well as consumer behaviour.

Success in this respect will amount to a powerful branding strategy that can establish an enduring relationship between a product and its publics. "Product" here can be in different forms namely: an item, commodity, service or personality.

This then suggests that there can hardly ever be a successful branding if the audience at which it is targeted does not benefit from it. Therefore, the socio-cultural dimension is crucial to any successful brand management. Unfortunately, success has been a rare commodity in political brand management in most African countries and Nigeria in particular. The brand contents as propagated by Nigerian politicians get the glamour in the media but do not make any appreciable meaning to the audience. Ironically, the trouble is that the interests of this target audience are hardly taken into consideration when the politicians scheme for their attention. This is a problem that needs to be probed into.

Operational Definitions

What is a Brand?

Richard Lynch (1997) defines a brand as the additional reassurance provided to the customer over the intrinsic value of the assets purchased by the customer. This can be a powerful method of retaining customer loyalty in mass-market products. But Paliwod and Thomas (1998) give a broader definition. To them, given all the factors - pricing, distribution and promotion - a brand means a situation whereby a consumer can identify a particular product and if satisfied with it, ask for it by name. Brand is the sum total of proprietary visual, emotional, natural and cultural

image or attributes associated with a person, company, product or service. When you think MTN, for instance, you think of the yellow color and mobile telecommunication service that has the widest coverage in Nigeria. When you think Coca Cola, you have a product that features red colour stripes in its logo and a cola drink that refreshes. The positive association one has with a product easily makes the selection of the product easier in the market and enhances the value and satisfaction one gets from such product. Brand associations, therefore, are the attributes that customers think of when they hear, or see the brand name.

A brand name gives a good first impression and evokes positive associations. Some of the attributes that trigger one's association with the brand are not necessarily only physical or tangible. Some intangible, psychological or even historical associations also make customers want to buy a product. For instance, some drink Coca Cola, not necessarily because it is better than any other drink but simply because that is what they grew up to know. Therefore, such values as history, names, logos, positioning, copyright, brand personality and brand associations all come together as a brand identity.

Types of Brand

Some brands are extremely popular among customers in such a manner that their absence is greatly felt when they are out of stock. A good example is Guinness especially among stout alcoholic consumers. These are usually the benchmark brands and possession of such can signify class. For instance, anyone riding a Mercedes especially in this part of the world can be considered as having acquired a social status that qualifies him as a "rich man." Mercedes or Porsche conveys an idea of wealth and respect. These are premier brands that, besides carrying distinct values, appeal and having a very clear identity, also have a long history of quality and durability.

Second generations brands are those products and services that have also through the years carved a niche in the minds and pockets of customers. Branding experts have argued that these second generation or secondary brands take a cue from the premier brands and they are brands a customer prefers only in the absence of premier brands. For instance, Daewoo automobile takes after Opel in some respects and all indices

still point to Opel as a better automobile. However, secondary brands also cut across international boundaries and are well respected globally. You also have tertiary brand, which finds it difficult to compete with primary or secondary brands. A good example is Vitalo. This beverage product, though weighing the same 450gms as Bournvita and Milo, has to be discounted for it to have any reasonable share in the market.

Etzel et al. (1997) makes us to understand another way of classifying brands, which is on the basis of who owns them. Thus we have producers brand and middlemen's brand, the latter being owned by retailers or wholesalers. MTS and GBO, for instance, are popular middlemen brands in Nigeria.

Other terms that need to be understood include co-branding. This type occurs when certain brands are bought together probably due to product compatibility or corporate compatibility. Co-branding usually engenders cooperative advertising and a case in point is when Mobil Oil and Mr. Bigg's endorsed each other in a manner that gets Mr. Bigg's fast food eatery sited in a Mobil filling station. Fighting brands are those that use price discounting to outsell each other. When a manufacturer discovers that its brand is not selling as it should, it can cut down its selling price to as low as 50% in order to have a competitive edge over its rival. Elastic brand obtains when a company that offers two or more products or services in the market uses the most popular brand to sell the less popular brand.

Branding

Branding or brand management is the creation and development of distinct values for a product or service in a manner that makes it appealing and different from others, with an objective of giving it an easily recognized clear identity. Such identity must be communicated to the target customers also in a manner that elicits goodwill with them.

