

IJMC Department of Mass Communication

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Professor Adeolu Akande is a Professor of Political Science and teaches at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Igbinedion University, Okada Edo State

Dr. Omowale, Adelabu, teaches at the Department of Mass Communication Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State. Email contact: omowale2001@yahoo.com; adelabuo@run.edu.ng

Dr. Joshua Kayode Okunade, teaches at the Department of Mass Communication Caleb University, Imota, Lagos. E-mail Contact: joshuakayodeo@yahoo.com

Dr. Sunday Ogbonna, teaches at the Department of Mass Communication Caleb University, Imota, Lagos. E-mail Contact: oyesun@yahoo.com

Dr. Andrew Asan, Ate, teaches at the Department of Mass Communication, Edo University, Iyamho, Edo State, Nigeria. Email: ate.asan@edouniversity.edu.ng/ateandrew@yahoo.com

Achike C. Okafo teaches at the Department of Mass Communication, Caleb University, Lagos. E-mail Contact: okafo@yahoo.com

Violet Omojan Okokor teaches at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State. Email Contact: omojan.okokor@gmail.com

Paul OnuwaIkwu is the Manager (Public Affairs) Jos Electricity Distribution Plc Email Contact paul.ikwu@jedplc.com.ng

Victor Olusegun Babatunde, teaches at the Department of Mass Communication, Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State Email Contact olubabs902@yahoo.com

Olutobi Michael Folorunsho, teaches at the Department of Mass Communication, The Polytechnic Igbo-Owu, Kwara State Email Contact mikeolu88@gmail.com;

Joyce Habsat Imhanobe teaches at the department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada. Email Contact peculiarjoyce1@yahoo.com

Saheed Olaitan Olayinka teaches at the Department of Mass Communication, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State Email Contact saheedolayinka4@gmail.com;

Dr. Titilola Esther Aiyelari teaches at the General Studies Unit, The Polytechnic Ibadan Oyo State

Dr. Chinedu Christian Odoemelam teaches at the Department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada judahmandate@gmail.com Christian.odoemelam@iuokada.edu.ng

Grace Abosede Adegunle is of the Department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada Edo State adegunleg@gmail.com

Queen Ekemeye Odoemelam is of the Department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada Edo State rosesplend@gmail.com

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PERSONALITY SYMBOLS AND BRAND POSITIONING IN THE TELECOM INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

OKUNADE, Omowale Adelabu, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
Redeemer's University,
Ede, Osun State.

KAYODE, Joshua, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
Caleb University,
Imota, Lagos.

OGBONNA, Sunday, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
Caleb University,
Imota, Lagos.

Abstract

Personality symbol in telecom advertisements is fast becoming industry standard practices. Personality symbol is capable of covering all the identifications of the brand. Despite the increasing use of this advertising method, little or no empirical research has been done to ascertain its influence on brand positioning. The objective of the study is to know the influence personality symbols have on brand positioning. The survey method was adopted with questionnaire as data gathering instrument from 150 respondents in Lagos. Findings showed that respondents identified with various personality symbols used by GSM operators. However, majority (63%) of the respondents said they do not patronize the service because of the personality

symbols used in the advert. Fifty-six percent of the respondents said they feel connected with the personality symbols used by their service providers. The researchers concluded that personality symbols as used by telecom industry operators have contributed to their brand positioning in the minds of their target audience; however it cannot on its own be said to be responsible for the market share of the brand. It was recommended that GSM service providers must complement their use of personality symbols with other marketing communications effort to successfully position their brand.

Keywords: Personality symbol, brand positioning, telecom industry

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of Global System of Mobile (GSM) communication technology in 2001 in Nigeria, the marketing communication industry has witnessed increased dynamism and stiff competition for the pocket of subscribers. Before the liberalization of the Nigerian telecommunications market in 1992, Nigerian Telecommunication Limited (NITEL) was the monopoly that dictates who gets connected to its epileptic and often congested landlines. This changed in 1992 when Private Telecommunication Operators (PTOs) were licensed to operate wireless telecommunication services. The PTOs as pioneered by Multilink revolutionized the telecommunication market. The basic selling point of the PTOs was their fixed wireless feature that put to rest the cumbersome logistics of NITEL's cable connection and the politics of line acquisition.

