



THE NIGERIAN STATE RE-BRANDING AND THE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION

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Abstract: *Governments and countries are increasingly using branding to sell their regions and countries to the rest of the world, in order to increase their international profile, attract foreign direct investment, make her citizens acceptable anywhere, and their places ideal destinations for tourism and trade. This study examined the Federal Government re-branding campaign and its effect on the river state people. The objective of this study is to ascertain the people's perception towards the Nigerian state before the Re-branding campaign. Survey research method was adopted in the study among 386 population of Rivers State. Structured questionnaire was used to obtain data utilized in the study and presented in tables. Chi-square was used to test the study hypotheses. The result of the study shows that the people's perception towards the Nigerian State has been largely negative before the rebranding campaign, thereby justifying the need for the rebranding initiative in the first place (calculated value (6.3766) > critical value (7.815). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, while the alternate hypothesis was rejected. It was recommended that The president, should urgently develop the political will to prosecute all high profile corruption cases, while giving no room for "sacred cow". He should also give good leadership. This will give the rebranding initiative the needed impetus to succeed in the future.*

Keywords: *Nation branding, Re-Branding Campaign Perception, River State, Peoples*

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the issue of cybercrime, drug abuse/trade, human trafficking, piracy, terrorism, corruption, money laundering, embezzlement and all forms of criminality, one cannot but agree with any genuine effort aimed at branding a for better image as positive perception of any country's image is an important gauge for judging her standing in the international community. A good image translates to respect, influence, prestige and attraction of investors which culminate to economic, social and political development of that nation. On the other hand, a bad or negative perception of a country's image is an



indication that such a country lacks respect, influence and prestige in the international circle, and could breed poverty, underdevelopment and negative brandings

Today, governments and countries are increasingly using branding and marketing techniques to sell their regions and countries to the rest of the world, in order to increase their international profile, attract foreign direct investment, make her citizens acceptable anywhere, and their places ideal destinations for tourism and trade. That was Nigerian government direction of thought following various (War Against Indiscipline (WAI), 1984; Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER); National Orientation Agency (NOA), 1993; Heart of Africa Project, 2005 & Nigeria-Good People, Great Nation, 2009) rebranding campaign initiated.

Prior to the launch of various rebranding campaign in Nigeria, Nigeria earned many derogatory names and was treated as outcast in many parts of the world. Innocent Nigerians have been treated with disdain, occasionally arrested indiscriminately and in many cases denied visas simply because they are Nigerians. An unprecedented number of Nigerians were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment or death outside the country for their involvement in various criminal activities, including immigration crimes, robbery, bribery, smuggling, arms running, prostitution and murder.

At a stage, Nigeria became a pariah State and was even suspended from participating in activities of some International Organizations like the Common Wealth.

This ugly situation no doubt, is attributable to the military's long presence in national politics which culminated in socio-economic paralysis, crippled economy, hunger, unreliable power supply, and corruption in high places, poverty, structural unemployment, death of social amenities, electoral flaws, sectional agitation of resource control which metamorphosed into kidnapping, hostage taking and political assassination by faceless militia groups like the Boko Haram Sect, Odua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) among others. These developments have portrayed Nigeria as an unsafe nation by foreign investors coupled with activities of undesirable elements whose stock-in-trade were drug and human trafficking, militancy, advanced fee fraud, known as "419".



The launch of the campaign, “Nigeria-Good People, Great Nation”, was highly welcomed among Nigerians and International community. It was a systematic and logical approach the reinventing the lost image of Nigeria globally. The Campaign, “Nigeria-Good People, Great Nation”, which replaced the failed “Heart of Africa Project” initiated by former President Obasanjo among other things aim to achieve and improve the global and local perception of Nigeria and Nigerians and to build a better and acceptable image for Nigeria. At the Launch, Late President Yar’Adua contended that the campaign was a genuine one to re-orientate Nigerians towards believing in themselves and changing people’s perception of the country, both locally and internationally. Akunyili (2009), the then Minister of Information and Communication, noted that the psychology of an average Nigerian and their attitude towards the nation needed major facelift. In her view, it is only when Nigerians believe in themselves that they can truly make the change needed in the society, and be in a position to positively project Nigeria image outside the world (Akunyili, 2009).