Branding is not about getting your targets to choose you over your competitors, branding is about getting your prospects to see you as the only reasonable solution to the problem. This clearly makes us appreciate the difference between brands and communication. Advertising, which contains such communication, is different from branding. Advertising raises the awareness about the brand attributes and puts them in the sub-conscious minds of the custo-

mers. This brings to the fore the importance of customer's ramification in branding.

The concept of branding, therefore, involves the creation of an identity that brings a set of values and the communication of same in a consistent manner that attracts new customers and makes it a way of life for a loyal franchise of customers and consumers.

Personal Political Branding

The change that is being experienced today has proved that branding should not be limited to companies or their products and services. First as with corporate brands, personal branding is a promise of value. It separates you from your peers, your colleagues and your competitors. Personal branding is not about creating a larger than life image for the outside world, it is about understanding your unique combination of rational and emotional attributes such as skill, values and passions and using these attributes to differentiate yourself and guide your career decisions in your service to the citizenry. It is about knowing how to powerfully leverage what is unique about you that differentiates you from others. Personal branding strategy is absolutely critical to long-lasting success in politics.

This is especially important in a country like Nigeria where integrity has been pushed to the back seat and violence and incessant hunger for political power now rule the air. Despite the poverty and social unrest in the land, an intending political office holder still needs to build up and manage his brand in order to achieve his goals in the political realm of the country. A winning political brand enjoys good visibility and presence as well as increased mileage among his audience.

For a politician to be a successful brand, his brand has to be given a context. Before you can clearly describe your personal brand, you need to look out on your vision and purpose especially as it relates to the people that you want to serve. Purpose is internal but as a good political brand, your vision is external. How do you want to make a positive difference in the lives of the people you want to serve? Vision forms what you see possible for the world. Your purpose is the role you play in supporting that vision. In addition, personal branding needs a clear definition of goals. What do you want to achieve for yourself and your audience in the next two, four or even

eight years? Proper documentation is essential because it enhances your understanding of your vision and purpose, which is a condition necessary for the building of a personal political brand.

To successfully unearth your brand, your personality must be authentic. What are your pluses and minuses? If you are the creative, dynamic and outgoing type, how do you enhance these qualities? Knowing these qualities makes it possible for you to position yourself relative to your competitors and gives you a road map for beating them.

With the right communication, the next step will be to describe the essence of your brand attributes, create a brand statement and develop a plan to communicate it to your target audience, which you must have identified. This is the plan of the ideal communication tools by which your audience can be reached. This can vary, depending on your goals but may be you will want to write articles or contribute to your internal newsletter, may be regular ward meeting is more appropriate for your brand. A critical evaluation of these tools is imperative in order to appreciate the best to use in penetrating to your audience. While communicating to your public in whatever manner, you should ensure that you match your communication with your brand. Whether you are giving a presentation, participating in a meeting, or writing a report, you do not leave your brand behind. You need to ask yourself how you can connect your personal attributes to every given situation. Every meeting, every project, every business trip, every business meal, every public speaking engagement must be connected with your brand.

For your brand to abide, you must live up to its attributes. You must question everything you do, every tool you use, every article of cloth you wear. Are they consistent with your brand? Such attitude keeps your brand clear and consistent. A proper evaluation of your brand is a compulsory step to take in order to know how successful you are. The feedback the politician gets from his audience enables him to evolve or develop for the better, if hitherto such feedback has been negative. Improvement could also take the form of augmenting your brand attributes as you continue to grow. The bottom-line is that you ensure your brand continues to be authentic and differentiated.

Research Hypothesis and the Nigerian Perspective

The conjecture that audience mindset hardly influences personal political branding in Nigeria is supported in this study. It is usual for the average Nigerian politician to brand himself as a political messiah whom the electorate must believe in. But research has shown clearly that there is a wide divergence in the claims made by these politicians and the impact of their leadership in the lives of the people they pledge to serve. Electoral malpractice often has been a part of insincerity to their followers. Nwabueze (1993) has also noted that one of the greatest challenges of democracy in Nigeria and Africa is wholesale rigging by which governments keep themselves in power. He added that this challenge is a grave one because it is a recurrent incidence in the polity. The situation is not different from what obtains under military regimes. Huntington (1968) asserts that military officers (in power) are hostile to the needs of political institution building as they are ill-prepared to make changes in political processes. This is in spite of their claims as rescue missionaries.

