THE IMPACT OF BRAND IMAGE ON PASSION OF POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which brand image influences the passion of post graduate students in public universities in south south Nigeria. The population of this study is drawn from postgraduate students from four federal universities in South-south namely; University of Port Harcourt, University of Calabar, University of Benin and University of Uyo. These schools have a population of 34, 984 postgraduate students. The choice of these institutions is firstly because they are federal universities with higher allocation unlike state universities secondly, because these universities are the only federal universities that offer postgraduate programs. This data was gotten from school website and direct interaction with post graduate admission office of these universities. For this study, the sample size was determined through the use of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. For a finite population of 34,984, a sample of 379 was derived. Our findings reveals that brand image has a very strong influence on passion of post graduate students with regression estimate of over 9.42. the study also has a p-value of 0.000 which is also less than alpha of 0.05. in all, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate was accepted. The study further recommends that in setting up committees within the university, at least a representative member from the department of marketing should be nominated because while other members are making suggestions along the line of operation, the marketer present would raise concerns and contributions on customers reception to committee outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *brand image, passion, universities, south-south, post-graduate*

INTRODUCTION

Brand image is an integral component of brand equity as it conveys the worth of the brand to the consumers. Kotler (2001) defined image as "the set of beliefs, ideas, and impression that a person holds regarding an object". Therefore, it is about the mental representation of the brand based on individual consumer's beliefs, ideas and impression. It is perceived differently by both consumers and organization. The way consumers or the target audience of the brand views or interprets is known as perceived image while the other is the desired image, which is the way company wants to position its brand matching the consumer's perceived image. When organizations make assumptions about the perceived image it is known as presumed image. These levels of image can be contradicting because managers may not exactly know what is going on in the mind of the consumer. This gap is filled by the research on the construct in various disciplines which guides the practitioners and opens new horizon to understand their consumers. Ever since the introduction of construct "brand image", it has been defined in multiple ways. Every definition is based on its conceptualization on various aspects. For instance, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) defined "brand image as being largely a subjective and perceptual phenomenon that is formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional." It is about how consumers perceive. So it can largely vary depending on the mental representations of respective consumer.

According to Aaker (1991) brand image is referred to as "a set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way" and in the same context Keller (1993, p. 109) defines it as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory". Both of these definitions lead to the fact that there are various abstract features that may reside in the consumer's mind about the brand, either

objective or subjective. According to the definition of Lee & Back, (2008), "Brand image is the reasoned and emotional perceptions of consumers attached to specific brands". One thing that each of the definition conveys is that it is automatically formed depending on what consumers take meaning of the brand and each brand can have as many images as its consumers. Gardner and Levy (1955) were credited with the introduction of the construct in 1950s, and described its social and psychological nature. The construct had its roots in the discipline of psychology that is why it captured its place in the consumer behavior research. It is based on different psychological variants which describes the consumer behavior (Gardner & Levy, 1955). With the development in the concept in its era of 1960s and early 1970s, it was researched and conceptualized on the basis of social psychological construct "attitude". Bird et al, 1970 defined it as "an attitude about a given brand" (Bird, Channon, and Ehrenberg 1970). It soon found to be playing vital role in marketing manager and captured the attention of marketing managers when empirical research supported its importance during purchase decisions (Doyle et al, 2008).). Gensch (1978) in his research on brand image, found a significant relationship between brand image and brand preference. Then in 1980s, attitude-based image research dominated in the research, and created more hype in linking the brand image with the consumer behaviour and marketing management (Zamanou, et al 1994). The concept of semiotics was applied in 1988 by Noth. From this perspective, "objects of the marketplace are claimed to form semiotic systems, and commodities are studied as signs whose meaning is the consumer's brand image". Researchers continued to work in the same direction in 1990s, and brand image became the key component of brand equity (Jahangir, et al 2009 p.3).

Images are the interpretation of their beliefs and values. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) gave the classification of human beliefs as (i) descriptive, (ii) informational and (iii) inferential. Descriptive beliefs are drawn from direct experiences consumer have with the product. Informational are the ones that are predisposed by outside stimuli and sources such as society, ads and communities. Inferential beliefs are the ones that are the result of interpretations on the basis of past experiences with the product. Discussed levels of beliefs held understanding the diversity of images that can be formed on the basis of these beliefs. While conducting his research on hospital brand image, Kim (2008) explained that "brand image is not absolute; it is relative to brand images of competing brand". He described that brand image is also formed on the basis of direct experience with the brand. In addition, brand image acquires a strategic function for the marketers. They can manage the marketing activities in creating positive brand image and differentiate it from the competitors (Javalgi et al., 1992).