The campaign of the government has gone round the states of the federation to mobilize the people to join hands with the federal government to achieve its targeted objective. Rivers State is one of the States visited by the Former Minister of Information and Communication, Prof. Dora Akunyili to preach the gospel of Re-branding Nigeria project due to its potentials in both natural and economic resources. Rivers State is a State where people in authorities are perceived to recklessly embezzle public funds with impunity without channelling such funds to meaningful projects that will aid development. More so, the State between 2003 and 2007 witnessed high spate of cultism, hostage takings, kidnappings, political assassinations, murder, and closure of many companies coupled with myriad of people migrating to nearby States to take refuge.

No doubt, the campaign has been on through various communication media. However, the extent to which the people accepted the rebranding campaign and their attendant attitude has remained widely unknown despite the huge amount of naira expended on re-orientating citizens to demonstrate outstanding behavior, be of good ambassadors and to portray Nigeria as a loving, peaceful and responsible country, the image has remained rather the same. More importantly, the way they see the rebranding campaigns could make or mar the overall goals of the rebranding project therefore the assessment of people’s



perception in Rivers State in the context of acceptance of the campaigns and its attendant influences necessitated this research in the first place.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to ascertain the people's perception towards the Nigerian state before the Re-branding campaign.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This following research question has been framed to serve as roadmaps, based on the research objective:

Do the people's perception towards the Nigerian state before the Re-branding campaign negative?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The need to make the study statistically empirical informed the formulation of testable hypothesis. The essence is to statistically check the relationship or variance between the frequencies to be observed and expected.

Ho:The people's perceptions towards the Nigerian state before the Re-branding campaign have not been positive.

Hi: The people's perceptions towards the Nigerian state before the Re-branding campaign have been positive.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Branding and Re-Branding: An Overview

Branding is the process that is used by businesses to utilize marketing strategies to enhance their products, services or image so that it is more readily recalled by their customers. Branding refers to the concrete symbols such as a name, logo, term, slogan, design, fonts, colour scheme, symbols and sound for easy identification of the products (American Marketing Association, (2009). The Oxford American Dictionary also defines branding as a trade mark, goods of a particular make: a mark of identification made with a hot Iron: a piece of burning or charred wood: to mark a hot Iron or table with a trade mark.

It is also the marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies a product from other products. Simply put, rebranding is a promise to the customer; it tells them what the customer can expect from the products and services, and it differentiates



once offering from that of other competitors. Therefore, Branding is not an advertising campaign, marketing, slogan, or a logo but act as an identifier. It doesn't have to apply to a product, a company, or a title but name, such as the Coca-cola is a brand, George W. Bush is a brand, Bill Clinton is a brand, Goodluck Jonathan is a brand etc.

The Editor of Brand Week Magazine, Karen Benezra maintained that: There are so many parity products out there that the only way to differentiate yourself from others is to create an aura", an image, around your brand....Mark Lacter, Onetime Editor of LA Business Journal, puts it rightly when he posits that "branding has always been a critical discourse and has everything to do with instant recognition in a very instantaneous society. A brand is "the name, associated with one or more items in the product line, that is used to identify the source of character of the item(s)", Kotler (2000, p.396). The American Marketing Association (AMA, p.404) defines a brand as, "a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one sell.

Ibru (2008, p.10) illustrates that branding is the process of creating and managing brand. Therefore, branding is the marketing and management process that gives a product, service, organization or personality, a unique identity and image such that it is easily identifiable and distinct from the competitors. Brand is a continuous process rather than a destination, due to the changing and dynamic nature of the market place, Ibru (2008, p.10). With countries, the decision process is even more difficult because the objective and cost are different; the investor decision invariably being influenced by the political, social, and economic stability of the nation in question. This according to Frost (2004),

"There's no arguing that the image we have of another country says a lot about how we view it as a tourist destination, a place to invest or a source of consumer goods".