In 2001, the federal government through the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) auctioned the first license for the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) to the public. At the end of the day, MTN, ECONET and CIL won the right to operate

GSM services. CIL license was later revoked because it could not meet the deadline for paying 10% of the bid price. Since then, other service providers have joined like Globacom, ETISALAT, and many Fixed Wireless operators have been issued Universal License to operate GSM network and other services. With the increase in number of telecom service providers come the need to fight for market share and leadership.

The use of personality symbols to promote an organization's brand had been duly deployed by the telecom industries in Nigeria to promote their products to the teeming Nigerian populace. According to Aaker (1998), a more memorable and interesting brand can be assured with a brand having a personality than a brand which is nothing more than a set of attributes. Brand personality also tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function or as the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand (Aaker, 1997).

Brand, according to Czinkota and Ronkainen (2004:260) relates to a name, term, symbol, sign or design used by a firm, to differentiate its offerings from those of its competitors while Upshaw (1995:14), notes that a brand is the sum of its equity, identity, positioning, personality, essence, character, soul, culture, and ultimately the brand image. Positioning in another guise is the act of designing the company's offering and image so that they occupy a meaningful and distinctive competitive position in the target customer's minds (Kotler, 2005).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One tool employed by all these service providers apart from different service bouquet is marketing communications such as advertising, sales promotions, sponsorships, experiential marketing, public relations and other forms of marketing communications

activities. Therefore, to connect with their teeming subscribers and win new ones, all the GSM service providers embraced the use of one form of celebrity symbols or the others. With the increasing use of personality symbols comes the need to study and understand the effect and effectiveness of these symbols on the brand they represent.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To ascertain the role of personality symbols in product positioning.
- ii. To know the role played by personality symbols in entrenching brand loyalty.
- iii. To ascertain if the use of personality symbols is responsible for the current positioning of MTN and GLOBACOM in the GSM market.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To give vent to the study, the following research questions were postulated:

- What is the role of personality symbols in product positioning?
- What is the role of personality symbols in entrenching brand loyalty?
- Is the use of personality symbols responsible for the current positioning of MTN and GLOBACOM in the GSM market?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is rooted in Symbolic interactionism theory as propounded by George Herbert Mead (1920). The theory explains the symbolic meaning people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction. Symbolic interaction theory studies and explains society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviours. Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they

believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation (Dong, 1990).

The key assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism are:

- a) Humans must be studied on their own level and efforts to infer principles of behaviour from the study of nonhuman form is misguided.
- b) The most fruitful approach to the study of human behaviour is through an analysis of society.
- c) Human being is an active agent of behaviour rather than simply a passive respondent to external stimuli.

Based on these assumptions, Dong (1990) asserts that Symbolic Interactionism is anchored on the facts that:

- a) Behaviour depends on a named or classified world. The names or class terms attached to aspects of the environment carry meaning in the form of shared behavioural expectations that grow out of social interaction. From interaction with others, one learns how to classify objects and in that process also learns how one is expected to behave with reference to those objects.
- b) Among the class terms learned in interaction are the symbols that are used to designate "positions," which are the relatively stable, morphological components of social structure. These positions carry the shared behavioural expectations that are conventionally labeled "roles."
- c) Persons acting in the social structure name one another in the sense of recognizing one another as occupants of positions. When they name one another, they invoke expectations with regard to each other's behaviour.
- d) Persons acting in the context of organized behaviour apply names to themselves as well. These reflexively applied

- positional designations, which become part of the "self," create internalized expectations with regard to their own behaviour.
- e) When entering interactive situations, persons define the situation by applying names to it, to other participants in the interaction, to themselves, and to particular features within the situation, and use the resulting definition to organize their own behaviour accordingly.
 - f) Social behaviour is not, however, determined by these definitions, though early definitions may constrain the alternative definitions to emerge from interaction. Behaviour is the product of a role-making process, initiated by expectations invoked in the process of defining situations, but developing through a tentative probing interchange among actors that can reshape the form and the content of interaction.
 - g) The degree to which roles are "made" rather than simply "played," will depend on the larger social structures in which interactive situations are embedded. Some structures are "open," others relatively "closed" with respect to novelty in roles and in role enactments of performances. All structures impose some limits on the kind of definitions that may be called into play and thus limit the possibilities for interaction.
 - h) To the degree roles are made rather than only played as given, changes can occur in the character of definitions, in the names and class terms those definitions use, and in the possibilities for interaction; and such changes can in turn lead to changes in the larger social structures within which interactions take place.

