

Journal OF RESEARCH AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN HUMAN KINETICS AND HEALTH EDUCATION



JORCIHKHE

ISSN: 1575-5648

Volume 4, ISSUE 1, 2018

Brand Management Strategy: Trends and Perspectives in Nigeria Sports Industry

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Abstract

The increasing competition in sports entertainment market and the continuous challenges of achieving economic success has been a top priority among sports managers and clubs. The global sports business environment has required enterprise to strengthen their brand and strive to convey a strong, consistent and most appropriate message to prospective consumers. It is on this ground that this paper seek to examine diverse positions of scholars and experts on the concept of branding, current trends of branding and associated problems of branding in Nigeria. The researchers also explored brand management strategy and the model for measuring brand equity in sports organisations. The submission emphasis the role of government and stakeholders in creating a sustainable business friendly environment that will reposition Nigeria sports industry as an investment destination.

Key words: Branding, Brand equity, Brand management strategy.

Introduction

The sports industry has become a money-spinning sector all over the world spreading across all strata of the human society. The sports delivery system in Nigeria has evolved from pre-colonial period of simple organisation of traditional sports and recreational activities to the present state of controlled complex organisation. The current economic crises in Nigeria have triggered significant debate on the need to

diversify our economy. Largely absent from this debate is the need to see the sports industry as possible sector for diversification. While other sectors like agriculture, information technology among others have been prioritised. The economic viability of sports has not been perceived by government officials and policy makers.

According to the study on the contribution of Sports to economic growth and employment in the European union (2012), sports is an important economic sector in the European union with a share in the national economy which is comparable to agriculture, forestry and fishing combined. Jeremi (2010) postulates that sporting events like soccer mostly the world cup stimulate trade around the world and beams the spot light on the host country. Many countries of the world have strategically used sports to brand their country, drawing the attention of the international world to their nation's economic opportunities and tourism. Countries that bid for Olympic and other mega sports events are sending a signal that they are ready to open trade. (Andrew & Man, 2010).

Even though sports look attractive from a distance, most investors do not appreciate its capacity. The cost of running sports is rising daily. Individuals, club and even nations are finding it extremely difficult to cope, hence, they are finding alternative way out (Asagba, 2008). The economic environment has been more complex, following the recession; organisations are becoming more sensitive in their approach to business. There is a big question on why Nigeria sports brand are no longer attractive to sponsors? The emergence of telecommunication firm seems to boost sports sponsorship until recently. Globacom has threatened to end its sponsorship of the Nigeria Premier league after more than ten years. The last sponsorship agreement was signed at the beginning of 2012/2013 league season and it ended at the end of 2016 Super Four football tournament which was held in both Kaduna and Uyo. According to reports, Globacom spent N8 billion in order to empower and promote the Nigeria premier league to improve the league to be among one of the continent's best three local leagues (Peter, 2016).

Concept of Branding

Branding has emerged as a top management priority in the last decade due to growing realization that branding is one of the most valuable intangible assets that organisations have. According to Arpit (2015) citing the Mnerican Marketing Association "A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or service of a seller or combination of them, intended to identify the goods or service of a seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate them from other competitors. Branding is an important marketing tool used to stimulate recognition. When a product, service, person or place is branded, it develops a personality and reputation. A successful brand campaign result in a name, design, logo or other recognizable symbol that stand out among its competitors (Kelvin, 2009).

Branding is also a process that involves creating a unique name and image for a product in the customers' mind, mainly through advertising campaigns with consistent theme. Branding is aimed at establishing a

significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers (Keller, 2009). A strong brand commands customer loyalty and premium price, constituting valuable assets that drive company revenue and growth. They are central to many sports organisation and business transaction, especially sponsorship deal and product merchandising.

Types of Branding

The following are types of branding in sports industry:

1. **Personal Branding:** Personal branding and image development have become increasingly vital for career longevity and maximization for sports talent. Athletes management is a virgin ground in Nigeria. Although, most Nigerian sport athletes are brand ambassadors to organisations who intend to use their personality to promote certain goods and services. (e.g. Kanu Nwankwo, Brand Ambassador of Peak Milk).
2. **Corporate Branding:** It is the practice of promoting the brand name of corporate entity, as opposed to specific product or service. According to William (2006), corporate branding include logo, customer service, treatment and training of employees, packaging, advertising, stationeries and quality of product and services. Any means by which the general public encounters specific brand constitutes a touch point that can affect perception of the corporate brand.

