

Building Sustainable Brands through Improved Work Place Etiquette

Bolaji Michael Cole* Joy Tuoyo Adu

Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, Yaba College of Technology, P.M.B. 2011, Lagos. Nigeria

Abstract

Branding implies more than any marketing action it is the force of connection between the client and the enterprise and is one of the most important loyalty determinants for sustained growth and increased profit intake. On the other hand, corporate etiquette is important for the growth of any organisation, it is the act of behaving sensibly and appropriately at the workplace to create a lasting impression on clients. This research is an empirically based paper which uses a three Linkert scale questionnaire administered to 35 respondents. Their responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis showed integrity, positive attitude and networking as being the core of any enterprise needed in building a corporate brand, if it must have any relevance in the corporate space. Finally, branding is germane to corporate growth as it promotes both the image and products of any organisation, but this is only possible with proper workplace etiquette as it translates into workplace productivity which leads to sustained corporate growth.

Keywords: Sustainable brands; Improved workplace; Clients; Corporate; Positive attitude; Workplace etiquette; Organisation; Relationship; Workplace productivity; Corporate growth

1. Introduction

Each society, enterprise, person or product, has a personal brand even if it isn't given much thought to. A brand describes an entity even in its absence. It is the soul of every business, enterprise or institution and is fundamental, basic and essential for its growth and development. When viewed positively, branding becomes the best sales tool available to most organisations; on the other hand, a negative opinion of a brand could be the biggest hindrance to its acceptance. Branding implies; more than any marketing action; personnel as the main ambassadors of the brand. The force of the connections between the client and the contact personnel is one of the most important loyalty determinants contributing not only to customer-based images but also on the images formed and held by all stakeholders; be they employees, customers, investors, suppliers, partners, regulators, special interests and local communities (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; 2008). In building brands whether corporate or personal, three focal perspectives must be considered; is it positive, credible or authentic? These are important to the enterprise and its customers and form the basis of a brand core or brand essence. The positive brand core is a major focus of any enterprise and it is important to ensure that the brand essence is effectively communicated; Appearance, Behaviour and Communication are a requirement for brand essence, portraying the way brands are presented to others. This A.B.C forms the core of etiquette in the workplace.

Gibson-Odgers (2008) regards etiquette as a kind of specific language spoken by successful professionals in the workspace, which is required towards establishing productive relationships with colleagues and clients alike. Successful relationships begin when courtesy, respect and concern for the well-being of others is exhibited, as relationships mean a better opportunity for growth. Etiquette could also be considered as a scheme of procedures and conventions which regulate social and professional behaviour allowing for decent communication and interaction through civilized behaviours, regardless of its level of material culture. Any society must possess etiquette in which every person knows the behaviour expected from one person toward others and vice versa. In the workplace, there are acceptable rubrics and norms of behaviour upheld by legal codes and mandated by customs enforced by group pressure. However, a breach of etiquette faces no formal trial or sentence rather the penalty lies in the disapproval it receives.

1.1 Literature and Conceptual Framework

Proper customer relation is the bedrock of branding which is a long term project with a marketing strategy. Branding investment lies at the base of the marketing strategy and on the long-run, marketing strategy focuses on developing and maintaining the brand integrity through human capital development.

Any corporate organisation willing to provide a profitable product or service, must of necessity put the concept of branding on the front burner. Branding must include not only product or enterprise branding but equally important is personal and personnel branding for sustained growth and increased profit intake with a consummate relationship with clients and customers.

According to (Gilmore et al., 2001; Chaffey et al., 2000) brand strategy required by managers in a corporate enterprise for growth, must be focused on the short run and devoted to commercial objectives based largely on networking which should be made up of a combination of transaction, relationship, interaction and network marketing. Branding in some cases is considered a simple logo printed on the product's pack; this is a

major error. At any level, all organisations must make efforts to achieve and maintain quality in product and service delivery, while branding tends to add intangible value to the quality product (Brodie et al., 1997). The instrument that must be utilized to synergize this value is marketing communication, in other words, personnel etiquette. Developing personnel etiquette requires that the brand essence should be developed in consultation with the personnel so that everyone on the team buys into the brand essence and can communicate it effectively through acceptable mannerisms. Linked to the idea of brand essence is corporate etiquette or workplace etiquette.

1.1.1 Corporate Etiquette

Etiquette can be defined as the action or actions that we take when we are with others, through consideration, respect and honesty; consideration and respect for one's self and others, as well as honesty in all business dealings. Corporate Etiquette refers to behaving sensibly and appropriately at the workplace to create an everlasting impression on clients or customers. No one is taken seriously if poorly behaved at the workplace, as there is a need to be professional and organized. Corporate etiquette is all about behavioural patterns both towards colleagues and clients (Bandura, 1997).