From the above, audience of advertisements encounter personality symbols in the adverts and formulate and reassess their plans of action in terms of the objects and people encountered in the advertisements, and in terms of their own assessments of themselves. This theory is germane to this work because it helps to explain the

relationship between the audience and the personality symbols they encounter in any advertisement they expose themselves to.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK PERSONALITY SYMBOL

Personality symbol according to Halim (2012) is “a type of advertising execution that involves developing a central character through which the brand delivers its benefits. It also allows the brand to build an identity, to differentiate itself from the competitors”. This connotes that personality symbol in advertising creates brand character that helps deliver benefits to the audience.

Zeren (2009) says successful personality symbols are sincere and consistent. They have an identity. They do not lie. Personality symbols project ones needs and wishes. People see what they want to be in the personality symbols. For him, creating a personality symbol is social engineering. It targets the social needs and it is one of the most effective strategies in the field of marketing communication.

The use of personality symbol according to Halim goes back to late 1800's. One of the oldest personality symbols created in 1893 is Aunt Jemima, promoting pancake mixes and syrup. The other oldest personality symbol which is still in use just like Aunt Jemima is Michelin Tyre's personality symbol, Michelin man.

Personality symbols perform several functions for the brand. Marra (1990), says that a well-developed personality symbol can provide durability in the messages and therefore build a prestige for the brand. Also by using personality symbols remembering the brand is made easy and its benefits can be conveyed easily. Mostly the creative advertising campaigns that base their communication strategy on personality symbols find the adaption of their messages to other formats and media channels easier as well.

Halim (2012) identified five types of personality symbols often used in advertisement to include:

- i. Human
- ii. Animal
- iii. Magical, mythical or an already known character
- iv. Iconic
- v. Illusionary or Abstract

On human personality symbols, Schultz and Schultz (1998) says, “whereas a human personality symbol can be a ‘real, living’, celebrity or an ordinary person, he/she can also be a ‘created’ person. For example, “Betty Crocker is a computer generated hybrid of 75 real American faces”. Examples of human symbols used by GSM service providers include DBanj, Tuface, Funke Akindele, Afeez Oyetoro (aka Saka), Davido and others.

Personality symbol might be a very useful communication strategy in marketing communications however, creating a successful personality symbol is not an easy job. This informed the rationale behind this study.

PRODUCT POSITIONING AND PERSONALITY SYMBOLS

Product, according to Osuagwu (2006:35), is something that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition and consumption. For a product to be successful, it must possess the ability to perform promises made in the advertising as well those made by the salesmen. Having qualified in that respect, companies must ensure that each segment of the society has a brand that identifies with the aspirations of that segment of the society. In other words companies must try to match a particular product with a particular target audience while edging out other similar brands targeting the same audience.

Belch and Belch (2001:52) defines positioning as “the art and science of fitting the product or services to one or more segments of

the broad market in such a way as to set it meaningfully apart from competition.” Aaker and Myers (1987:125) agree that the term position indicate the brand’s or product’s image in the marketplace. On the other hand, Trout and Ries (1972:51) suggest that the only way a brand can stand out among others in the market is for the brand image to contrast with the competitors. According to them, “in today’s marketplace, the competitors’ image is just as important as your own. Sometimes more important.” Belch and Belch (2010) therefore sees product positioning as relating to “the image of the product and or other brand relative to competing products or brands. The position of a product or brand is the key factor in communicating the benefits it offers and differentiate it from the competition. They explain further:

...the position of the product, service, or even store is the image that comes to mind and the attributes consumers perceive as related to it. This communication occurs through the message itself, which explain these benefits, as well as the media strategy employed to reach the target group.

A company’s product position strategy focuses on either the consumer of the product or the competition in the market. Both method, according to Belch and Belch (2001), involve the association of product benefits with consumer needs, while the strategy that targets the consumer does so by linking product with the benefits the consumer derive or creating a favourable brand image.

STRATEGIES FOR POSITIONING A PRODUCT

Before a company can decide on the approach to adopt for its product, Trouts and Ries (1972) advised managers to ask and provide answers to the following six questions:

- i. What position, if any, do we already have in the prospect’s mind? The answer for this question will be provided through the company survey of the market, that is, the target audience.

- ii. What position do we want to own?
- iii. What companies must be outgunned if we are to establish that position?
- iv. Do we have enough marketing money to occupy and hold the position?
- v. Do we have guts to stick with one consistent positioning strategy?
- vi. Does our creative approach match our positioning strategy?