Therefore, if brand are attributes of a product, service or country comprising the brand name, logo, colour, values, customer service level, price, packaging etc, it could be described as a continuous and strategic process involved in creating and managing the brand. According to Thomas Cromwell and Savas Kyriacou, (2011) various governments all over the world are tasked with the economic and political development of their countries. They posits that National development cannot be achieved in Isolation of the international community, as markets and foreign polices compete in the international arena so also a



nation's political, economic, legal and cultural environment contribute to its identity and image. In this sense, every nation is already a brand. It already exists in the minds of others as an entity with positive and negative attributes. Based on this perception, other nations and individual will interact with it by either contributing to its development or hindering it.

How a country is perceived, both domestically and abroad, from the quality of its goods and services, to the attractiveness of its culture and its tourism and investment opportunities to its economic, domestic and foreign policies, can be shaped under a brand. The branding process strengthens democracy and helps both internal development and successful integration into the world community.

Branding and Re-branding as they apply to a nation is still a new but growing discipline in international public relations. Most of the available literatures are still largely and loosely embedded in traditional marketing and management text books. Most of the definitions that exist concerning branding reflect more or less the meaning of brands (Odoemelam, 2010, p.32). Nelson (2000, p.16), writes that "a brand is really just a symbol with tremendous potential." Hankinson & Cowking (1996, p.8), also define a brand as "simply a product or competitor" whose distinguishing features could be tangible or intangible. These tangible and intangible attributes as Nworah (2006, p.2), notes, include name, logo, colour, values and service levels.

Re-branding on the other hand, encapsulates a complete overhauling. It is taken on the face value that there had been a brand in the first instance. Hedberg (2001, p.43), likened it to what happens in corporate offices, say large companies, where sometimes they overhaul or completely replaces their images and re-launch themselves as fresh corporate brands. He observed that, countries have sought to establish completely new brand identities. West (1997), as cited in Umeh (2009, p.13), agrees and writes: "almost every major post-industrial town or city in Britain has attempted to re-invent or reposition itself by adopting such image marketing techniques...." If done effectively, re-branding will attract investors and visitors, appeal to government officials, engender civil pride and conspicuously distinguish a place from competing places. Several things within a polity may necessitate re-branding such a place, as Heldberg notes, they include;

- To revive a pre-existing but outdated place image in order to make it more relevant to a great public.



- To recognize the occurrences of fundamental alterations in the character of an area.
- To communicate to potential stakeholders of a change in the activities done or undertaken within the region.

Re-branding Nigeria has to do with an image project designed and launched in 2009 by the Federal Government through the Ministry of Information and Communications.

BRANDING AND THE NIGERIA EXPERIENCE

Over five decades ago, experience has shown that most Nigerian leaders that ruled this country at various times introduced image reform programmes to launder the image and reputation of Nigeria and Nigerians. The major objective of this segment of the research work is to analyze the extent or degree of success, or failure of each of these image campaign projects as expressed in the preceding segment of this work which include among others. War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Ethical Revolution, Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAI-C), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as well as the nascent Rebranding campaign programme.

The Federal Government under Alhaji Shehu Shagari launched Ethical Revolution to re-orient Nigerians to toe the path of moral rectitude. This image reform programme did not usher in the long awaited change in the attitudinal disposition of the leaders and the led as the country at that period witnessed high incidence of political instability, corruption, fraud, squander-mania, nepotism, tribalism and a host of other negative social vices. This gross ineptitiveness and corrupt practices of our civilian leaders provoked power hungry and thirsty military officers to wrestle power from the ruling government. From all indications, the implementation of this image reform programme, to a large extent was a colossal failure.