According to Kevin (2009) corporate branding is essential for any business that wants to develop a reputation in the market place. Everything the company does has an effect on its image. A corporation market its product or service, its corporate culture, its employees and its contribution to the society. Super Eagles of Nigeria, Team Nigeria Olympic Team, De Tigers (Nigerian Male Basketball Team), Super Falcons to World cup, are examples of corporate brands in Nigerian Sports.
3. **Product Branding:** All products are perceived in different ways by consumers even when it is supposed to be for similar use. Successful product brand has established a reputation as the best or most popular in its class. Laokinridis, (2010), Sports products vary from tennis racket, baseball bat, athletic shoes, soccer ball, sports watch, Jersey, shin guard, punching bag, speed bags, energy drink, supplements, etc. Sports product brand are the producers of these product (Mike, Addidas, under Armor, Puma, New balance, Haggai, etc). American sports company, Nike, signed a deal with Nigeria football federation for \$750,000. This is to promote Nike brand in Nigeria and Africa. ("Nike deal", 2016) Sports manufacturing company promote their brand through sports organisations, association or sport personalities (athletes).

Current Trends of Branding in Nigeria Sports Industry

Nations are presently focusing on attaching foreign investment through sport tournament with their sports branding concept. Sports brand are now sending out emissaries to distribute their sports. Jamaica is a country that has capitalized on distributing sports brand by turning out some of the fastest athletes in the

world. According to Nebath (2013) through purposeful branding in sports, nations are gradually establishing universal appeal in acceptance by moving their brand from their traditional home countries to other parts of the world. The seven-aside rugby tournament in Kenya (Safari sevens), the American Basketball, English premier league, among others, are huge investments that have yielded a big economic return on the various associations and countries.

Christian (2016) opines that the biggest challenge in the Nigeria sports is lack of fund. Super Falcon (Nigeria Female Football Team) won a record-extending eight Africa women cup of Nation (AWCON) title and were stranded in Abuja. From all indication, it is evident that the Nigeria sports industry as a brand has lost its credibility. Sports sponsorship is fundamental to the development of sports in Nigeria. Akarah (2014) argued that corporate sponsors have lost confidence in the Nigeria sports industry due to political interference, corruption and administration, poor communication, lack of transparency and clueless implementation.

If Nigeria professional sports brand must attract the right investors and sponsors, seasoned sports managers must be given a chance to upload the right business conscious brand management plan; to reposition Nigeria sport industry. Globacom has built several consumer promotions around its relationship with Manchester United. English football followership in Nigeria continues to grow while the fan base of Nigeria sports has declined. According to Akarah (2014) Nigeria brands that have taken this sponsorship opportunity include Airtel (Arsenal, though abandoned) sterling Bank (Arsenal) among others. The Nigeria Football Federation signed the token of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars with Nike, which is the lowest of deal with any African football national team.

The 2015 World English scrabble championship was held in Australia, won by Wellington Jiguere, a Nigerian. He became the first African player to be crowned world scrabble champion. The platform of this success has not been fully utilized by the concerned federation who is still seeking sponsors for a major competition. The need to understand the business of sports by applying brand management strategy to appeal to corporate brand association will continue to arise. Twelve million dollars sponsorship deal was sealed by the Nigeria Basketball Federation ("Nike deal" 2016). The undisclosed source of the money build suspicion in the integrity of the federation. Although, there was a press conference but the official website of the federation fails to disclose the source and how the money will be spent.

According to Okafor (2003), moral and ethical issues must be clear to build investors' confidence and

brand reputation. Corporate business organisation will want to associate their brand with organizations that have integrity and transparency. It is observed that most sports federations and organizations website are not professionally planned. The contents of most site are not reflecting sincere data, news and necessary followership. According to Elliott, (2014), social media has paved way for business, media outlets and a host of other organisation to have direct conversations with their customers, allowing for a truly unparalleled level of audience engagement. Sports franchises and clubs should also find ways to leverage this incredible new marketing tools, working to realize the dream of any sports executives, to create a passionate fans base.