On the other hand, Passion is often cited as a component of love (Sirohi, et al 1998). Along with passion comes idealisation and adoration of the beloved. The passionate component of emotional attachment is responsible for the intensity of emotionality that comes with love however it does not reflect the intensity of love as such. Passion rather circumscribes the desire and (physical) attraction that is evoked by the object of love. Hence, passion can be understood as an important component of love, although not equivalent to love. Authors agree that love also implies a feeling of connectedness and intimacy (Thomas et al., 2005). Person-object relationships, therefore, are also very close and trustful, which necessitates that both partners are highly committed and dedicated to this relationship.

Passion refers to the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation and related phenomena in loving relationships. The passion component includes within its purview those sources of motivational and other forms of arousal that lead to the experience of intimacy in a loving relationship. It includes what Hatfield and Walster (1981) refer to as 'a state of intense longing for union with the other'. In a loving relationship, sexual needs may well predominate in this experience. However, other needs, such as those for self-esteem, nurturance, association, dominance, compliance and self-actualisation, may also contribute to the experiencing of passion.

Past research on passion supported the conceptualisation of the two types of passion. Using the Passion Scale, a bi-dimensional measure of the two types of passion, Varela et al. (2001) showed that the more people report high levels of passion, either obsessive or harmonious, the more they spend time on their activity, the more they value it and the more they perceive it as a passion. Furthermore, obsessive passion has been shown to be more invasive in people's life than harmonious passion. For example, people with a more obsessive passion perceive their activity as occupying a greater part of their identity and experience more conflicts with other life domains. When asked to evaluate the relative importance of the passionate activity and other life domains, (e.g., family, friends, or work), people with a more obsessive passion are more inclined to value their activity above all other domains.

Types of passion includes obsessive and a harmonious passion, which reflect the more passive and active forms of passion found in philosophers' work

(Roberts, 2006). Varela et al. (2001) hypothesise that the two types of passion result from the way the activity is internalised in a person's identity. In line with Self-Determination Theory, it is proposed that activities can be internalised in either a controlled or an autonomous way. A controlled internalisation refers to an activity that is internalised as tied to various contingencies, such as the person's perception of competence, desire for excitement, or sense of acceptance. This type of internalisation is hypothesised to result in a more obsessive and passive form of passion, where activity engagement feels mandatory and even compulsory. Obsessive passion is thus characterised by an internal pressure that pushes the person to engage in the activity. The individual feels compelled to do his or her activity because doing so may quench an uncontrollable thirst for the activity or satisfy various internal demands such as the maintenance of one's value or sense of self-worth. As such, the activity tends to be overly valued, to be favoured above all other aspects of the person's life and to take disproportionate space in the person's identity (Reynolds & Beatty,1999).

An activity may also be internalised within a context of choice and exploration, referred to as an autonomous form of internalisation. This form of internalisation is hypothesised to result in a more active and harmonious type of passion, which is characterised by a sense of deep interest, but also of volition. Harmonious passion refers to a motivational force that leads people to choose to engage in the activity and to personally endorse the importance of their activity engagement. The activity is valued, but not overly so, which allows people to engage in other life projects. Although the activity occupies a significant space in the person's identity, it is not overpowering, such that activity engagement remains under the person's wilful control and is in harmony with other aspects of the person's life.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

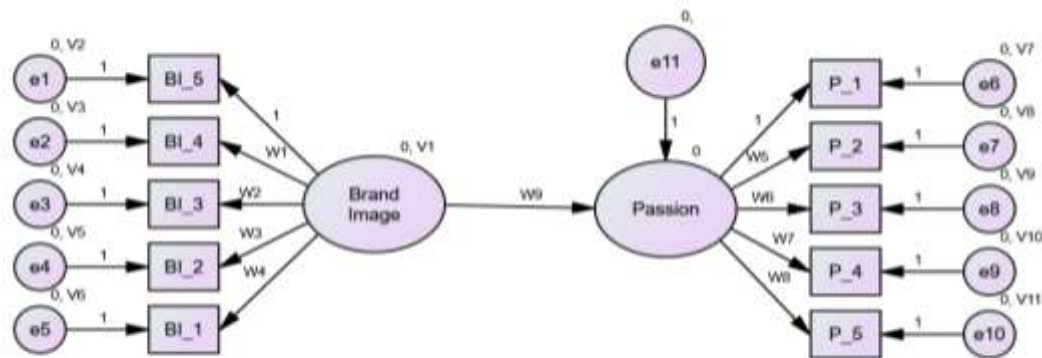H0 Brand Image does not have any effect on the passion of customers in public universities in south-south, Nigeria