In sheer modesty, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime that initiated the War Against Indiscipline consistently strived to use all resources at their disposal to wage relentless war against indiscipline and corruption in Nigeria. Few months after its launching, WAI sensitized Nigerians against any form of indiscipline. Aligwe (2000, pp.102-103) lends credence to the foregoing claims where he affirmed that the brave soldiers of WAI annihilated bribery and corruption, abuse of public office and resources, lawlessness, impatience, unpatriotism, greed, graft, laziness and idleness, favouritism, mediocrity, cheating, disorderliness,



dishonesty, fighting and quarrelling and smoking in public places, drug trafficking, swindling, gambling as well as drunkenness. Though the Buhari regime that threw up the image reform programme was short-lived, yet WAI, to a large extent succeeded in the realization of the objectives of the image campaign programme that necessitated the introduction of the image project.

The Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) was established to enthrone a society that would provide a conducive atmosphere for the attainment of its fundamental objectives of economic reconstruction, social justice and self reliance. Instead of adopting the coercive approach of his predecessor, MAMSER under Ibrahim Babagida's regime adopted persuasive mode of instilling discipline in Nigerian citizens.

Evaluating the success or otherwise of this image reform programme, Ezeme (2002, p.264) writes that the ugly behaviour of Nigerians were resuscitated under the programme, indicating that the previous change was only skin-deep and therefore describe it as a propaganda outfit. Nwokoro affirms that the slogan sound hollow because people who are morally bankrupt have no business mobilizing others for self reliance. In reality, this image reform project like others before it could not achieve its noble objectives principally because of poor implementation. Despite the fact that MAMSER was the most expensive reform programme ever introduced by our past leaders in this country, the image campaign programme, to a large extent could not impact positively on the lives of Nigerian people because of lack of commitment on the side of the handlers of the project.

Similarly, the image project tagged "War Against Indiscipline and Corruption" (WAI-C) was introduced by Sani Abacha. Regardless of huge financial resources expended on the project, WAI-C became a political hoax as it served as propaganda machinery to dress up innumerable atrocities perpetrated by the maximum ruler. The dreams of the image project were not only unrealizable, but also became counter-productive. Thus, WAI-C like other past image campaign programmes recorded colossal failure because of lack of commitment and poor project implementation.

Besides, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was firmly anchored on 2001 Kuru Declaration, which embodies the vision we have for Nigeria: to build a truly great African democratic country, politically united, integrated and stable, economically prosperous, socially organized; with equal opportunity for all, and



responsibility for all, to become the catalyst of (African) Renaissance and making adequate, all embracing contributions, sub-regionally, regionally and globally. This image reform project was initiated by Olusegun Obasanjo during his first tenure as the civilian President of Nigeria. The primary aim of NEEDS is to create a new Nigerian citizen who values hard work and who also realizes that one cannot have something for nothing. This on-going Nigeria image reform programme seeks to restructure the government to be smaller, stronger, better skilled and more efficient at delivering essential services. It also seeks to transform government from haven of corruption to an institution that spurs development and serves the people.

This image reform programme since its inception has impacted positively on the socio-economic and political life of Nigerian citizens. NEEDS like WAI, has succeeded to a great extent in reaching out to national, state and local development targets.

The Heart of Africa project which was introduced by Olusegun Obasanjo has been discontinued sequel to the fact that it could not impact positively on the challenges Nigeria and Nigerians are facing inside and outside the country. According to Professor Dora Akunyili, Heart of Africa could not fly for many reasons, but the two most prominent reasons are: firstly, the name is contentious, as Malawi was first to use the Heart of Africa slogan, and many other African countries have laid claims to being the heart of Africa. Secondly, Heart of Africa was first launched overseas and this automatically disconnected ordinary Nigerians from this project. This, no doubt, made the project look elitist and foreign in nature. The truth is that any image reform project that seeks to reposition the image of a country both internally and externally should start from home before it gets abroad. Despite huge chunk of money sunk into this image campaign project like WAI-C, Ethical Revolution and MAMSER, the dreams of such image reform projects remain unrealizable.