Problems of Branding in Nigeria Sports Industry

Research studies have indicated that professional sports organisations, lack appropriate brand practices. The need to develop a conceptual framework which comprises strategies as well as operative brand management option for sports organizations and clubs, become necessary.

Yakubu (2015) citing Lado and Wilson (2004) revealed that there are three major problems of sports branding in Nigeria sports industry which include:

1. **Sport Marketing Myopia:** As sports marketing strategy, branding is usually designed to meet the needs of sports consumers. In Nigeria the industry has been guilty of "marketing myopia" which is lack of foresight on branding ventures and strategies. There are many observable symptoms which include, wrong focus on production and sale of product, goods and services rather than identifying and practically satisfying the needs of sports consumers and their market.

Okafor (2008) opines that in Nigeria sports industry there is a short sighted and improper focus and quick return on investment such as sponsorship, instead of long-term investment in research and relationship marketing. Akarah (2014) agrees that in Nigeria, sports marketers learned their skills without formal training for their job. They are called, "promoters" and are poorly paid while their counterparts in developed countries are regarded as "press agents" and earn better emoluments.
2. **Inadequate Sports Marketing Research:** Research neglect exists at both professional and amateur level and no society can grow beyond the level of its research, this applies quite directly to Nigeria sports industry. Arpit (2015) suggested the need for sports organisation to invest in well-designed researches that include qualitative methodology.
3. **Poor Sales Techniques for Brands:** Sales have been driven by quota and commission mentalities with little emphasis on training and facilities for larger-marketing strategy. According to Yakubu (2015) citing Ayò (2008) in his contribution identify ambush marketing, organisation weakness and poor application of sports theories as three other problems bedeviling sports branding in Nigeria. There is need to develop local and indigenous content for the Nigeria sports

consumers.

Model of Measurement of the Brand Equity in Sport Organisations

Based on the conceptual model that recognizes the multi-dimensional character of the brand equity, scholars have argued various approach and model of measuring brand equity. According to Keller (2009), brand equity is the crucial intangible value a brand brings to organizations, perhaps one of the most important marketing issues discussed in recent years. The concept of brand equity has been argued for both by accounting and marketing perspectives but commonly both disciplines highlight the importance of having a long-term focus within brand management (David, 2016; Henrik & David, 2012).

Brand equity from financial perspectives has been defined as the incremental cash flow resulting from a product with a brand name versus the cash flow of the product without the brand name (Kevin, 2009). Brand equity from a marketing perspective has been described as the associations and beliefs a consumer has about a brand, also referred to as "consumer brand equity" (Ross, Russell & Bang, 2008, Henrik & David, 2012). For explicit understanding of the model of measuring brand equity in sport organizations, the proposal of Angel, Villarejo, Felix and Martin (2007), explains the establishment of the influence of three groups of specific antecedents of sports organizations on the components of the brand equity. These have positive consequences on the market that will affect a feedback process for the indicated antecedents.

Brand Management Strategy

The main focus of every marketing strategy is the customer sports brand managements strategy are plans, built on setting goals which can be achieved in specific time as well as describing instrument and procedures leading to their achievement (Kelvin; 2009). According to Milos (2011) strategic plan direction has to define the company vision which is based on tradition and aims of current management. The sports brand strategist has to determine strategic direction by identifying the organisation goals, opportunities, such as risk, opportunities and advantages.

Sports association through the help of season professionals must carry out a competitive analysis the aim is to compare and try to be one step forward. Corporate sponsors objectives, fans and spectators' needs must be anticipated and incorporated into the sports association brand management preference to attract sustainable patronage and brand loyalty. According to Keller (2009) customer prediction is the base for visions and strategic goals. It is important to be sensitive to prospective clients objectives setting, purpose driven approach and professional communication that will drive sustainable relationship.

SWOT analysis (strength, weakness, opportunity and treats) among other assessment model could be used to review existing sports organisation so as to ensure that the rebranding options are explored.

