

## Review

# Rebranding Nigeria: the role of advertising and public relations at correcting Nigeria image

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## ABSTRACT

On Tuesday of March 2009, rebranding Nigeria project was launched in Abuja with a Slogan, “Nigeria: Good People Great Nation”. The actual intention of the Nigeria government was to create a good image for the country both home and abroad. An assessment of the project through this paper showed Nigeria as a bad product that is difficult to market. Therefore, the paper chiefly used good leadership, Nigeria brand icons and good public service as a rebranding mechanism for public relations and advertising exercise. The work relied on meta-analysis method to carry out the research while it used persuasion theory to explain the rationale behind rebranding Nigeria. The paper argued that the ray of hope for Nigeria’s government in the Heart of Africa campaign project to re-brand the country has been dashed due to the neglect of the political, social, and economic stability cum non-involvement of public relations and advertising experts in the rebranding project. But it quickly observed that when properly applied, effective public relations and advertising strategies cum conducive political, social, economic environment as it can be found anywhere in the world, the re-branding exercise will be fruitful. It recommended that, the government should imbibe the tenet of public relations which asserts 95% action and 5% talking among other things.

**Keywords:** Rebranding, advertising, public relations, place branding, image.

## INTRODUCTION

The term, ‘branding’ or rebranding is a pretty common word in business circles the world over. This is not strange since there is an increasing mass production of goods while services are taking different shapes on daily basis. Notwithstanding, it won’t be a surprise if one who is not involved in advertising, marketing or public relations find its meaning a bit hazy. One person may claim that a company’s logo is its brand while another insists that the real brand is the slogan. Still, others may assert that branding is about communicating the company’s mission or image. All these are components of a brand, but they do not capture the whole package, not even by a long shot. In reality, a brand is much more than a single image or string of words. A brand is not tangible. A successful brand lives in the minds and hearts of the prospective audience, likewise the bad brand. A

brand must provide what the public think of the product or service despite almost anything can be branded. Manufactured goods, a service, a location (country) even a person. For instance, Elivs, Paris Hilton, Amsterdam, Las Vegas, IPOD and Roles; are all established brands. The most successful brands hold a power positive position within our psyche (*The Punch*, P. 36).

The focus of this paper is on **place branding**, then what is place branding? A place branding can be defined as the process whereby a town, region, country (Nigeria) actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity for itself, with the aim of positioning it in formally and externally as a good destination for trade, tourism and investments.

In this regards, countries such as India, UK, USA, South Africa, China, Wales, Spain and Ireland have

succeeded in attracting businesses and tourists to their countries as a result of well managed branding programme supported by fairly stable political, social and economic environments. Examples of these branding are; “UK’s Cool Britannia” and “Ok; Uk,” New York’s “I love NY,” Spain “Turespana” etc. All these are the campaign executed to attract both tourists and potential investors to these places. Making a case for the application of branding principles in the market of places, Peter van Ham, as cited in Ferguson’s (2001) article “Brand – name Government” says a state just like a company requires a strong brand. Therefore to rise above the cluttered political landscape, a state must be able to define and promote its vision. This requires politicians and bureaucrats to understanding how identity is developed, promoted and maintained. Therefore, the services of public relations and advertising executives are imperative here.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research relies more on meta-analysis with the use of available literatures, newspaper editorials and seminar papers on the subject rebranding of Nigeria nation. Also, personal observation on the happenings on the nation Nigeria was also included being citizens who witness what is going on in the country.

### Theoretical Framework

This research work relies on Persuasion Theory which tents to induce change in belief, attitude and behavior. First, the brand Nigeria seeks to persuade the international world to change their attitude and believes towards Nigeria – that Nigeria is not as bad as they think. Again, it also persuades the Nigeria citizen to change their behavior so they too will have trust in both themselves and their government.

### Public Relations and Advertising: a panacea for rebranding Nigeria’s image

In 2004, the Olusegun Obasanjo government launched an image project for the country which he called the Nigeria image project at the time. The then Information and National Orientation Minister, Chief Chukwuemeka Chikelu, made a presentation on “image and national economics” to media, public relations and advertising executives. The project was government attempt at changing positively international perception about the country. The project was renamed in 2005 by Frank Nweke Junior, the Minister of Information and National

Orientation at the time and later translated to “The Heart of Africa” (HOA) project. The HOA project received an initial government contribution of 600 million Naira (about \$3 million) (Nworah, 2006. P.2). Despite the huge amount of capital pumped into HOA project, the project was perceived as white elephant project (Nworah, 2005. P.7). Despite all efforts put in place the project however failed as a result of:

- They did not conduct an image analysis
- Stakeholders were not involved in the development of the brand
- No co-ordination of the Heart of Africa Campaign
- Low involvement by public relations, advertising and the media practitioners.
- Lack of confidence in the economic, political and social reforms.