Answers to the questions above will give a company an insight into what strategy to adopt, who its competitions are, and an assessment of consumers' perceptions of competition. It will also enable the company determine the competition position in the market, know the target audience's preferences in terms of demographics, life style, taste and purchase motivation. Aaker and Shansby (1982) suggested six approaches. The strategies are:

- i. Positioning by attributes and benefits: products can be set apart from other similar brands in the market based on its specific attributes and the benefits it offers. The basic thing is to identify the salient attributes which will fulfill consumers anticipated needs. This is because consumers will be making purchase based on their anticipated needs.
- ii. Positioning based on the price and its quality. According to Belch and Belch, company can run adverts that reflect the image of a high-quality brand where cost is considered secondary to the quality benefits derived from using the brand. Again, they may also use price/quality competitively; that is, the company can focus on the quality and value offered by the product at a competitive price.

- iii. Positioning by use and application: by associating a product with a specific use, a new product can be introduced to the market while at the same time it can expand the use of an old one.
- iv. Positioning by class: there are buses like the Cross Country fleet that are associating themselves with comfort, cost savings and enjoyment commensurable with what is obtained in airlines. The intention is to compete with airlines for passengers to areas within the country and neighbouring countries.
- v. Positioning by users: there are products that are used by a particular group of people in the society; such products like food seasoning, sanitary towels are associated with women while products like alcohol are considered drinks for the men.
- vi. Positioning by competitor: this is a common strategy in the telecommunication industry. For instance MTN says it is the leading network by saying, '*where ever you go*'; Globacom on the other hand says, '**Glo... Rule Your World**'. Yet, the two networks provide competing services.
- vii. Repositioning: Belch and Belch (2010) added repositioning as a strategy that involves altering or changing a product's or brand's position. According to them, repositioning a product usually occurs because of declining or stagnant sales or because of anticipated opportunities in other market positions. Apart from the above, the telecom industry especially when GSM services were introduced, makes use of celebrity idols as a means of positioning their brands in the market. For example, Etisalat adopted Tuface as its brand idol. Until recently, they also had Afeez Oyetoro (aka Saka) as its celebrity symbol to the low ends of the market. Similarly, MTN, the leader in the

market by subscribers' base has used different celebrity symbols to position its brand in the market. Globacom also used celebrity such as King Sunny Ade (KSA), Bisade Ologunde (Lagbaja), Bezhiwa Idakula (Bez), Bright Okpocha (Basketmouth), Jude Abaga (MI), Wande Coal, Chinedu Okolie (Flavour), Peter and Paul Okoye (P-Square), Waje Iruobe, Omawumi Megbele, Funke Akindele (Jenifa), Chukie Edozien (Lynxx), Sammie Okposo and Ego Ogbaro.

Several nollywood divas such as Funke Akindele, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Sunday Omobolanle (Aluwe), Chika Okpala (Zebrudaya) and his telly-wife, Lizzy Eveome, the Ovuleria of the now rested New Masquerade series have featured as personality symbols for one telecom industry or the other. Others are Bolaji Amusan (Mr. Latin), Madam Ibidun Allison, the Amebo of also rested Village Headmaster and Madam Kofo Abiola, noted for her signature skyscraper headgears.

Since the coming of GSM service providers, the use of personality symbols has been one of the defining nature of their product positioning in the market. According to Oladimeji (2014) quoting a statement from Glo office on the use of brand personality, he writes that:

as brand representatives, they are vested with the responsibility of positively motivating their followers from all strata of life, not only to join the Globacom network, but also to recommend its products and services to others in their circles of influence.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was adopted for this study. The method deals with subjects concerning all works of life and is suitable for collecting data on attitude of people on certain subject area. Lagos

residents were chosen as the population of the study owing to the fact that most of today's telecommunication service providers started in that state.

A total number of 150 respondents were selected for the study in the senatorial district in Lagos State which was eventually chosen after applying the multi-stage sampling method from the three senatorial districts. Three Local Government Areas (LGA) were selected from the selected senatorial district and it was from these LGAs that three streets were randomly selected. 50 copies of questionnaire were distributed for each of these streets. Of the 150 copies distributed 143 copies were returned, putting the response rate at 95%.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Of the 143 respondents, 71 were male respondents making 49.7% of the total number, while a total number of 72 females responded to the questionnaire. This represents 50.3% of the total figure. Again, the age of respondents were grouped into; 15-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35 and others. Of this, those in the 15-20 age bracket represent 38.4% (n=55); 21-25 age bracket represent 16.8% (n=24); 26-30 has 21.7% (n=31); 18.9% falls within 31-35 age bracket and those categorized as others represent 4.2% (n=6) of the 143 respondents.

