

BRAND PERSONALITY AND CULTURE: THE ROLE OF ROTARY CLUB IN A CONTINUOUSLY DIVERSE SOCIETY

Mustapha Tosin BALOGUN

Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3939-0192>

Email: mustapha.balogun@lasu.edu.ng

Olubusola Temiloluwa OYEKUNLE

Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0529-7697>

Email: olubusola.oyekunle@lasu.edu.ng

Usman Moyosore TIJANI

Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7132-3948>

Email: usman.tijani@lasu.edu.ng

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of Rotary International and Nigeria's brand personality and culture from the lens of Hofstede's cultural principles and Rotary International Four Way Test. Using discourse analysis, Hofstede's cultural principles such as power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity and uncertainty avoidance and Rotary International Four way Test (that questions if whatever act that's said or done is the truth; fair to all concerned; if it brings goodwill and better friendship or if it is beneficial to all concerned) were used to examine the brand personalities of Nigeria and Rotary International. Findings indicate the existence of different cultural responses when both Hofstede and Four Way Test were used to examine the multicultural nature of Nigeria as it is evident that citizens have no National culture nor trust between cultures.

Keywords: brand personality, culture, Rotary International, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, especially during the economic recessions, the saturated markets have made organisations focus on customer retention strategies so as to increase their lifetime value or brand equity (Niros, Pollalis & Niros, 2020). Vigorous competition between brands have made consumers to be more discriminating and knowledgeable while making decisions, as organisations increasingly search for strategies that will enable them establish strong emotional bond with consumers, based on product and service differentiation for value propositions (Bairrada, Coelho & Lizanets, 2019). One might argue that the basic essence of creating a successful brand is based on a carefully considered long

term process, that goes beyond the realms of short-term orientation of sales; however, one must agree, that even the biggest brands should translate into revenue creation, organizational performance (Badgaiyan, Dixit & Verma, 2017) and consumer-brand relationships (Hassey, 2019).

Carah and Brodmerkel, (2020) defined a brand as sophisticated networks of information, associations and feelings that are open ended or multidimensional, social and cultural processes which relies on the participation of active consumers and other cultural actors in order to create meaning and value. While extensive pragmatic research has been carried out in the field of marketing and business management on how brands are built, managed and sustained over time (Aaker, 1996; Klein, 2000), there is still desire to make brands more efficient, effective and valuable within the midst of unequal distribution of resources and power in society (Carah & Brodmerkel, 2020). This posits why critical scholars such as Konberger (2010) and Banet-Weiser (2012) argue that our cultural worlds are saturated by brands. Therefore, we must seek to understand how the pervasiveness of branding in our culture affects our identifications and imaginations, our political subjectivities and the distribution of power and resources. Furthermore, for one to have better understanding of the pervasiveness of branding on our culture, there is need to understand how existing cultural practices is achieved through social cohesion and stability regulatory agents.

As people incorporate brands into their lives, critical scholars believe it engages us in the communication of our identities through consumer participation and creative self-expression in ways that strategically benefit the brand and at the same time appear to reserve their freedom and autonomy (Serazio, 2013; Carah & Brodmerkel, 2020). This is because no society is devoid of any form of cultural practice that is not regulated by culturally based agents. So, to study any country, or a society that is dominated by many organisations or brands; there is need to look primarily at the pattern of organisation and its cultural background so as to understand the social interaction expected thereof (Ajala, 2001).

Nevertheless, the different discursive backgrounds of sociology and socio-anthropology scholars on the meaning of culture and society to be same or different informed the focus of this paper to expatiate on the relationship between brand and culture. While socio-anthropologist scholars maintain that culture serves as an institutional framework that gives meaning to social reality and perhaps function to allow for the existence of society; sociologists believe culture and society are same (Ajala, 2001). In this regard, this paper examines if personality of a country as a brand and culture of organisations that create those brands influence the character of the people therein? Or is brand personality a social reflection of the culture of the country or organisation from which the brand originates?

2. Review of literature

Brand Personality

Personality is considered to be an important factor to build strong relationship, just as successful individuals and brands attract, influence and appeal to people to interact or purchase (Niros, Pollalis & Niros, 2020) because it helps individuals to achieve social success, recognition and differentiation. This suggests why Aaker (1997) define brand personality as a set of enduring human characteristics or traits associated with a brand. It is believed to help in creating a self-expression benefit

that becomes a vehicle through which the consumer can express his or her own personality (Badgaiyan, et al 2017).