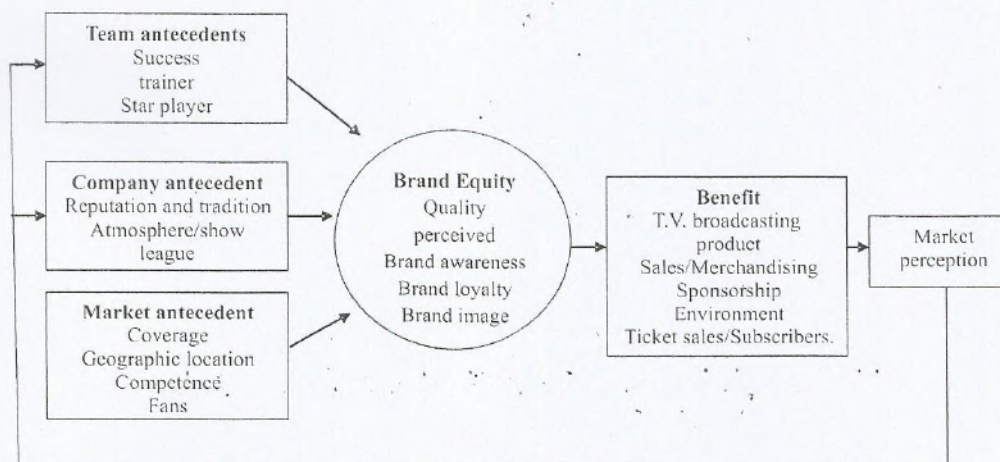
Brand management strategy for rebranding options will help to reposition sports associations/clubs for

repurchase consideration. The perception of customers must be deliberately planned and rightly communicated through purposeful research based, findings will inform the best alternatives that will position sports/clubs for better brand practice, which remain a major challenge in the Nigeria sports industry. (Haastrup, 2017)

Reaching a set goal should be in harmony with a SMART form which is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. Mjlos (2011) recommends that the process of evaluating goals should be formed on these points.

- time schedule control
- control of fund raising and ensuring additional financial sources
- fulfillment of plans and to which extent they have been completed
- how to amend observed facts
- proposal of eventual plan adjustment

Model for Measuring the Brand Equity in Sport Organisations



Source: Angel, Villarejo, Felix and Martin (2007)

As described above, the relationship between the benefits of the brand equity and its component is of special relevance to the brand management process of sport organizations. According to Angel *et al* (2007), it specifies a system in which the consequence of the brand equity form a perception of the product. In this case, the brand of the sports organisation remains reflected in the mind of the consumer and therefore constitute the market's perception of the name of the organisation. This perception is the result of the antecedents, those related to the team, the organisation or the market, and the four component of brand equity as well as the benefit derived from it.

Decoittle (2014) opines that such character is intangible and immaterial; capable of sports organisation which create a perception associated with the image of a team, club or association. In the sports industry the perceived brand equity is related to the success of the team — it wins and losses perceived quality of experience, develop by the consumer (Keum, 2009).

Team Antecedents

For the sports organisation and the management of the brand, there is nothing like the success of the team: to obtain title, championship, and to contribute to the formation of more elevated brand equity (Nebath, 2013) The perceived quality of any sports entity will improve when the sports success arrive, the notoriety reached by means of the support of mass media increases. The level of loyalty of the fans when the team provide to it fans and the image of a winning brand is associated to the success and attitude of the public (Theodorakis, Athanasios, Leigh & Achilteas, 2009).

Quality of trainers also plays a significant role on how a team is perceived. Jones and Tylor (2007) agreed that coaches and trainers personality is capable of attracting fans and increase public coverage given by mass media. Angel *et al* (2007) postulates that the notoriety of the team that manages to contract the best, honoured coach or manager is increased by the space that the organisation obtain in mass media in the days of pre-season. The personality of trainer/coaches have been an evidence to attract and influence sponsors, and inherent sensations thereby increasing the fan base of sports organisations.

Karolina and Andresa (2012) explains that inclusion of star players have been perceived to improve the brand quality of tournament. The society of athletes, especially when connected to a cardre of fans, often stimulates a unique and intriguing form of solidarity, bordering on ferocious allegiance. Mark (2015) testifies that it is undeniable that the success achieved by sportsman (starathlete) are used by the organisation's brand managers to influence the created atmosphere and sense of expectancy for the season which increases the sales entrances seasonal ticket and product under the emblem of brand and figure of the star player contracted.