Majority of the respondents' educational level falls within those with first degree and those categorized as others (that is those who have other certificates other than SSCE, OND, BSC/ND). These two categories returned 32.2% each (n=46); OND category returned 7% (n=10), and SSCE came back with total of 41 respondents, representing 28.9% of the figure.

RQ 1: What is the role of personality symbols in product positioning?

Table 1: Respondents' view of the role of personality symbols in GSM service provider positioning

Sex	R e s p o n s e s					T o t a l
	Excellent	Very good	G o o d	F a i r	B a d	
Male	7.6% (n=11)	7.6% (n=11)	19% (n=27)	14% (n=20)	14 (n=2)	49.7% (n=71)
Female	6.2% (n=9)	11.9% (n=17)	22.33% (n=32)	7.6% (n=11)	2% (n=3)	50.3% (n=72)
Total	1% (n=20)	19.6% (n=28)	41.2% (n=59)	21.7% (n=31)	3.5% (n=5)	100% (n=143)

Majority of the respondents, 41.2% (n=59), rated it as good, 21.7% (n=31) rated it as being fair, 19.6% (n=28) says it is very good but only 1% of the respondents think that the role of personality symbols in GSM service provider positioning is excellent, while 3.5% say it is bad.

Table 2: Response as to whether personality symbols influence product positioning in the market

S e x	R e s p o n s e		T o t a l
	Y e s	N o	
M a l e	28.7% (n=41)	21% (n=30)	49.6% (n=71)
Female	32.9% (n=47)	17.4% (n=25)	50.4% (n=72)
T o t a l	61.5% (n=88)	38.5% (n=55)	100% (n=143)

61.5 % of the respondents say personality symbols influence the position the GSM service provider occupies in the market while 38.5% of them says no. when asked to give their reasons for their choice, 71.5% of them says the number of times a personality symbol was used

by service provider confirms that it leads others, 20% say when they see a personality symbol in an advert everywhere it register their presence over the others in the market. However, 8.5% says the frequency does not necessarily mean that the service provider is the leader in the market.

Clearly from the response above, use of personality symbols influence how people see a particular GSM service provider with regards to its position as the market leader as affirmed by Halim (2012) where he notes that use of personality symbols is a type of advertising execution that involves developing a central character through which the brand delivers its benefits. It also allows the brand to build an identity and to differentiate itself from the competitors. In essence, the usage of personality symbols in promoting a product has a place in the heart of consumers of such products as the personality's image helps to hold a subconscious imagery of the product. This follows the trend when respondents were asked to list their perceived leading GSM providers in the Nigerian market. 71.5% indicated MTN first and Globacom second followed by Airtel. 40.2% indicated Globacom as the leading GSM followed by MTN, Airtel and Etisalat. The response of those who indicated MTN tallied with the top listing for GSM providers in Nigeria.

Table 3: Respondents' view of which GSM provider is No1. between Globacom and MTN

S e x	R e s p o n s e		T o t a l
	G l o b a c o m	M T N	
M a l e	16.8% (n = 24)	32.8% (n=47)	49.6% (n=71)
F e m a l e	16.1% (n = 23)	34.3% (n=49)	50.4% (n=72)
T o t a l	32.9% (47)	67.1% (n=96)	100% (n=143)

Again, majority of the respondents (67.1%) say MTN is the number one GSM provider rating it over Globacom. This assertion however, is not backed by any empirical evidence and is thus assumed to be the imagination of the respondents most probably based on the fact that the MTN GSM network became functional much earlier than the Globacom network. Now if the respondents agreed that personality symbols makes the respondents rate MTN over Globacom, it would be right then to say that personality symbols can influence product position in the mind of the public and the marketplace.

RQ 2: What is the role of personality symbols in entrenching brand loyalty?

