

Assessment of Corporate Identity and Corporate Image Gap of Zenith Bank among its Customers in Aba and Port Harcourt

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Abstract

This study is an assessment of the corporate identity image gap in Zenith Bank among its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt. The objectives, among others are to assess the corporate identity of Zenith Bank, find out if there is a gap between the corporate identity and corporate image of the bank held by its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt and find out factors that affect Zenith Bank's corporate image among its customers in the two regions. It was a descriptive survey research. The research instrument was the questionnaire and convenience sampling technique was used to select a total of 384 Zenith Bank customers in Aba and Port Harcourt after purposively selecting 16 branches of the bank for the study. The findings indicated that there is a gap between the corporate identity of Zenith Bank and its corporate image among the bank's customers in Aba and Port Harcourt. It was also found out that the lack of service amenities is one of the factors that caused the gap and it affected the corporate image of Zenith Bank among its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others, that the management staff of Zenith Bank should initiate strategies to communicate features of the bank's corporate identity such as the slogan to its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt to bridge the gap and ensure that management provides some necessary service amenities which customers would appreciate.

Keywords: Corporate identity, corporate image, customers, identity-image gap, Zenith Bank Plc.

Introduction

The desire of every organisation is to be noticed by its customers and subsequently grow to an excellent height. To achieve this, the organisation should have strategic plans in place that would attract customers to it. One of such strategic plans is to have a laid down corporate identity that will make the organisation unique. The corporate identities of an organisation are those unique features that distinguish the organisation from others or those communication elements employed by an organisation which make it identifiable.

Corporate identity when activated may either improve or spoil the existence of the organisation. Therefore, it is imperative for the organisation to research on what factors are attractive and can stand the test of time, instead of following the bandwagon. Whether the corporate identity is impressive or not, it still has an impact on the minds of the publics. However, it would be an advantage for the organisation if its corporate identity can make a

positive impression on its publics. If it fails to yield a positive outcome, then there is bound to be a gap between the corporate identity of the organisation and its corporate image as perceived by its publics.

The collective impressions from the various publics become the corporate image of the organisation. Corporate image is therefore, the summation of the opinions or mental pictures which the publics have about an organisation. Most times such perceptions are influenced by the corporate identity of an organisation. The publics referred to here are persons that are connected and have a stake in the organisation in one way or another. These publics are also called stakeholders and they comprise customers, employees, shareholders, community where the organisation is situated, the government, etc. This study is focused on one of these publics which is the customers of Zenith Bank. It assessed the extent of gap that possibly exists between their image and the corporate identity of the bank.

Statement of the problem

The influx of banks in Nigeria has made it imperative for banks to have unique features which are of significance to them and still attract customers. An observation of Zenith Bank indicates that the bank has not relented in its pursuit to express its corporate identity in terms that customers can easily understand. Meanwhile, a brief conversation with the bank's customers also gives the impression that while some customers are pleased with the corporate identity of the bank, others think the bank needs an improvement in communicating relevant and realistic values as its identity. However, it is likely that the management staff of the bank are not aware of such views which suggest an identity-image gap. Therefore, this research sought to find out the extent of gap in the corporate identity and corporate image of Zenith Bank.

Objectives of the study

1. Assess if the customers of Zenith Bank in Aba and Port Harcourt can recognise the corporate identity of the bank.
2. To find out the extent of gap between the corporate identity of Zenith Bank and its image as perceived by its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt.
3. Find out if there is/are factor(s) that may have caused a gap between the corporate identity and corporate image of Zenith Bank among its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt.

Research questions

1. To what extent can Zenith Bank customers in Aba and Port Harcourt recognise the corporate identity of the bank?
2. To what extent is there gap between Zenith Bank's corporate identity and the corporate image as perceived by its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt?
3. What factor(s) if any, caused a gap between the corporate identity and corporate image of Zenith Bank among its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt?

Theoretical framework

System theory formed the theoretical basis of this study. The theory is credited to an Austrian biologist named Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy. The theory explains how the inter-relationship between elements can become holistic when put together. A system consists of things that relate to another in order to form a whole. What makes the system whole are elements, variables, environments, internal relationships (LittleJohn, 1996). The environments, for example, are the publics who are inside and outside the organisation like the employees, customers, shareholders, community, or government. Hence, there is need for an inter-relationship in order to form a whole system.

In order for an organisation to grow, it needs to be dependent on its environment. Systems theory explains how an organisation's dependence on its internal and external environments is essential (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2002). When an organisation becomes interdependent units, it means that a change in one part affects the other parts. For instance, in an organisation that has different departments that work together to achieve a holistic goal, when one department is derailed, it affects the other departments and this could turn out to affect the external environment. A system consists of parts that are connected so that a change in one part induces a change in other parts (Baran & Davis, 2009).