The current rebranding campaign programme introduced by Yar'Adua administration, stems from the need to ensure that it succeeds where others failed. The major causes of failure of the past Nigeria image projects include but not limited to the use of non-experts in various stages of project conceptualization, design and implementation, unsuitable measures, non-commitment and insincerity of our leaders, inadequate resources as well as non-participation or alienation of Nigerian masses from taking active part in various stages of



image reform policies as most Nigerian governments always plan for and not with the Nigerian citizens in the transformation process.

RESEARCH METHOD

It is an established fact that there are numerous research methods available for researchers to adopt in their studies. These research methods include content analysis, survey, historical, descriptive etc. Among these various research methods available to researchers in conducting their researches, survey research method will be employed and utilized in this study.

The rationale behind the adoption of this method is popular social researchers' averment. According to Ogbuoshi (2006, p.34) "survey research refers to the sampling of peoples opinion on an issue". This translates to mean that survey research method is well suited for circumstances where the researcher's interest is to find how many people in a particular population hold or possesses a particular attribute, opinion etc. This aligns with the broad objective of this study. Consequent on the above, the survey research method is adopted for this study.

POPULATION

The population for this study comprises all the people of Rivers State. The total number of people in Rivers State is 5,198,716 (five million, one hundred and ninety eight thousand, seven hundred and sixteen), based on the 2006 census figures obtained from the National Population Commission in Port Harcourt, Rivers State capital.

SAMPLE SIZE

The researcher adopted the Taro Yamane's statistical formula that is widely used by both social science and physical science researchers. To prove that the sample is a representative of the population, a critical parameter at an acceptable level which Tuckman described as a confidence level is normally put at a 95% level (.05). This means that both sample and population are distributed in the same way, and there is 5% error margin for them. In alignment with the above statements, the researcher adopted Taro Yamane's statistical formula in the determination of the sample size from the population of Rivers State.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Research instrument has to do with various tools available for researchers to utilize in gathering data. Since the research method adopted for this work is the survey approach, the



researcher deems it fit to use the questionnaire method of data collection as its research instrument. The rationale for this adoption is borne out of the researcher's desire to obtain reliable and valid information and to ensure that the results obtained would conform to certain scientific principles such as systematic, objective and general reliability of information.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to extract relevant information from the respondents. The questionnaire will be structured in such a manner that it properly captures and addresses all the specific objectives of this research. The research instruments (questionnaire) were objectively distributed to the randomly selected samples in each Local Government Council headquarters in Rivers state. The questionnaires were also distributed to the respondents individually by the researcher. They were collected back on the spot, as the researcher waited patiently for the respondents to fill the questionnaire as distributed. The essence is to reduce the mortality rate as much as possible. Data were arranged and coded for easy understanding.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The study hypothesis earlier formulated was tested using the data collected. Tabulation and simple percentages mathematical tool was also used in the presentation of data. Quantification in research permits the measurement of variables involved in a study. Therefore, chi-square statistical measure was used in testing the hypotheses. That is, to check the relationship or variance between the observed and expected frequencies.

RESULT PRESENTATION

Table 1: Contingency Table for objective

Response	MALE		FEMALE		Total
	<i>Fo</i>	<i>(fe)</i>	<i>Fo</i>	<i>(fe)</i>	
Of Course	61	(65.1)	61	(56.9)	122
Not at all	19	(22.4)	23	(19.6)	42
To some extent	122	(11.5)	87	(97.5)	209
Cant say	4	(6.9)	9	(6.1)	13
Total	206		180		386

$$Fe = \frac{TR \times TC}{GT}$$

$$R_1 C_1 = \frac{206 \times 122}{386} = 65.1$$

$$R_2 C_1 = \frac{180 \times 122}{386} = 56.9$$



$$\begin{aligned} R_1 C_2 &= \frac{206 \times 42}{386} = 22.4 & R_2 C_2 &= \frac{180 \times 42}{386} = 19.6 \\ R_1 C_3 &= \frac{206 \times 209}{386} = 111.5 & R_2 C_3 &= \frac{180 \times 209}{386} = 97.5 \\ R_1 C_4 &= \frac{206 \times 13}{386} = 6.9 & R_2 C_4 &= \frac{180 \times 13}{386} = 6.1 \end{aligned}$$