Corporate etiquette is important for the growth of any organisation; because people will do business with people they like and feel comfortable with. Workplace etiquette is really about the simple things like how quickly customer's queries are responded to directly or indirectly; on the phone or by email, how the time of others is respected by being punctual for meetings and how promises made are followed up. Every interaction of personnel with stakeholders creates the potential to build the reputation of the organisation. It, therefore, becomes important to look at all the ways interactions with customers are achieved, review how well it is being managed and what determines the ideal scenario. Corporate business growth requires an understanding of what the organisation stands for and how that can be communicated to others (Gilmore et al., 2006; Rayport and Jaworski, 2001).

1.1.2 Corporate Practices in Nigeria

In Nigeria organisations grow their brands through cross-cultural relationships with counterparts from other climes. Thus, it becomes necessary to imbibe cosmopolitan business etiquette in their interactions.

Establishing a personal relationship with colleagues and superiors is common in Nigeria. The first twenty minutes of a first meeting, be it formal or informal, is spent getting to know the other party, therefore, agendas are not usually rushed at such meetings. This might appear strange to first-time visitors to Nigeria who are used to getting down to business immediately a meeting is arranged.

Nigerians prefer the use of Mr. /Mrs. /Ms./Alhaji before surnames, as titles are of utmost importance. Some occupations are used as titles too such as Engineer "Engr", Barrister "Barr", Architect "Arch" and Doctor "Dr". Many Nigerians will insist on being addressed with full titles at all times. Not doing this would be seen as being insensitive, rude and not according the bearer of these titles due respect. It, therefore, requires some form of an invitation to be on first name basis. This could be rather difficult for others from "first-name office cultures". Greeting processes are very important in Nigeria, and it is rare to just greet someone in passing. Time is usually taken when pleasantries are exchanged in the workplace. To shake someone's hand is common; however if a male meets a female in the workplace, he would usually wait for her to extend her hand first. It is common place to extend greetings to each person in a group individually, in order of seniority. This is a common sign of respect, which can also be applied to superiors. It is also appropriate to bow the head when shaking the hand of someone obviously much older. It is also generally accepted to cower when speaking to superiors and seniors through the avoidance of eye contact. In general, Nigerians make much less use of eye contact than members of Western cultures. Insisting on looking others in the eye during a conversation might easily be taken as a sign of rudeness or even aggression.

Generally, Nigerians work at a more relaxed pace than one might be used to. During meetings, it is not out of place to be interrupted by calls, emails, or knocks at the door, which would be attended to with a prompt excuse me. Punctuality is hardly valued with little or no apology; being on time can be quite hard. This could be as a result of the erratic traffic conditions making patience a virtue sorely needed when doing business in Nigeria. It is often wise to schedule important meetings well ahead and to call in the day before to confirm such meetings.

2. Methods

Research design: the study describes the relevance of training public servants on corporate cosmopolitan etiquette.

2.1 Research setting

The setting of the survey was a training held for public servants at the Entrepreneurship Development Incubation Center, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The training was meant to promote politeness, sophistication, integrity, respect, discretion and performance of public officers in the discharge of their duties.

2.1.1 Scope of study

The study was carried out on the campus of Yaba College of Technology, Yaba during the GWIIN International training on business development, etiquette and leadership program held on 11-14 March 2013.

2.1.2 Research population

The target population was made up of 50 participants who attended the training.

2.1.3 Sample

Questionnaires were administered to 50 participants at the training with 35 respondents.

2.1.4 Sampling technique

The purpose of selecting 50 participants for the study was to assess the impact of the training on the participants seeing that they deal with the public on a daily basis. Participants were drawn from the registry, bursary, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and other academic units of the College. The training was to get the staff to improve on their output and general service delivery towards promoting the brand image of their establishment.

2.1.5 Instrumentation

A closed-ended questionnaire was presented using a 3 point Likert scale of agree, disagree and undecided. This is to bring answers to researcher's questions and objections.

2.1.6 Administration of instrument

The questionnaires were administered to the selected participants personally through face to face contact. These were collected from the participants the same day. Out of 50 questionnaires administered only, 35 were returned. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to ensure honest responses.

2.1.7 Procedure for data analysis

Data obtained was collated and transferred to a spreadsheet for analysis. The information was then analyzed using percentages.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 General description of data

The sample size for the research was made of 35 respondents of GWIIN International training on business development, etiquette and leadership program held at Yaba College of Technology, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development incubation building, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. The gender distribution showed that 61.3% of the participants were male while 38.7% were females. Participants were drawn from different age brackets ranging from below the age of 30 years 18.2%, 31- 35 years were 9.1%, participants of ages 36 – 40 years were 3.0 %, those between the ages of 41-45 years were 21.2 %, 46- 50 were 18.2 %, 51-55 years were 21.2% and those above 55 years were 9.1%. Indicating a widespread and relevance for good image branding and etiquette in the discharge of duties to the public the number one customer.