Table 4: Respondents' view as to whether personality symbols influence brand loyalty

S e x	R e s p o n s e s		T o t a l
	Y e s	N o	
Male	28.7% (n = 41)	21% (n=30)	49.6% (n=71)
Female	32.9% (n = 47)	17.4% (n=25)	50.4% (n=72)
Total	61.5% (n = 88)	38.5% (n=55)	100% (n=143)

Table 4 shows that personality symbols is vital to the decision a consumer takes when selecting a brand and the eventual decision to stay loyal to the brand. It must be noted that brand loyalty is a result of the brand ability to deliver on its promises and the anticipated needs of the consumer. This view is thus supported by Zeren (2009) when he asserts that personality symbols are sincere and consistent. Thus, the identity built is measured by the respondents' believe in both the personality used in advertising the product and the ability of the telecommunication provider to keep to their promise of good service.

So when asked to rate the influence of personality symbol on their patronage of GSM services from providers, 42.6% rated MTN personality influence as very good on their choice, 26.6% says it is excellent, 26.6% also say it is good, while both fair and bad carries 2.1% each.

On the other hand, 47.5% vote 'very good' for Globacom, 28.7% rated it good, 12.6% say it is excellent, 7% see it as fair and 4.2% described it as bad. Although, 47.5% rated the personality symbols as very good on the part of Globacom to MTN's 42.6%, a huge number of the respondents (26.6%) rated MTN as excellent against Globacom 12.6%. This response perhaps informs the increasing use of personality symbols by various GSM service providers.

RQ3: Is the use of personality symbols responsible for the current positioning of MTN and GLOBACOM in the GSM market?

Table 5: Respondents' view of the influence of personality symbols on MTN and Globacom position in the market

GSM service providers	R e s p o n s e s		T o t a l
	Y e s	N o	
M T N	12.6% (n=18)	37% (n=53)	49.75% (n=71)
G l o b a c o m	18.9% (n=27)	31.5% (n=45)	50.3% (n=72)
T o t a l	31.5% (n=45)	68.5% (n=98)	100 (143)

From Table 5 above, 12.6% (n=18) of the respondents said Yes that MTN current position in the market is influenced by its use of personality symbols, while 37% (n=53) said No. similarly, 18.9%(n=27) of the respondents Yes that Globacom current position in the market is attributable to its use of personality symbols, while 31.5% (n=45) said No.

Furthermore, majority (68.5%) of the respondents said Yes that the position of both GSM service providers in the market cannot be attributed solely to their use of personality symbols. This position affirms the assertion of Belch and Belch (2010), Aaker and Myers (1987) and Trout and Ries (1972) as they see product positioning as relating to “the image of the product and or other brand relative to competing products or brands. The position of a product or brand is the key factor in communicating the benefits it offers and differentiate it from the competition. Hence, personality symbols does not have a place in this wise.

CONCLUSION

To successfully position a brand in the market especially in a fiercely competitive market like that of GSM services, it goes beyond the use of personality symbols. It entails identifying the markets with unfulfilled need, segmenting the market, targeting the segment and positioning one’s product or services using a variety of marketing strategies.

For GSM service consumers, Quality of service is very important, along with fair billing and other marketing strategies. It is when all this has been done that the marketers can communicate through its personality symbols the specifically designed message to the identified target audience.

From this study, it is revealed that use of personality symbols play important role in product positioning. The choice of personality symbols goes a long way in connecting the brand to the target customers who see these personality symbols as their role model. The study revealed that the position MTN and Globacom occupy in the marketplace amongst the other GSM service providers is enhanced by the frequency of use of personality symbols among several other factors.

In other words, using personality symbols as a product positioning strategy will work best only if the price is right, the quality of service is excellent, and if the correct strategies and the right promotional activities are adopted.

In view of this, it is therefore recommended that:

- i. Use of personality symbols as product positioning strategy must be used to complement other marketing communication efforts especially quality of service.
- ii. In the choice of personality symbols, care must be taken to ensure that the right person is chosen that can connect with the right target customers in the market segment. It is only when they do that they can create a message that will resonate with the target prospects.
- iii. It is pertinent for GSM service providers to constantly strengthen and refresh their personality symbols to keep abreast of the changing tastes of the target audience.
- iv. It is important to have a flexible personality symbols for different campaign so as to accommodate the changing taste of the target audience.
- v. For a product to be well positioned in the marketplace, the quality of the product must be high and the price must be competitive. According to Belch and Belch, for this to work effectively, the quality must be better than other brands in the marketplace.
- vi. Above all, personality symbols can only help create product loyalty if its psychological and sociological attributes match the needs and expectations of the consumers.

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