Brands are significations around which social actors and even nations construct their identities. Because expression of such identity informs both local and foreign markets of messages that words cannot express (Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt & Spyropoulou, 2007). For example, Ford is American, Malasia is “truly Asia”, and Nigeria is “heartbeat of Africa” according to the countries tourism advertising.” While brands have been of significance importance in international marketing literature, the significance of country literature is not left out (Pitt, et al., 2007). For example, literatures such as Kotler and Gertner, (2002); Brymer (2003); Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) with anonymous (1990) argue that nations can be viewed as similar marketing entities to products and brands and it is patriotic to promote one’s country as a brand in order to overcome competition. Likewise, Pitt, et al. (2007) encouraged countries in Africa to behave like structured organisations that are popular so as to assess their brand personality as part of their marketing strategy to promote themselves as tourism destinations and remove negative perceptions that emanate from negative socio-political, economic instability or proximity to unstable countries because countries with an unknown or poor reputation or brand will be limited or marginalized (Brymer, 2003; Pitt, et al. 2007).

For example, US brand personality is a multidimensional construct (Rojas-Mendez, Murphy & Papadopoulos, 2013) consisting of three main dimensions namely: amicableness, resourcefulness and self-centeredness. Davies, Rojas-Mendez, Whelan, Mete and Loo (2018) on other hand indicated that in previous studies, sincerity and competence are two most identified dimensions to measure brand personality, though cultural specific and entity specific dimensions also exist. So, the authors identified three dimensions – sincerity (warm, friendly, pleasant, agreeable and cheerful) competence (competent, efficient, effective, confident, and professional) and status (prestigious, refined, elegant, sophisticated, and glamorous) – as being universally relevant to both culture and entity.

By implication, managements of organisations and countries are to develop socially constructed attributes that serves as a social glue binding all individuals together (Wijethilake, Upadhaya & Lama, 2021). These attributes should either be internal processes and propensities that helps to explain what people say about themselves or external behavior of people’s action in a particular way or social reputation that expresses what others say or think about one’s personality. Social glue can further be expressed as people’s culture (Mashile, Munyeka & Ndlovu, 2019) and unique sets of norms, values, beliefs, ways of behaving and their configuration that uniquely characterizes the way groups in organisation get things done.

Culture

Different scholars have given various positions to what culture means. According to morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. Also, it is posited to comprise traditional beliefs and social practices that leads to rules for social interaction (Malkawi, Alqatarneh and Fehringer, 2020). Mumford (1994) defined culture as a complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, particular locality or social group. Iwama (2007) gave an occupational therapy perspective by defining culture as shared spheres of experience and the ascription of meaning to objects and phenomenon in the world.

Finally Hofstede (2012) sees culture as collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

From the definitions above, it is observed that culture is a learned distinguishing behavior of individuals or groups in an organisation or a larger social environment.

For example, organizational culture do not operate in a social vacuum. Rather, it operates within socio-cultural context of assumptions, values and artefacts that is ongoing, dynamic or interactive in order to manage organizational change and renewal (Bamgboje-Ayodele & Ellis, 2015). It can influence how people set personal and professional goals, perform tasks and administer resources to achieve them. Organizational cultures affects the way in which people consciously and subconsciously think, make decisions and ultimately the way they perceive feel and act (Nwibere, 2013). In competitive cultures, values relating to competitive advantage, high levels of dynamism, goal demanding strategies, marketing superiority and profits are prioritized. Bureaucratic cultures on the other hand sees formalization, operating procedures, rules, hierarchy as important so that management can perform in a stable environment that allows predictability and efficiency and stability.

All the same, researchers on organizational cultures posit that leadership and management-attribute leadership styles are most significant factors that affects employee behavior. They opine that the style of the leader translates into values and priorities that control employee behavior towards customer and product. However, it is safe to say that since individuals bring their personal values, beliefs and attitude to organisations, their levels of commitment to the organisation differs based on the level of fit of existing organizational culture.

Hofstede's Cultural Principles

Power Distance: this cultural principle is based on the premise that the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2012). It has to do with the fact that a society's inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. In cultures scoring high in this dimension, the hierarchy is accepted even with no justification. The societies that score low demand equality of power and explanations for all the possible inequalities.