Academic qualification, as well as work experience, showed that 2.9 % of the respondents were HND holders, 14.3 %, were B.Sc. / B.A holders, respondents with M.Sc. were 71.4%, while 11.4 %. Of the respondents were Ph.D. holders. There was equally a good spread of respondents in term of work experience. 39.4 % had 0- 10 years working experience, 45.5% had between 11- 20 years' experience while 15.2 % had 21 - 35 years of working experience. This wide spread of respondents in terms of qualifications and duration of work experience clearly shows that no one is too qualified academically or experienced at work to learn and develop etiquette skills for greater productivity.

3.2 Research question 1: Is Branding required for Corporate Growth?

In addressing this question certain issues among employees in the corporate space as it pertains to the brand image are put into perspective. These include; integrity, self-confidence, self-control, reputation, networking, proactivity and innovation.

In answer to the question of integrity, 91.4% of respondents consider integrity as being the bedrock of any enterprise needed in building a corporate brand; this agrees with Kathy young who considers integrity as being wrapped up in what is called the "work ethic", considering it to be a most important characteristic of a team member. Thus, it is important that corporate bodies relate with their clients with relationships based on honesty and trust (Dugger, 2007). 5.7% of respondents, however, believe otherwise, while 2.9% were undecided. On the question in relation to the confidence of staff in the workplace, 94.3% of respondents agree that confidence of staff is required in building the corporate brand for growth. This is required because a confident employee is able to attempt new, higher and more difficult tasks (Bandura and Locke, 2003). 5.7% of respondents, however, believe that self-confidence has nothing to do with staff performance or corporate growth. This is contrary to Bandura (2004), who stated that self-confidence has a powerful effect on organisations'. It could, therefore, be agreed that confidence is needed by staff members of organisations in dealing with the public since this goes a long way in selling the corporate image or brand. Anger management issues are common in the corporate world especially when it has to do with difficult customers who at times are impossible to please; it is paramount that the staff of any corporate organisation exercise self-control in all situations when

dealing with clients. According to Rouble (2013), an employee with well-developed self-control will be able to perform their duties in a focused, committed fashion without allowing external influences to distract them. This was agreed by 88.6% of respondents while 8.6% disagreed and 2.8% was undecided.

On the question of reputation being required in creating a positive image of an organisation, 82.9% of respondents were of the opinion that an organisation needs its reputation and that of its management and staff to be impeccable while 11.4% of respondents were of the opinion that it doesn't matter, with 5.7% being undecided. According to Zinko et al. (2012), reputation at work focuses on issues related to an individuals' capacity to perform their job effectively, while being cooperative and helpful towards others. No corporate body exist in isolation neither can its management or staff operate without recourse to colleagues and clients in the industry, thus it is pertinent to note that 100% of respondents agreed that networking is key. This is corroborated by Olkonnen et al. (2000) who stated that networking is used to make sense of what happens in complicated markets, providing an understanding of inter-organisational and business relationships. On the issue of proactivity and innovation in establishments while 2.9% of respondents disagreed on this, 97.1% of respondents were of the opinion that corporate bodies must be innovative in dealing with members of the public, every enterprise be it public or private need clients and customers to survive because the corporate world is a competitive one where innovation and proactivity in service delivery would be the niche of the organisation in business. Proactivity and innovation are important as they enhance the effectiveness of organisational growth (Unsworth and Parker, 2003). Nil was undecided.

3.3 Research question 2: Is Etiquette Necessary in Building a Sustainable Brand?

The importance of etiquette is captured in topical issues analyzed through the research instrument. Issues such as politeness, respect for clients, positive attitude, poise, sophistication.

86.6% of respondents agreed that respect for clients or customers and politeness is necessary within the workplace. This could be largely due to the cultural and religious disposition of the respondents, considering the fact that in the Nigerian culture men shake hands when being introduced, but it is believed to be unacceptable to extend a handshake to women particularly women of the Islamic faith, despite the fact that a number of this class of women work in the corporate world. In so many ways culture plays a large part of corporate practices in the workplace. It is, therefore, important to note that Culture affects a person's perception of the world and, during interaction with clients may often define what is considered as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour (Gibson - odgers, 2008). It must be noted that a polite, professional manner is a key component to one's success, and the golden rule of treating others as one would like to be treated pays big dividends in the corporate world (Learnkey, 2012) 11.4% of respondents disagreed on this while there was no undecided response. 100% of respondents agreed that all organisations need a positive attitude from its employees in order to be relevant in the corporate space. Attitude is everything, having the right attitude towards work and life is vital, the attitude of employees has a huge impact on the culture and environment of any organisation (Mohanty, 2014). It was observed that 82.8% of respondents agreed that cosmopolitan etiquette behaviour during business lunch or dinner is important in driving home the need to have poise in such meetings while 8.6% each disagreed and were undecided. In building a brand it is important to note that the display of cosmopolitan etiquette not only shows class but also sophistication and this is part of the brand essence; dressing, comportment, finesse, 88.6% of respondents held this view, 11.4% disagreed with nil undecided.