The theory is applicable to the study because when there is a change in the attitude of the management staff of Zenith Bank which is different from how its corporate identity had promised, it affects the reaction of customers who are its external environment. Therefore, a negative or positive change in the corporate identity of the bank may provoke a corresponding perception from its customers.

Conceptual review

Public relations is referred to as a management function because it helps organisations in making essential policies that are mostly proactive. The necessity of public relations for an organisation's growth cannot be overemphasised as it helps in building and sustaining a pleasant relationship between an organisation and its internal and external publics if well managed. Public relations is rightfully referred to as a management function as it helps to resolve many issues before it arises in an organisation. Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues (Ajala, 2005).

Therefore, it is not farfetched to say that public relations as a management function is a deliberate and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics (Lux, 2015). Public relations is essential for an organisation because it enables an organisation maintain its corporate image. Since it is a proactive measure, it helps to know when customers' interest and trust in the organisation is beginning to falter. In order to avoid an impending crisis in future, public relations helps to maintain a two-way communication and ensure that both the organisation and its publics maintain a mutual relationship (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000).

Overview of the corporate identity of Zenith Bank in Aba and Port Harcourt

Zenith Bank is a commercial bank which was established in Nigeria on May 30, 1990. The bank has its head office at 87, Ajose Adeogun Street, Victoria Island, Lagos. Zenith Bank has

grown significantly with branches located in many parts of the country; it has four branches in Aba and 12 branches in Port Harcourt.

Corporate identity refers to the tangible and intangible qualities used by an organisation to differentiate itself from other organisations. Tanneberger (1987) stresses that corporate identity reflects the distinctive capability and the recognisable individual characteristics of an organisation. Corporate identity is a significant way by which an organisation develops unique features it can use to differentiate itself from others. An organisation uses corporate identity features that are distinctive to identify and make itself exceptional among others. Corporate identity is necessary to an organisation as it differentiates it from its competitors (Otubanjo, 2011).

Many thoughts come to mind when considering the corporate identity of an organisation such as the organisation's personality, values, buildings, corporate lifestyle, decor, house-style, uniform, behaviour and the corporate culture of an organisation as projected by its communication elements (logo/name, colour scheme, slogan/motto, mission statement and vision statement). When thinking of the corporate identity of the organisation, the name comes first because it is significant and it should be one which has meaning and is easily recognisable and remembered by members of the public. Another element to consider is the logo; logo is more like a symbol for the organisation so it should be creative yet evoke meaning for the organisation and be easily recognised by publics. Logo helps organisations to be recognised by their customers and also distinguish them from competitors (Hem and Iversen, 2004). Another aesthetics used by organisations is colour which should be attractive. Colours used in an organisation's logo communicates different messages (Nwosu, 1992). These communication elements when incorporated collectively become the corporate identity of the organisation and help attract customers.

To identify and differentiate itself from other organisations, Zenith Bank uses visible corporate identity features like its name **ZENITH**; a **Z** logo couched in bold red and grey colours (mostly seen in a cube), building structure (which is white and a glass design from the top floor to the last floor), uniform attire (for some staff). Other corporate identity features are its slogan, mission statement and vision statement of Zenith Bank. Zenith Bank also has a passion encapsulated in three words: people, service and technology (Annual Report of Zenith Bank Plc, 2006).

Naturally, the Zenith Bank branches in Aba and Port Harcourt have the same visible features and both regions have the same mission and vision statement. The bank claims to be driven by people, technology, and service. Its mission statement is to establish a presence in all major economic and financial centres in Nigeria, Africa and indeed all over the world; create premium value for all its stakeholders, build the Zenith brand into a reputable international financial institution recognised for innovation, superior customer service and performance (Group Annual Report and Financial Statements of Zenith Bank Plc, 2009).

Corporate identity does not only depend on the visual features of the organisation which is summarised as the symbolism as aforementioned. It also entails the behaviour, and communication used by the organisation. When a fusion of all three (symbolism, behaviour and communication) is well incorporated in the organisation, it becomes an identity mix which endears the customers to the organisation and gives it a positive corporate image.

Corporate image

Publics are influenced by what they perceive in an organisation and this forms an impression in their minds. Image is the functional qualities and psychological attributes in the minds of the customers (Martineau, 2008). Corporate image is the perception stakeholders have about an

organisation. Corporate image is an overall perception of an organisation which is held by its different publics (Villanova, Zinkhan, & Hyman, 2000).