All these and others were identified as variables that worked against rebranding Nigerian as Heart of Africa. At this juncture, it becomes imperative that the government should not undermine the importance of the role of public relations and advertising experts in rebranding Nigeria’s image in the international world. What then is public relations and advertising as it is incumbent on this paper to look at one or two definitions of these two concept (Public relations and advertising) just for the purpose of clarity and understanding of its conceptual relevance to this paper. There are over 600 recorded definitions of PR and advertisings, according to Keghku (2005, p.3).

Public relations, according to Black (1989, p.5) “is the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information” While BIPR (1969) defines public relations as “the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understand and good will between an organization and its publics”.

In the other hand, advertising can be defined according to Jerremy Bullmore as a paid for communication intended to inform and or influence one or more people” Daramola, F. (2002). The above, individual and institutional conceptual framework of public relations and advertising show it is a practice of been proactive, analytical, truthful and providing full – information when dealing with the publics which is applicable to the provision of quality public service.

The hub of public relations and advertising as panacea for rebranding Nigeria is in its overall functions (as posits by Dr Tyotom) of:

*truthfulness and full information, sustained goodwill, analyzing of trends, predicting their consequences and counselling organization leaders. Therefore for the enhancement of successful rebranding Nigeria project, effective public relations and advertising strategies must be adopted (Tyotom, 2011).*

A consumer could easily afford to spend money on a product without much consideration and with potentially less consequences as a result of dissatisfaction. It is not so simple with companies wishing to invest in a place or with tourists wishing to go on holidays to a place. Both the companies and holiday makers are influenced by a lot of other factors because of huge sums of money involved and the potential consequences of making a poor decision because the social and political environment of the place, its stability, tranquillity and value for money compared to other destinations before making their choice must be taken into consideration. So, any public relations and advertising effort put in place without addressing the state of Nigeria as a bad product to market will be fruitless.

### **Nigeria Bad Product Difficult to Market**

The image of Nigeria had been battered before the world. This is a country where we do not believe anything can work well. Nigeria has come to be identified with biblical aged saying. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" the nationalists who fought for Nigeria's independence from British imperialists envisioned a nation anchored on egalitarianism, justice, fairness and good governance. Fifty years down the line, looking at what has become of the country, the spirit of the Azikiwe, Balewa, Awo, and so on are no doubt wallowing in regret, bitterness and total disappointment. Their relics have refused to rest in peace because this is not the country of their dream. Nigeria is racing forward to assume the status of a failed state. The term, "failed state" is used by political commentators to describes a state perceived as having failed at some of the basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government.

According to the 2004 Transparency International corruption perceptions index, Nigeria still ranks as the third most corrupt country in the world in a survey of 146 countries, coming only ahead of Haiti. Another research in the recent past, the *Foreign Policy Magazine* in its (2009) failed state index (FSI) ranked Nigeria 15<sup>th</sup> among the 177 countries listed. With this, Nigerian moved up from 22<sup>nd</sup> positioned in 2006 to three places with a 90.8 percent change from the previous years. It is between Kenya and Ethiopia in 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> places respectively, while Somalia, Sudan and Iraq have been positioned among themselves.

Common characteristics in the study used to classify a failed state include a central government so weak and ineffective that it has little or no practical central over much of its territory non provision of public services, erosion of legitimate authority, widespread corruption and criminality, refugees and involuntary movement of populations and sharp economic decline. Of the five

characteristics, Nigeria as a brand only meets four. What this survey has succeeded in during is to show that, Nigerian is on the fast track to actually becoming a failed state if urgent measure is not taking to rebrand the image of the country (*The Nation*, 2021).

According to a statement by US assistant secretary of state, Bureau of African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, said: 'Nigeria needs a strong, health and effective leader to ensure the stability of the country and to manage Nigeria's many political, economic security, and other challenges'. From this statement, we observed that, the world is watching all our activities and anomalies in the areas postulated above. More light could be shed on the failed area of our country as observed above.