This implies that personal branding does not encourage relationship building in Nigeria. Personal political branding is about building a solid relationship between a politician and his publics. Such relationship building develops overtime (Payne et al., 1998). Branding should build a relationship that transforms a prospect to a customer. With improved branding, your customer, who was just an occasional patron, becomes a more stable client. When the brand management gets even better, the client becomes a supporter, then an advocate and then your partner. These essential stages are bypassed by our politicians in their packaging to the members of the society who are not moved by sweet talks that lead to no where.

METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional interview approach was adopted to find out the feelings of respondents toward their political leaders who are fond of presenting themselves as messiahs who have solutions to the problems of the masses, through various forms of media. Lagos, with its metropolitan face, has the trappings of contentment or otherwise that are regularly expressed by Nigerians about political leaders. This makes the

city an appropriate sample for Nigeria which is the population under consideration.

Lagos, as a city, has three fairly distinct demographic specifications. At the first extreme are areas populated by the rich and wealthy class. Typical of these areas are Victoria Island, Victoria Garden City, Ikoyi and the like. These we have grouped together and called "Lagos Island". Far away on the line is the middle class, representing people who are neither rich nor poor and who are mainly professionals. These people can be found in Surulere, Yaba, Palmgrove, Ikeja and are grouped together with a reference tag "Lagos Mainland". At the far end is the "outskirt" where people with low income find abode. Ajegunle, Mushin, Oshodi and Agege are good examples that readily come to mind.

It should, however, be noted that this area sampling is not totally fool proof or mutually exclusive. Lagos Island is not totally devoid of middle class people while some wealthy people still reside in the outskirts probably for reasons of cultural affinity or land availability. Besides this, there are many low level income earners working with the rich as house maids, gardeners, drivers, security guards and so on. But these socio-economic clusters are discernible in the city and therefore useful to our project.

Three parties were interviewed in each of the clusters: with twelve persons representing a party. An average of twelve respondents was calculated in each cluster making a pooled total of 36 respondents in the three clusters. Each area had been divided into strata of four biases comprising politics, business and commerce, culture with educational and religious prominence, and finally the youth.

The four point response scale is some steps away from stereotype. After a background statement that politicians are fond of presenting themselves as saviour to the citizens, the question: "What is your feeling toward the performance of political leaders?" was asked, using 1996 and 2003 as our time frame, reason being that it is a period when both military and civilian regimes have ruled. The usual "excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, very poor" response stuffs were replaced with more substantive responses namely: "feeling of need, feeling of hopelessness, feeling of contentment and feeling of indifference". The following four tables show the average responses generated from each cluster and the pooled responses from the three clusters.

FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

The most surprising result to the researcher is that no respondent sat on the fence of indifference. Everyone has got something to say either for or against about these political leaders who are fond of presenting themselves as messiahs to the people through the branding packaged for themselves by either themselves or their consultants. Findings showed that branding has not influenced the feeling most people have of the political leaders performance. This is clearly demonstrated by a whopping 22 of the 36 respondents who claimed that their needs have not been met by the political regimes despite their promise to do that. To them it is a clear case of failure of the leadership. The case gets compounded with 7 out of 36 expressing their feeling of hopelessness, claiming there was no way out of their present predicament. It would have been a total disaster if the remaining seven had not expressed some feeling of contentment in the leadership (Table 1-4).

The breakdown shows that the “outskirts” expressed the highest feeling of need and hopelessness. The reasons are obvious. They live in areas where basic needs for livelihood are barely available. Feeling of contentment is higher among the island dwellers while 3 out of 12 respondents of the mainland category felt that the situation is that of hopelessness.

Another important eye opener is that the rich also cry. Among the 12, half said they were not satisfied with the leadership of the political class, their being portrayed as messiah notwithstanding. Some curiosity was generated here. How could the people who had all they needed and wanted still complained about the leadership? Some of the wealthy respondents in the interview conducted with them said their feeling of need was for good governance that tolerates due process and derides bribery and corruption. There is convergence in the needs of the outskirts people and the wealth class. Good governance which the rich yearns for is that same accountability and good governance that will fill the needs of the poor people for shelter, clothing and food.

The middle class elements are also in need. Seven out of 12 who expressed the feeling of need said in a back up interview that politicians are pretenders. A view that can generally represent the group was expressed in this statement by one of them: “they claim to fight corruption and

unemployment but it does not go beyond the pages of newspapers.” The group’s disappointment was bolstered by the three respondents who expressed feelings of hopelessness.

The major implication of this is that a greater part of the political class in Nigeria is a brand that should not be trusted. This implication signifies the wide divergence of the needs and aspirations of the people and what the politicians claim to be. The political brand offerings are out of tune with audience mindset.