Nwosu (1996) notes that corporate image can be seen as a general picture of an organisation or corporate entity in people's minds. It can also be described as the way the general publics see or perceive the organisation. Corporate image does not exist in isolation, it must be influenced by what an organisation does directly or indirectly. Corporate image comprises of the personal perception in the minds of the publics which can be vague or clear, limited or broad depending among other things on their involvement with the organisation (Vos and Schoemaker, 2001). Summing all the above, Alvesson (2000) avers that corporate image is the holistic and vivid impression held by the publics of an organisation.

When the corporate image as perceived by the organisation's customers is positive, it becomes advantageous to the organisation. However, when the corporate image of an organisation is misinterpreted, it means the motive of the organisation was not well defined and has turned out to be misleading and this can lead to an identity-image gap.

Corporate identity-corporate image gap in an organisation

Corporate identity-corporate image gap happens when the intended self image of an organisation is not what the customers perceive. For instance, when an organisation refuses to practise what it has promised in its corporate identity, it will influence the corporate image as perceived by its customers and this will lead to a gap. Another causal factor could be when the attitude of the management staff does not reflect what the organisation stands for. In all circumstances, there is an image gap if self-image and the corporate identity of an organisation do not match (Vos and Schoemaker, 2008).

This gap most times, leads to a misunderstanding between the organisation and its customers and can be resolved with the help of communication which can build a mutual relationship between the parties involved. Organisations should endeavour to bridge such gaps as soon as noticed. They should also make it a priority to bridge any gap between them and their stakeholders (Lilly, 2010).

Methodology

The study employed the survey research method and three hundred and two thousand (302,000) customers of Zenith Bank in Aba and Port Harcourt made up the population of the study. Out of which a sample size of 384 was arrived at with the use of Keyton sample size recommendation. The sampling procedure adopted was the purposive sampling which was used to select four Zenith Bank's branches in Aba and 12 branches in Port Harcourt. Convenience sampling was also used to select only Zenith Bank customers in Aba and Port Harcourt who entered the banking hall for transaction during the data collection process. A total of twenty-four (24) customers drawn from the sixteen branches summed up to 384 respondents. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. After the research instrument was administered and collated, 378 copies of the instrument (94 copies retrieved from the Aba branch and 284 copies from the Port Harcourt branch) were valid for data analysis. Data were presented and analysed using simple percentages and four-point modified likert scale.

Data presentation, analysis and discussions

Research question 1: To what extent can Zenith Bank customers in Aba and Port Harcourt recognise the corporate identity of the bank?

Table 1: Responses on the extent customers can identify Zenith Bank's corporate identity

| S/N | Extent of corporate identification. Customers can: | Aba | | Port Harcourt | | Total | |
|--------------|--|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | | F | P | F | P | F | P |
| 1 | Recognise the name of Zenith bank | 34 | 36 | 114 | 40 | 148 | 39 |
| 2 | Recognise the “Z” logo | 47 | 50 | 138 | 49 | 185 | 49 |
| 3 | Recognise the bank’s slogan/motto | 3 | 3 | 9 | 3 | 13 | 13 |
| 4 | Recognise the bank’s colour | 10 | 11 | 23 | 8 | 33 | 9 |
| 5 | Not recognize any of the features | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 94 | 100 | 284 | 100 | 378 | 100 |

F= Frequency, P= Percentage

Data presented in table 1 shows that Zenith Bank customers in Aba and Port Harcourt can recognise some elements of the bank’s corporate identity. However, the slogan/motto and colour were the least recognised features by Zenith Bank customers in both Aba and Port Harcourt. The logo of the bank was recognised by more than 49% of the respondents in both branches, while the name of the bank was recognised by 39% of the respondents. The above data therefore, show that the banks’s customers in Aba and Port Harcourt can recognise the corporate identity of Zenith bank.

Research question 2: To what extent is there gap between Zenith Bank’s corporate identity and the corporate image as perceived by customers in Aba and Port Harcourt?