In the same vein, Professor Chinua Achebe wrote in his book. "The trouble with Nigeria", that our problem is simply failure of leadership. Achebe said that there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria land, climate, water or anything else. He asserted that the Nigeria problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hall-mark of true leadership. Achebe's treatise nearly three decades ago is still as relevant as if it was spoken yesterday. We are where we are today as a brand that failed, because of the selfishness of the few in the corridors of power and the docility of the large populace.

Two years ago this is a country where the former president Umaru Musa Yar'adua left the country to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment without deeming it right to hand over to the Vice President or officially notify the National Assembly as specified in section 145 of the 1999 constitution; until the then former chief law officer in Nigeria, Michael Aondoakaa (SAN), said "Yar'Adua could rule from anywhere". This affirms what Wole Soyinka meant when he said some people had mastered the art of speaking from the four compasses of their mouth. The same president was ferreted into the country like a thief in the night and the first lady became the "defacto" president from where the vice president took instructions. This particularly is a bizarre and sickening brand which spells grave consequences for the nation.

**Corruption on the Part of Leadership:** There are notorious cases in the land; bribery which comes in various ways of inflated contracts, election rigging in the National Assembly and other various atrocities being committed in the House of Representatives with leaders carting away huge amount of money in "Ghana – must-go" bags, then, what kind of rebranding is Nigeria talking about. In the good old days, public officials who stole five shillings from fraudulent travelling claims were punished along with those who stole 100.000 pounds. Two years back, British parliamentarians who collected a few pounds inappropriately from public funds in form of allowances were forced to resign their positions. The

Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, said that although the offences were not criminal, they were morally unacceptable from the point of view of integrity which their offices demanded. That is the way it should be (*The Nation*, 2010).

**Political point of View:** We cannot deny the fact that our present has been shaped by our past political experiences and there is so much to learn from the past mismanaged and staged managed elections in Nigeria. In some part of this world, elections are conducted with no written rule (Britain as an example). They have no written constitution but people believe there are certain norms which cannot be violated. But the case is different in Nigeria brand – our elections have always be a shame with all several anomalies, hiccups, lapses and irregularities, what a pity! In many other countries, elections are seen as routines; a ritual at specific periods that each country has fixed for the purpose. The term many countries, does not imply the advanced countries alone; even some African countries have learnt to conduct elections gracefully; South Africa and Ghana are good examples. It is a national shame that Nigerian brand has not been able to give the country a template that would ensure free, fair and credible elections twelve years after it has transited to democratic rule.

**Infidelity in economy's policy:** Despite its abundant population and natural resources, Nigeria has not been able to achieved sustainable economic growth after 50 years of independence. Experts say that, while its peers have been able to tackle the major bottlenecks in the way of growth, Nigeria has remained at the “take-off” stage of development, with all its major sectors still performing far below acceptable standard.

**The State of Infrastructure in Nigeria:** We must first of all make Nigeria work, before we embark on the job of convincing others to come and experience it. Nigeria government needs to look at the Nigeria roads, as it has become a death-trap for the commuters and all road users. It remains a callous reminder that in spite of huge resources spent, Nigerian roads are still death traps. The investors, who are used to operating in environments where infrastructure such as power, water and roads are taken for granted, are hard pressed to come to term with the fact that they have to provide their source of power and water, if they must do business in Nigeria

**Insecurity:** Unfortunately, Nigeria nation has not been able to curb the trend of insecurity in the country. Frightening stories of violence emerge on daily basis in all parts of the country on the insecurity issue. The activities of the Boko Haram, an Islamic sect is already a nightmare to the entire nation and even beyond. The Niger Delta unrest, the killing of ten corps members in post election violence and the unprecedented bombing in Bauch, Niger, Bornu States and FCT are enough to discredit the brand called Nigeria.

Having seen Nigeria as a bad product to market, what then can we do to rebranding Nigeria? Obafemi Awolowo one of the past leaders of the country had in his book entitled “Path to Nigeria Freedom” written in 1947 opined that Nigeria is a more geographical expression and that there are no Nigerians as there are French or Germans. This brutal truth was to be used against him later but that is the truth. The fact therefore is that if Nigerians hope to build a nation of good brand in the mind of their prospective audience, they have to work for it. It is at time like this that all patriots must rise to the occasion, and place the interest of the country above every other consideration. Nigeria state should stop peddling false hood through scandalous influence peddling within the comity of nations, priding itself as the giant of African rather, it should follow the above steps for rebranding her image in the world market.