4. Conclusion

Branding is germane to corporate growth as it promotes both the image and products of any organisation. From the discussions, it is obvious that workplace etiquette translates into workplace productivity which equally leads to corporate growth. It can only be said, therefore, that branding and etiquette go hand in hand. It is one thing to have a good product and another thing to sell it, while talent can help an organisation get going; the brand is what will sustain it. It is, therefore, necessary that management and staff members of any organisation see themselves as brands of the establishment and institutionalize workplace etiquette as it only takes one customers' bad experience with one bad employee to wreck a multi-million Naira investment.

In summary, it is necessary to make positive changes in how organisations are run by first getting to understand personal branding and ensuring that this is communicated in a consistent, authentic and relevant way to staff and by extension to customers. Finally, it is important to ensure that customers are treated just the way staff members would like to be treated. This can be done by continuous review and training on corporate etiquette practices. All it takes is the will and motivation to have it done.

Reference

- Bandura, A. (2004). Cultivate self-efficacy for personal and organisational effectiveness, in Locke E. A. (Eds.), *Handbook of Principles of Organisational Behaviour*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 120-136.
- Bandura, A. & Locke, E. A. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited, *Journal of Applied*

- Psychology*, 88, 1, 87-99.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman.
- Brodie, R.J., Coviello, N.E., Brooks, R.W & Little, V. (1997). 'Towards a paradigm shift in marketing? An examination of current marketing practices' *Journal of Marketing Management*, 13, 5, 383-406.
- Chaffey, D., Ellis-Chadwick, F., Johnston, K. & Mayer, R. (2000). *Internet Marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Duggar, J. W. (2007). 'The role of integrity in individual and effective corporate leadership' *Journal of Academic and Business Ethics* p 1-7 [online] Available <http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/10504.pdf> (October 27, 2015).
- Gibson-Odgers, P. (2008). *The World of Customer Service*, 2nd ed., Thomson Higher Education, Ohio, USA.
- Gilmore, A., Carson, D., Grant, Ken., O'Donnell, A., Laney, R & Pickett, B. (2006). *Networking in SMES: findings from Australia and Ireland*, *Irish Marketing Review*, 18, 1 & 2, 21-28
- Gilmore, A., Carson, D., & Grant, K. (2001). SME marketing in practice, *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 19, 1, 6-11
- Hatch, M.J. & Schultz, M. (2008). *Taking Brand Initiative: How Companies Can Align Strategy, Culture, and Identity through Corporate Branding*, Jossey-Bass.
- Hatch, M.J. & Schultz, M. (2001). Are the strategic stars aligned for your corporate brand? *Harvard Business Review*, 79, 2, 128-134
- Mohanty, S. (2014). A Leader with positive attitude and thinking can bring great Success, *International Journal of Emerging Research in Management & Technology*, 3, 2, 61-63
- Nigeria Expats Guide (2015). [online] Available <http://www.internations.org/nigeria-expats/guide/working-in-nigeria-15535/business-etiquette-in-nigeria-3> (October 27, 2015).
- Olkonnen, R., Tikkanen, H. & Alajoutsijarvi, K. (2000). The role of communication in business relationships and networks, *Management Decision*, 38, 6, 403-409.
- Rayport, J. & Jaworski, B. (2001). *Introduction to E-Commerce*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rouble, G. (2013). Can self-control make great employees? *Workplace Conflict Resolution* [online] Available <http://www.the2percentfactor.com> (October 27, 2015).
- Unsworth, K. L. & Parker, S. (2003). Proactivity and innovation: promoting a new workforce for the new workplace, in Holman, D. et al (Eds.). *The New Workplace: A Guide to the Human Impact of Modern Working Practices*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 175-196.
- Workplace Etiquette: Why Being Polite Counts on the Job (2012). Expert Human Relations Media [online] Available <http://www.learnkey.com/workplaceetiquette> (October 29, 2015)
- Young, K. (2015). Integrity in the Workplace, [online] Available http://www.resolutionsbilling.com/pdf/integrity_in_the_workplace.pdf (October 27, 2015).
- Zinko, R., Ferris, G. R., Humphrey, S. E., Meyer, C. J. & Aime, F. (2012). Personal reputation in organisations: Two-study constructive replication and extension of antecedents and consequences, *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 85, 156-180.