Table 2: Responses on the extent of gap between the corporate identity of Zenith Bank and its corporate image

| S/N | Questionnaire items | Region | SA 4 | A 3 | D 2 | SD 1 | Total | WMS fx ÷ Total | Remarks | Decision |
|-----|---|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|-------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| 8 | Zenith Bank’s slogan “in your best interest” shows they are focused on people. | Aba | 60 | 51 | 86 | 19 | 216 | 2.2 | Negative | Rejected |
| | | PH | 104 | 378 | 150 | 57 | 689 | 2.4 | Negative | |
| 9 | Customers have easy access to Zenith Bank’s staff in times of transaction. | Aba | 48 | 168 | 34 | 9 | 259 | 2.7 | Positive | Accepted |
| | | PH | 140 | 591 | 74 | 15 | 820 | 2.8 | Positive | |
| 10 | Zenith Bank uses modern technology for its services to customers. | Aba | 96 | 132 | 42 | 5 | 275 | 2.9 | Positive | Accepted |
| | | PH | 180 | 396 | 136 | 39 | 751 | 2.6 | Positive | |
| 11 | The approach of communication used by Zenith Bank’s staff is not understandable | Aba | 16 | 39 | 114 | 20 | 189 | 2.0 | Negative | Rejected |
| | | PH | 8 | 24 | 210 | 169 | 411 | 1.4 | Negative | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 12 | Zenith Bank is customer-focused in service delivery and this has helped its value creation process towards assisting customers in achieving their goals | Aba | 12 | 96 | 76 | 21 | 205 | 2.1 | Negative | Rejected |
| | | PH | 60 | 267 | 254 | 53 | 634 | 2.2 | Negative | |
| Weighted Mean Score | | Aba | 232 | 486 | 352 | 74 | 1144 | 2.38 | Negative | Rejected |
| | | PH | 492 | 1656 | 824 | 333 | 3305 | 2.28 | Negative | Rejected |

Table 2 above shows that there is no difference in the opinion between customers in Aba and Port Harcourt concerning the corporate identity of the bank. However, on the extent of gap between the corporate identity of Zenith Bank and the corporate image as perceived by customers in Aba and Port Harcourt, the above table illustrates that there is a gap. The weighted mean score for items 8 and 12 which were rejected by Zenith Bank customers in Aba and Port Harcourt show that there is a gap between the corporate identity of the bank and the perception of customers in both regions. The bank emphasises its focus on people and customer service but most of the customers in both branches did not accept this position about the bank. This is also seen in the average weighted mean score which is negative with 2.38 for customers in Aba and 2.28 for customers in Port Harcourt. This is negative as it is below the benchmark of 2.5 criterion mean score. So putting all the variables tested into consideration, the data in the table above show that there is a gap between Zenith Bank's self perception and the image its customers in the two branches have of it.

Research question 3: What factor(s) if any, caused a gap between the corporate identity and corporate image of Zenith bank among its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt?

| S/N | Options | Aba | | Port Harcourt | | Total | |
|--------------|--|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | | F | P | F | P | F | P |
| 1 | Lack of friendly interactions with customers during transactions. | 11 | 12 | 5 | 2 | 16 | 4 |
| 2 | No provision of service amenities i.e. business loan, house loan etc. for the customers. | 34 | 36 | 129 | 45 | 163 | 43 |
| 3 | Management and staff behaviour | 12 | 13 | 23 | 8 | 35 | 9 |
| 4 | Name, colour, logo | 7 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 2 |
| 5 | Slogan and objectives | 22 | 23 | 98 | 35 | 120 | 32 |
| 6 | No reason | 8 | 9 | 29 | 10 | 37 | 10 |
| Total | | 94 | 100 | 284 | 100 | 378 | 100 |

F= Frequency, P= Percentage

Data presented in Table 3 show that the primary factor that caused the image gap was the lack of provision of service amenities to Zenith Bank customers (provision of house and business loans). In Aba 36% of the customers and 45% customers in Port Harcourt affirmed

this. Another factor is the slogan and objectives which was confirmed by 23% of the customers from Aba and 35% of Port Harcourt customers.

Conclusion

This study assessed the possibility of a corporate identity- corporate image gap between Zenith Bank and its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt and the factors that may have caused the gap, if any. The corporate identity of Zenith Bank as communicated by the bank using various elements has helped its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt to recognise the bank as distinct from other corporate bodies. It has also influenced the perception of these customers in the two regions, there is no variance in the image of the bank held by the customers in the two regions. However, an identity-image gap was observed between Zenith Bank's corporate identity and the corporate image of the bank as perceived by customers in Aba and Port Harcourt. The factor that caused the gap between Zenith Bank and its customers in Aba and Port Harcourt was the lack of provision of service amenities to Zenith Bank customers in both regions. Another was the factor of slogan and objectives.

Recommendations

1. Even though customers in Aba and Port Harcourt can recognise most of the corporate identity features of Zenith Bank Plc, it is recommended that the management staff of the bank should not relent in their effort to enhance the aesthetics of the bank and its slogan which many of the customers did not recognise.
2. Provision of amenities such as loans is one of the great ways that banks could improve the lives of their customers. Zenith bank should endeavour to make business and house loans accessible to its customers since this was the major factor that negatively affected the bank's image among its customers in both regions.

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