Organisational Antecedents

A solid reputation in the management, administration, tradition and economic outlook of the organisation, provide an increase in the brand equity. According to Olberdho & Jisha, (2005) consistence in winning, pedigree, standing integrity is needful to create a positive brand equity in the mind of customers, fans, sponsor and investors. Creating a deliberate experience, by customizing sports arena with company logo, color, sales of souvenir, restaurant, monuments where traditional success story (pictures, medals, trophy, jerseys etc) are displayed will engrave lasting memories that will enhance brand equity of sports organisation (Baner, Saver, & Schmitt, 2005).

Market Antecedent

The third group of antecedent that affect brand equity in sports organisation is market which influences the component of brand equity. Angel *et al* (2007) describe that public coverage by means of agreement with different mass media from local regional or national character can support a greater or smaller interest of the team at the level of public opinion.

Geographical location has much to do with the identification of a brand. History has it that Nigeria and Ghana are producers of sprinters in Africa but of recent Ivory Coast and South Africa have taken over the lead in the spirits. (Haastrup, 2017) According to Angel *et al* (2007) sometimes by tradition, by climatology, cultural components or other motivations, certain localities or region are more inclined to the practice of some sports specialities, which causes the organisation or countries that practise there, to have the possibility of reaching high brand equity.

The fourth of the market antecedent is the fans. The support of the fans is essential to maintain the brand equity of the organisation, not only by the income from the sale of entrance and seasonal tickets, but because they help to consolidate and to strengthen the team, which supposes an attractiveness for other consumers who feel attracted by high value that acquire the brand (Mark, (2016).

Role of Sports Organisations in Managing Brand

The major challenge in the Nigeria sports sector is funding. Sponsors and stakeholders have declined in their sponsorship and participation, leaving the sports industry in the hands of unsustainable government funding. This has affected the performance of most sports organisation and has continuously worsened the Nigeria sports as a brand. The following are experts and professionals position on the roles expected of sports organizations (public or private).

- i. Sports organisations should focus on customer loyalty. According to Smith (2009) social media platform with athletes and fans will increase fans' base and will generate a sense of responsibility which is capable of building consumer ownership and patronage (customer loyalty).
- ii. Training and re-training of sports personnels in management, marketing, coaching and public relation will enhance decision making and improve service/product delivery with sense of

professionalism. Corporate reputation may affect satisfaction and loyalty of consumers if not managed by seasoned professionals. (William, 2006)

iii. Developing an internal mechanism to checkmate administrative activities for possible corruption, ensuring standard with acceptable practice and brand interpretation. According to Buil and Chematony (2013), strong brand and good reputation have become an important beneficial attribute of a well managed brand. When, on the other hand, poor interpretation of brand and corrupt practices can destroy brand reputation and undermine organisation integrity which lead to sponsorship withdrawal.

iv. Sports managers of those organisation should concentrate on customers as much as they focus on sport result. They should consider the game and team as a product (or service) that has to be presented on the market property.

v. Developing a marketing department which will help in the appropriate re-positioning of organisation brand to attract sponsors and investors. Seasoned sports marketers/brand experts and managers will assist in the formulation, implementation and interpretation of brand-strategy which will be directed towards delivering organisation brand promise.

Buil and Chematony (2013) posited that organisation thrives when they work with sponsors and deliver their brand promise. Brand and corporate image of sports organisation can be best managed by professionals.

Conclusion

The harsh reality of economic recession is gradually revealing the need for government to create the right business environment that will enable sports to thrive. Unfortunately the government over involvement in appointment, employment and spending without accountability will still be among the major challenges of our sports industry. The complexity of the global business environment has required enterprise to strengthen their brands and to strive to convey a strong, consistent and appropriate message to consumers. The need to market Nigeria sports industry as a brand is a collective responsibility of both the government, corporate organisations and stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. There is need for sports association's personnels to unlearn and relearned through purposeful training that will equip them to communicate their brand professionally.
2. The national sports policy needs an inclusive reference documents that will enhance ethncal conduct and promote professional practice.
3. Sports associations/organisations should explored social media to professionally attract wider

participation of sports consumers.

4. Government should pass a legislative act that authenticates tax reduction as incentives for corporate sponsors.
5. Government should seize to intervene in their appointments and employment of non-professionals in the administration of sport.
6. Professional sports associations should connect with other stakeholders by communicating the appropriate knowledge/information that will enhance best global practice.

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