Individualism: The context of this cultural principle is that high scoring societies prefer a loose social framework in which each individual is expected to take care of their own needs, while people's self-image is determined by the term 'I'. At the opposite end of the spectrum, stand the collectivistic societies where individuals expect help from their relatives or members of other in-groups they belong to, and the people define themselves as "we".

Masculinity: High masculinity characteristics within a culture are manifested through competition and focus on achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. The opposite side of the scale is referred to as femininity. Feminine cultures are more consensus oriented and prefer cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life. While masculine cultures think refugees should be assimilated; feminine cultures lean towards integration. Religiously, the interpretation of religion in masculinity cultures is that god tends to be stricter than gods in feminine cultures who promote treating neighbours with care.

Uncertainty-Avoidance: This dimension expresses attitudes towards ambiguity. The indicators on the spectrum relates to how societies deal with the

fact that future is unknown. High uncertainty avoidance index can be found in countries with strong beliefs, set behavioural and strict rules. Countries with low uncertainty avoidance index are generally more relaxed about their principles.

Nigeria's brand personality and culture

Nwuba (2018) expressed that Nigeria has a population of over 180 million with over 300 ethnic groups, different languages, cultures and outstanding in ethnic diversity. Within the six geo-political zones are 774 local government areas for political expediency, while the country has her administrative structure that comprise of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT). English is the official language used in all governmental interactions, educational institutions and formal business interactions. This is because past governments did not want a situation that one tribe will assume superiority over the other if a language is picked as the official language. Nevertheless, there should be a national culture that consist of beliefs, convictions, racial identities, languages and traditions that are commonly shared by the population of a sovereign country that are so engrained in the behavior of people in such society to shape every sphere of their lives (Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi & Adekoya, 2021).

For example, Ugbam, Chukwu and Ogbo (2014) argue that the name Nigeria never existed before the end of the 19th century, while the geographical space now referred to as Nigeria was owned by different ethno-linguistic groups such as the empires of Oyo, Kanem-Borno, Sokoto Caliphate and the Benin Kingdom amongst others. These cultural groups were as a matter of administrative convenience merged together to become one entity by Britain. Unfortunately, while there exist no evidence to suggest that these cultural groups wanted uniting into one entity, there is yet to be a National culture over a century after the forced merger because each cultural group have jealously guarded their cultures.

From an empirical point of view, Ugbam, et al (2014) observed that there have been observable erosion of Nigerian culture over the past decades, especially after the country's independence. Citing Ogunjimi and Na'Allah (2005), Ugbam, et al. (2014) opine that the infiltration of pop culture due to the acceptance of globalization have continuously eroded peculiar Nigerian cultural values such as languages, greeting norms, cuisine, customized appearance and dress, occupations, faith and cultural components which are now giving way to suppression and subjugation of African culture. Unfortunately, the original cultural complexion of the nation is fast destroyed as it is affecting both adults and budding generation within each culture.

Rotary club: A Brand with Personality and Culture

For more than a century, the impact of Rotary International has been felt in all Nations of the world by assisting nations to fight disease(s), promote peace, supporting education, providing clean water, sanitation and hygiene, saving mothers and children, growing local economies through economic enhancement projects and protecting the environment amongst many others (www.rotary.org/en/our-causes). The achievement of these causes can only be accomplished through the assistance of professional and service minded business people, relating in 5,000 plus clubs located in different countries that have multiple cultures, ethnic, religious and spiritual alignments worldwide.

Rotary is a powerful force for change (Devlyn, 2000) in spite the diversity that exist between members. The organisation recognize the need for culture of equity and inclusion which is summarized in the rotary principle named The Four Way

Test. This is an ethical code that guides Rotarians as they provide service to others, promote integrity and advance world understanding, goodwill and peace.

The code asks four questions which are:

1. Is it the *truth*?
2. Is it *fair* to all concerned?
3. Will it build *goodwill* and *better friendships*?
4. Will it be *beneficial* to all concerned?

These four principles have made Rotary to become a powerful force for change because the name crates an instant bond not only among a global network of individuals who are friends, neighbours, leaders or problem solvers to those in need (Devlyn, 2000); but it also stand as a humanitarian institution that takes action to create lasting change across the globe in our communities and in ourselves (www.rotary.org/en/our-causes).

On this note, we can all agree that Rotary has been able to fulfil the requirements that's synonymous to what a brand personality should possess. This includes the ability of the brand to create meaning and value, the personality has been able to attract, influence and appeal to people's judgement and the organisation has a unique characteristics of getting things done. But does Rotary's organisation culture fulfil Hofstede's principles?