The Socio-Cultural Ramification of Branding

The issue that arises now is on how the overall brand paradigm of a product fits into the overall social context. The traditional marketing theory, which focuses more on how a brand is created and its attributes and promises are

Table 1: Average responses from “Lagos Island”

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
Feeling of need	6	50.0	50.0
Feeling of Hopelessness	2	16.7	66.7
Feeling of Contentment	4	33.3	100.0
Feeling of Indifference	0	0	0
	12	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Average responses from “Lagos Mainland”

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
Feeling of need	7	58.3	58.3
Feeling of Hopelessness	36	25.0	88.3
Feeling of Contentment	2	16.7	100.0
Feeling of Indifference	0	0	0
	12	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Average responses from “Outskirts”

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
Feeling of need	9	75.0	75.00
Feeling of Hopelessness	2	16.75	91.75
Feeling of Contentment	1	8.35	100.00
Feeling of Indifference	0	0	0
	12	100.0	100.00

Table 4: Pooled average response from Logos

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
Feeling of need	22	61.11	61.11
Feeling of Hopelessness	7	19.44	80.55
Feeling of Contentment	7	19.44	100.0
Feeling of Indifference	0	0	0
	36	100.00	100.00

delivered may be inadequate to tackle the problem. A more comprehensive social theory will be needed to take care of the bigger picture of the society against which an enterprise's branding plays out. The new theory, in view of what is presently on ground, will contribute to people's culture rather than exploit it. This will mean yielding more cultural resources to the people.

This issue is particularly problematic with personal branding in politics. Many political personalities especially in the developing world have been regarded not as respectable citizens but as those who are out to loot the treasury and line up their pockets with public funds. The interest of the public, which they are supposed to serve, is not paramount and this is why political personal branding has not worked. No matter how a politician tries to portray himself in this part of the world, the ultimate aim in the eyes of his audience would be taking care of his own interest upon getting to government.

It should be noted that the Nigerian politician has found himself in this quagmire because over the years, the communication problems of political parties, the prime seekers of electoral support in representative democracies, have been thoroughly aggravated by profound social changes (Curran and Gurevitch, 2000: 156). The huge reservoir of social support and confidence on which they relied and actually depended in the past have dried up. In today's Nigeria, Politicians have to court backing from a more consumerist, individualistic, volatile, skeptical and oftentimes frustrated electorate on the basis and appeals of the moment.

Politicians are therefore being asked to explore a social view of branding which is the emergence of a new equilibrium based on brand - audience dialectic. It means that any politician will move away from the stereotype branding paradigm that is meant to accomplish his own interest to the one that genuinely respond to the needs, desires and aspirations of his audience. This is just like a company re-crafting its interaction with consumer culture in ways that exploit consumer moods and provide market-centric ways for consumers to express themselves.

This writer opines that as regards politics, this has two advantages. It can engender in the electorate the feeling that the politician concerned would be willing and prepared to deliver the dividends of democracy. The merit of this is that it makes democracy flourish with concomitant rights enjoyable by the people. Secondly, an

orthogonal relevance of this is that it continually reminds the citizenry that military rule is an aberration that must not be allowed to resurface. Uche (1989) has noted how those political and economic ideologies of Nigeria's First and Second Republic politicians, which were propagandized differentially to the detriment of the citizens, led to a series of political upheavals that culminated in the military take-over of the reins of government. It follows therefore that personal branding strategy of a Nigerian politician or indeed that of a developing country should endeavor to enhance delivery of dividends of democracy with a view to confining military rule permanent oblivion.

Theoretical Perspectives

The dominant paradigm of development communication, as packaged by such scholars as Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rogers (1976), stresses a direct or linear information flow in which ideas, practices, values and technologies are diffused from leaders and technocrats to followers and laggards. The brand management of many Nigerian politicians comes in that package. Here the drawback is obvious: recipients of information are not involved in the information flow, thereby making communication process paternalistic. This led to the emergence of the alternative, participatory paradigm which engages the citizens in the decision, implementation, and evaluation functions of the communication as well as promote decentralization and democracy (Lie, 1977). This paper supports the idea that the politician should make his audience active participants in the information flow when communicating his brand attributes to them. Therefore the cognitive pattern of the people the politician is communicating to is important (Burgoon and Ruffner, 1978). A message that fits into the receiver's cognitive pattern guarantees a balance in his internal inconsistency. Folarin (2002:82) adds that to restore internal balance, the receiver has to change his attitude toward the subject matter or the source.