Fig. 1. Operational Framework
Source: Souiden et al (2006) & Thomson et al (2005)
Amos Version 21 output

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Impression Management Theory

Impression Management (IM) is the study of how people attempt to manage or control the perceptions others form of them (Bozeman &Kacmar, 1997). The goal of impression management is to steer others' opinion or impression with the use of controlling information in either a personal or social situation (Highhouse , Brooks, & Gregarus 2009). In addition to IM being used in an individual setting, IM theory can also be applied at a macro-organizational level (Avery & McKay, 2006). Organizations use IM tactics to manage their image and cultivate a positive relationship with constituencies outside the organization.

According to Bozeman and Kacmar (1997), IM theory was first introduced by Goffman in his

dramaturgical model of social life in the late 1950s. Since then, many scholarly discussions about IM have been based on Goffman's framework. A typical IM model contains two key players: an "actor" who engages in "performances" or "IM behaviors" and an "audience" who interacts with "actors" under certain "environmental settings." IM behaviors can be categorized into two primary categories: assertive strategies, which an actor uses to establish a given desirable identity, and defensive/protective strategies, which are excuses and justifications to repair damaged identities (Drory&Zaidman, 2007).

Organizational impression management is "any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience's perceptions of an organization" (Elsbach& Sutton, 1992). Organizations undertake impression management activities to positively shape public perception of who they are, what services they provide, how well they provide them (particularly in contrast to competing companies), and the good they do...with the overarching goal to shape and communicate a positive identity and preclude a negative one.

It is in an organization's best interest to undertake such activity because effective organizational impression management has been linked to talent acquisition and employee retention (Highhouse, et al, 2009), competitive advantage (Fuller, Barnett, Hester, Relyea, & Frey, 2007), and even shareholder value (Enyia, 2016). For example, in investigating organization impression management, Sitzia et al (2006) found evidence that CEOs' use of proactive performance claims can affect investor perceptions and firm value. This section overviews salient impression management literature, discusses Jones and Suh (2000) taxonomy of impression management strategies, and suggests its potential in understanding how top executives can construct and negotiate organizational identity through the use of deliberate impression management tactics in weblog discourse.

This study theoretically is focused on impression management by organizations (i.e. tertiary institutions) towards stakeholders. Therefore the term organization will be used, instead of the individual, when impression management is described.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the research design adopted was quasi-experimental research design. The population of this study is drawn from postgraduate students from four federal universities in South-south namely; University of Port Harcourt, University of Calabar, University of Benin and University of Uyo. These schools have a population of 34, 984 postgraduate students. The choice of these institutions is firstly because they are federal universities with higher allocation unlike state universities secondly, because these universities are the only federal universities that offer postgraduate programs. This data was gotten from school website and direct interaction with post graduate admission office of these universities. For this study, the sample size was determined through the use of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. For a finite population of 34,984, a sample of 379 was derived. Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used in the test of hypothesis.
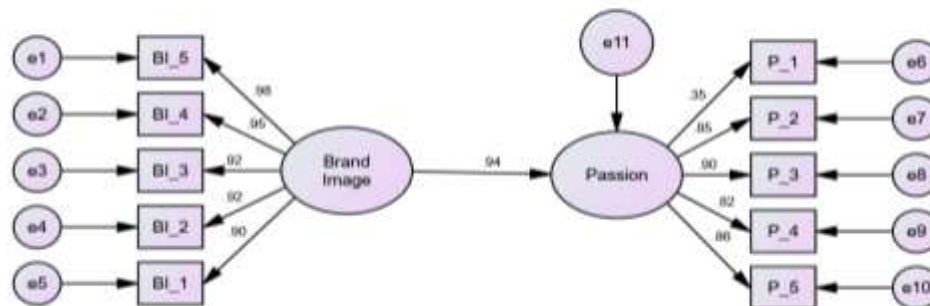
DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

Fig. 2.