3. Discussion

Comparison between Hofstede's Principles Vs Rotary Principles

Power Distance: Rotary scores *low in power distance* because it is an organisation that demands equality and explanations for all possible inequalities. This is evident in the four way test that requires members to question if any action or decision is fair or will build goodwill, better friendships and beneficial to all concerned?

Individualism: Rotary in the context of this cultural principle is *Collectivistic* because it believes in the world having societies where individuals can help others, where individuals can expect help from their relatives or members of other in-groups they belong to, and the people define themselves as "*We*". A look at the programmes of Rotary such as community corps, peace fellowships, scholarships and grants is indicative of the collectivistic nature of Rotary club.

Masculinity: Rotary operates within a *feminine, consensus oriented* culture as the organisation prefer cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and every individual having quality of life. Feminine cultures lean towards refugee integration while religiously believe God promote treating neighbours with care, truth and fairness. Finally,

Uncertainty-Avoidance: This dimension expresses attitudes towards ambiguity or what is unknown. Rotary relates within the *High Uncertainty Avoidance Index* because of her strong beliefs, set behavioural expectations and strict rules. A second look at the Four Way Test suggests that Rotarians are always guided by these set of questions when making decisions. These are strict rules to follow that guide set behavioural expectations of every Rotarian wherever located. It is expected that whenever the rules are adhered to, the organisation will not succumb to racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and political pandemics, one of such that has befallen our Nation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, an assessment of Nigeria, as regards Hofstede's four principles, suggests that because of the predominant polarization of unethical principles and values that are almost becoming a norm in the society, Nigeria rates high in power distance. It is sad to say, that society's inequality, is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Those who looted our common wealth yesterday are hailed by the people today. The negative effects of socio-political and economic crises, has gradually drifted us from the culture of collectivism, to individualistic culture. People now mind their own businesses. This is evident in the structure of houses being built nowadays with fences higher than the building itself.

Nigeria is high in the masculinity index. People are subconsciously competing with one another. Questions about sources of wealth have been thrown into the bin as focus is on achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. Gone are the days when any dropout will willingly choose to learn a trade or skill. Today, many of the agile youths are interested in online illegal transactions otherwise called Yahoo-Yahoo. Children in their twenties are now seen to own and drive exotic cars and sending money to parents without them querying the source of funds. Rather, what you hear is my child has arrived. Femininity behavior has now taken the back seat.

Uncertainty avoidance in Nigeria is very low. The future for citizens is very bleak because we are generally more relaxed about our principles. Rule of law is existing, but the management of it has been questioned. Structures that are created to make the Nigerian system work are not performing as expected. Trust in the judicial system is weakening as Justices continue to give conflicting court orders. Strike actions have become a tool to get demands from government, while representatives of government make unguarded statements that does not give hope to the people. But with all these existing, does it imply that we should secede as some individuals in some sections of the country are clamouring? No! I don't believe so. You hardly find a country that is homogeneous. U.S, UK, Russia and many other nations are never homogeneous in culture. Politically, culture is used as a tool to eliminate competition. Identity politics are often used for the purpose of achieving interests. Truly, failure of Nigerian institutions to check the inadequacies of those in position have affected the delivery of general good to citizens because governments in the local, state and federal levels are mostly extraction of elite corrupt friends.

If we recall, after the civil war in Nigeria, Nigerians became very united. We believed in one Nigeria but the inability of our leaders to make us forge together as a nation created the disagreements we are witnessing today. Therefore, we need to start asking questions.

How has the leadership influenced the life of the common man on the street? What do we need to do to make the institutions work? Why is the diversity in our constitution only concerned about states of origin but not resolving issues about youth empowerment, gender-inequalities, ethnicity and many other diversities that exist amongst us? How do we develop a national culture of shared convictions, beliefs and traditions that are neither foreign induced nor religiously imbedded doctrines?

It is time to deepen the meaning of diversity in our constitution as we need to choose individuals that will always abide by the four cardinal principles of Rotary as our representatives at all government levels so that we can come up with the right

policies that will enhance the growth and development of our nation. Also, every individual should start to imbibe the rotary principles and put it to action. Hence, spreading of goodwill and better friendship within and between all cultures is sacrosanct because Nigeria is better-off as a united country.

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