This writer states that for a successful personal branding to take place, the communication of such branding should be subject-object dialectic, wherein the overall paradigm of communication of the politician fits into the overall context of his audience.

Personal Branding and Communication

The mode of communication to a target

audience means a lot to the success of personal branding strategy. Basing personal branding on the correct assessment of audience mindset is one thing, but communicating it appropriately to the target audience is another. Since the bottom-line of a successful personal branding is object-subject dialectic, it follows therefore that, an unstructured mode of communication is preferable for any personal branding. With regard to traditional communication, Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) has come up with two categories: "structured and unstructured". Communication is structured when information flows from top to bottom with authority figures like kings and chiefs having an overbearing presence in the whole process. It is unstructured if the people involved are participants.

Personal branding is effectively communicated if the mode of communication is unstructured, and when venue-oriented modes of communication such as relaxation spots, markets, community playgrounds and the like are used, they can be highly potent and highly rewarding for the politician, no matter how traditional they may be.

Moreover, because these means are grounded on indigenous culture (Ugboajah, 1985), there is a high rate of interaction between the politician and his audience, thus enhancing confidence in both parties. This writer remarks that the structured- unstructured postulation of Ansu-Kyeremeh can be extended to mass-mediated communication. When personal branding is communicated on radio or television in a manner that involves the participation of the audience, it boosts confidence; but reduces confidence when it is not.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings in this project, it is the opinion of this writer that the mindset of an audience should be studied or researched into and clearly understood with regards to political branding. The prominent features of Nigeria's political history has been the emergence of a set of attitudes or fixed ideas in the minds of the electorate and the people in general about irresponsible behaviour of our politicians. Therefore, for a politician to earn the respect of the people, his personal brand management has to exploit these mindsets with a view to filling their needs and making a better following.

The most easily discernible mindset of the political audience is that which centers on need.

The needs of the electorate are enormous and they span nearly all ramifications of livelihood. People are hungry. There is a great sense of insecurity. Utilities are grossly inefficient and the economy is terrible, as there is poverty and pain in the land. Therefore, I recommend that when a politician is developing his brand, rather than concentrate on his personal qualities; his branding should be presented in a way that addresses the pains that the people suffer. This would mean that the politician as a communicator must set objectives with regard to actions that he, in collaboration with the target audience, has to take (Soola ed. 2002) in order to meet those needs. Therefore in this case people do not see you as a Harvard Graduate "but as a borehole provider," not as a "good man" but as a "sponsor of students scholarship." Being a "good man" does not practically convey a meaning that has bearing with the people's need. But a provider of scholarship will surely appeal to a student who yearns for education or his parents.

Entrenched mindset is found with people who feel that since they enjoy better life, putting a trust in politicians will not make any difference to their lives. They are the I - am - okay, don't - disturb - me types. Personal branding toward this mindset can be challenging as adspend in this area can lead to a waste if not carefully and purposefully crafted. The strategy here should be for personal branding to go the way of the future. Rather than say "Dr. Marcus: guaranteeing your prosperity" it might be better for the advertisement to brand Dr. Marcus as the man "To shape your future." If an electorate with an entrenched mindset cares about its future, such branding should have some appreciable level of impact on it.

No - hope - at - all mindset is a dangerous type that can lead to disaster if not quickly controlled. A good part of the Nigerian electorate falls into this ramification. With the cantankerous and chaotic situation as regards security, politics, religion, economy and the rule of law, many Nigerians have expressed hopelessness to the extent of referring to Nigeria as a failed state, that is, a state where rules no longer apply. How does a politician brand himself to address this problem?

The tendency has been for the politician to explore the possibilities of cooperation. In this case, the politician makes himself part of the electorate and not as a messiah from the moon. He presents himself as a co-stakeholder , co-

sufferer with the people. By doing so, he makes the people feel that their apathy can die if they cooperate with the politician to move their country forward. If the electorate feels they are still needed in the reconstruction of their country, this can frustrate the spirit of apathy and elicit hope and thereby ginger up their interest. Here Dr. Marcus is no longer “Man of the people” but “Man with the people.”

It is the position of this paper that with a thorough research into the attitudes of the people, politicians stand a better chance of appropriate brand management. Such research could be made more specific by being carried out at the federal, state, local constituency levels or even at the ward level.

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