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria's good brand depends largely upon a total different mindset of political operators who will utilize modern technology with the abundance of human and natural resources available in the country to radically transform our current pitiable economic, political and social deprivations and misery setting to a land of national harvest, wealth and integrity in the comity of nations. Nigeria as a brand will therefore not be doing anything negative if it were to provide honest, responsible, transparent and credible leaders on its market template. Like products and services brands, Nigeria leaders and politicians in particular need to create the desired impression that will sell them in the market place, making for the purpose of earning their target audience (the outside world) share in the competitive market.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the plethora problems discussed above, the follow recommendations have been suggested so that the rebranding project will not be tantamount to a jamboree project.

**1. Leadership by example:** As noted in the discourse earlier, Achebe opines that, the unwillingness or inability of the leaders to rise to his responsibility is the challenge of personal example. Hence this is the hall-mark of true leadership. Nigeria as a state should no longer tolerate the continuous recycling of hired and tired brains, when it has an abundance of fresh and tested, active, young and articulate brain.

**2. Nigeria Brand icons:** The point has been made by different commentators at different fora, that any

marketing effort for rebranding Nigeria that does not involve the country's brand icons is fruitless effort. Marketing practitioners agreed that, brand message is as credible as those that are doing the marketing. No present Nigeria leader has the credibility some Nigeria icons possess. Examples are: Emeka Anyaoku, Wole Soyinka, Philip Emeagorali, Austin Jay Jay Okoacha, Ibrahim Gambari, Bola Ajibola, Ngozi Okojo Iweala and so on who got to the world stage to present different picture of Nigeria image. Nigerian state should stop underestimating the intelligence of these and other hybrid icons. Nigeria icons, (these are those who through their personal efforts, have managed to give this country some measure of credibility in the international world) remain a reasonable and legitimate option for selling Nigeria brand in the international market. Also, Nigerian icons should make it a point of duty to participate in piloting the leadership of the country since "The price honest men pay for not being involved is to be ruled by dishonest men".

**3.Change of Attitude:** Similarly, all stakeholders in the Nigeria project must see the imperativeness of rebranding in the way we do things, the logo "Nigeria factor", "African time" or "this is Nigeria" which implies things can be done in unlawful manner should stop. The re-orientation must also focus on the need to make the people of this country believe in the brand called Nigeria. All Nigerians should work for peace, security, honesty, and stability, because we have one country that we can call our own. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to ensure that the integrity of the nation is rebranded as stated in the *The Nation* (2010, p 60). In rebranding Nigeria as a product, the leadership and followership must adhere to the ethical standards and values because charity begins at home. Part of the leadership ethical standard must be the foundation of the Nations policy on corruption free society (Bowman 1991). A corrupt leader cannot wage a successful war against corruption. According to Wole Soyinka recently, "There is a lot of rubbish to clear in terms of personnel, degraded structure, infrastructure and also the stubbornness of the highly powerful political actors who continue in the old manner" (personal communication). If we truly desire a change, we cannot ignore a call to change. Let those who give us bad brand be flushed out so that effective public relations and advertising campaign can serve as antidote to good branding just as *The SUN* opines.

**4.Conducive Environment:** Besides, Nigeria government must create conducive environment, as conducive as what could be found anywhere in the world. The Nigerian road network should be rehabilitated and motor-able. There should be constant electricity supply cum water supply in order to attract foreign investors and other stakeholders who can partner with the country.

**5.Truthful Propaganda:** Political leaders should be more concerned with truthful than propaganda. They should follow the principle of public relations which emphasizes "95% action and 5% talking". That is, they should put all things in order before embarking on peddling for foreigners.

**6.Wider Coverage of Information:** There should be high involvement of public relations, advertising and media expert in re-branding project. Information about re-branding project and actions should go beyond traditional channels of mass communication; radio, television, newspaper, magazines and billboards. Other channels such as internet, rallies, public campaign community briefing etc should also be included in the dissemination of information and feedback mechanism to involve all and sundry in the project.

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