Source: Amos Version 21 output

Table 1.Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Passion	<---	Brand_Image	.016	.003	6.290	***	W9
BI_5	<---	Brand_Image	1.000				
BI_4	<---	Brand_Image	.126	.002	54.998	***	W1
BI_3	<---	Brand_Image	.108	.003	41.893	***	W2
BI_2	<---	Brand_Image	.094	.002	40.954	***	W3
BI_1	<---	Brand_Image	.098	.003	36.001	***	W4
P_1	<---	Passion	1.000				
P_2	<---	Passion	3.734	.603	6.187	***	W5
P_3	<---	Passion	3.737	.598	6.244	***	W6
P_4	<---	Passion	3.669	.598	6.138	***	W7
P_5	<---	Passion	3.179	.513	6.195	***	W8

From our test output, we realize that when Brand_Image goes up by 1, Passion goes up by 0.016. The regression weight estimate, .016, has a standard error of about .003. Dividing the regression weight estimate by the estimate of its standard error gives z = .016/.003 = 6.290.

In other words, the regression weight estimate is 6.29 standard errors above zero.

The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 6.29 in absolute value is less than 0.001. In other words, the regression weight for Brand_Image in the prediction of Passion is significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed).

With a p-value less than 0.05, we therefore reject the stated null hypothesis.

Table 2.Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
Passion	<---	Brand_Image	.942
BI_5	<---	Brand_Image	.983
BI_4	<---	Brand_Image	.953
BI_3	<---	Brand_Image	.923
BI_2	<---	Brand_Image	.920
BI_1	<---	Brand_Image	.900
P_1	<---	Passion	.349
P_2	<---	Passion	.855
P_3	<---	Passion	.902
P_4	<---	Passion	.819
P_5	<---	Passion	.861

When Brand_Image goes up by 1 standard deviation, Passion goes up by 0.942 standard deviations. This indicates that brand image influences passion of customers in public universities by 94.2%.

Table 3.CMIN

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	31	3225.569	46	.000	70.121
Saturated model	77	.000	0		
Independence model	22	1954.380	55	.000	35.534

The Default model model has a discrepancy of 3225.569. Assuming that the Default model model is correct, the probability of getting a discrepancy as large as 3225.569 is .000.

For the Default model model, the discrepancy divided by degrees of freedom is 3225.569 / 46 = 70.121.

The Independence model model on the other hand has a discrepancy of 1954.380. Assuming that the Independence model model is correct, the probability of getting a discrepancy as large as 1954.380 is .000. For the Independence model model, the discrepancy divided by degrees of freedom is 1954.380 / 55 = 35.534.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.476	.462	.490	.000
Independence model	.336	.324	.349	.000

RMSEA = .476 for the Default model model.
With approximately 90 percent confidence, the population RMSEA for the Default model model is between .462 and .490.
PCLOSE = .000 for the Default model model. Under the hypothesis of "close fit" (i.e., that RMSEA is no greater than .05 in the population), the probability of getting a sample RMSEA as large as .476 is .000.
RMSEA = .336 for the Independence model model. With approximately 95 percent confidence, the population RMSEA for the Independence model model is between .324 and .349.

CONCLUSION

Our findings reveals that brand image can actually bring about passion of customers in Nigerian public universities to a very large extent. This is evident in the results generated from our structural equation model. On the overall, it reveals that brand image can bring about the passion of customers within public universities. in other words, when brand image goes up by one , passion of customers in response goes up by 0.016. However, with a standard error of about 0.003. this produces a z value of 6.29. this ultimately has revealed that brand image significantly predicts customer passion.

Recommendations

i. University management should ensure that the marketing department is effectively utilized. There is no way one would talk about branding without mentioning the custodians of branding domiciled within marketing department. The school administration should also make a conscious effort in visiting the department of marketing to obtain more ideas on several areas that corporate branding can bring about the emotional attachment of customers.

ii. In setting up committees within the university, at least a representative member from the department of marketing should be nominated because while other members are making suggestions along the line of operation, the marketer present would raise concerns and contributions on customers reception to committee outcomes.

iii. University management should ensure that its reputation is protected in all their activities ranging from academic to non-academic. They should understand that whatever is being done within the university signals information to people far and wide and this can make or destroy the institution.

iv. In setting up committees, competent people should be appointed so that whatever be the outcome of their decision would add value to the university.

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