Table 2: Computation

<i>Fo</i>	<i>Fe</i>	<i>fo - fe</i>	<i>(fo - Fe)²</i>	<i>(fo - fe)²</i> <i>fe</i>
61	65.1	-4.1	16.81	0.2582
19	22.4	-3.4	11.56	0.5161
122	111.5	10.5	110.25	0.9888
4	6.9	-2.9	8.41	1.2188
61	56.9	4.1	16.81	0.2954
23	19.6	3.4	11.56	0.5898
87	97.5	-10.5	110.25	1.1308
9	6.1	2.9	8.41	1.3787
				6.3766

$$\chi^2 = 6.3766$$

DEGREE OF FREEDOM (df) = (R – 1) (C – 1). On the contingency table 4.2.1, there are 4 rows and 2 columns. **df** therefore is (4 - 1) (2 - 1)

$$3 \times 1 = 3df$$

At 0.05 level of significance and 3 degree of freedom, the table value is 7.815

Test Result: The calculated value (6.3766) is less than the table value (7.815). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, while the research hypothesis was rejected.

It therefore means that the people's perception towards the Nigerian State has been largely negative before the rebranding campaign, thereby justifying the need for the rebranding initiative in the first place.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

From the statistical tests on the data collected, statistical evidence supports the acceptance of the null hypothetical statement. The image of Nigeria has been perceived to be grossly negative before the 2009 rebranding Nigeria initiative of the federal government. Statistics on table xiii accentuates this result. Against the popular belief of the rebranding campaigners that people have embraced the initiative, research data disproved this claim. That is, result shows that the people have not been favorably disposed to the rebranding initiative. Data presented on table xv lends credence to this finding. The result points to the



fact that Nigeria has had negative image perception, not only by Rivers State people, by Nigerians generally. Since the calculated value (6.3766) was greater than the table value (7.815), the null hypothesis was accepted.

The perceived variance between the frequencies observed and expected was not a product of error, but an occurrence that was based on statistical test. This finding reveals that despite attempts in the past to rebrand the Nigerian product, people's perception of Nigeria as a political entity remains grossly negative. This may have prompted the need for rebranding in 2009. Brymer (2003) averment that countries compete daily with neighbours and region for tourism, inward investments and export sales, holds true here. He equally contends that such countries that start with unknown and poor reputation will be limited to marginalization. This result gives credence to the initiative of the federal government to rebrand the Nigerian image. This, according to Akunyili (2009) was for Nigerians to "appreciate ourselves and our country which will put us in a position to present ourselves positively to the outside world". Therefore, research data supports the rebranding initiative, since Alabi (2009, p.28) believes Nigeria is a defective product.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Following the discussions of result and observations in the field, the research concludes that the rebranding initiative is tilling toward a monumental failure just like the previous initiative. However, the campaign cannot and should not be ruled out, since strategies can still be evolved to resuscitate the campaigns based on the recommendations that have been made in this research. In view of the study findings, the followings are therefore recommended

- (i) The federal ministry of information should as a matter of necessity suspend the rebranding initiative, and go back to the drawing board. They could use this document and other similar studies like that of Yahaya (2010) as blueprints. This is crucial in the face of the failing "Rebranding Nigeria" initiative.
- (ii) The president, should urgently develop the political will to prosecute all high profile corruption cases, while giving no room for "sacred cow". He should also give good leadership. This will give the rebranding initiative the needed impetus to succeed in the future.
- (iii) The information ministry all those concerned with the rebranding initiative should commission a study on media selection. The result of such study will help in



ascertaining the appropriateness of media to be used in driving future rebranding initiatives.

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