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## **Aligning Consumers’ Sensory Perception of Advertised Brands in Nigeria: Native Black Soap in Perspective.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research examined the aligning of consumers’ sensory perception of advertisement towards boosting the purchase of locally manufactured Native Black Soap in Nigeria. The research method adopted was survey. The population of study comprised the residents of Delta State, Nigeria which is 5,663,400 persons. The sample size of 400 was chosen using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table and purposively administered on the users of Native Black Soap. The study employed the framing theory of the media. The findings revealed that aligning consumers’ sensory perception with native black soap will help to enhance their preference for it. That, rational advertising appeal is most suitable in aligning consumers’ sensory perception; and while television can serve as primary media, radio can be a secondary media in advertising native black soap to change Nigerians’ preference for foreign products and for product demonstration too. This study recommends that to boost sales of Native Black Soap, manufacturers should maintain high quality standard of production and good packaging; that Nigeria government should give soft loans, tax exemptions for entrepreneurs’ and open up international markets for them. Also, health institutions in Nigeria should encourage the consumption of locally made products such as the Native Black Soap.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Aligning, Sensory perception, Advertising, Brands and consumers*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria as a third world country no doubt is battling to compete favourably with developed countries in terms of brand image and high turnover for the sale of her locally manufactured products. Branding refers to “a marketing practice in which a company creates a name, symbol or design that is easily identifiable as belonging to the company. This helps to identify a product and distinguish it from other products and services.” (Smithson 2015, 2). Also, branding is defined as “the process of creating a strong, positive perception of your company and its products in your customers mind” (Markus 2019, 1). Building an image for a brand and boosting the sales or profit margin by a manufacturer does not happen overnight, it takes sometime in addition to consistent advertisement that will align and influence the perception of the consumers (active or Potential), towards liking, purchasing and using such a brand especially when it involves complementary/ competitive goods like the case of a bathing soap. According to Senator Ben Murray Bruce, Nigeria is such a place where the

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ideology of the majority is, ‘anything foreign is good/ superior and made in Nigeria goods are poor/ inferior’ (a statement made by Senator on his Common sense initiative programme on Silver Bird Television, 2016).

In this regard, repetitive advertising is required for a consumer of a brand to be able to recognize and recall the brand among other competing brands. “The influence on the perceptual process of a consumer comes through a number of advertisements and channels like billboards, jingle, taste of a new flavour of an ice cream or a smell of a leather jacket which in turn, have worked on the five senses.(Michael 2009, 23). There is no gainsaying that a sensory data emanating from the external environment – like hearing a tune from a radio can generate internal sensory experiences when the jingle/song triggers the listener’s memory. Trying to align a brand with the sensory processes of a consumer in order to enhance the chances of liking and trying a product or influence a positive perception of a product, is important for a brand like the native black soap (which are mostly tied and sold in transparent cellophanes), so as to harness and build a strong competitive advantage over foreign competitors like Eva, Avon, Dove, Funbact bathing soaps and others.

Paying huge attention on the sensation of consumers is a good foundation towards building up a strong competitive advantage for a product as it helps to make these products or brands stand out from the rest in the market place (Michael, 2009). Some adverts of these brands emphasizes on the five senses, while some lay emphasis on more. Marketers rely heavily on the visual elements in advertising, store design and packaging emphasising on the brands’ colour, size and styling. When it comes to the sense of smell, Deborah, Barbara and Susan, (1995) cited in Michael, (2009) found out that viewing an advert is not always enough, adding that, when consumers are exposed to odours emanating from a product/brand they are more likely to try the product or alternative products within each product category.

In other words, sensory marketing is a key area that manufacturers and advertisers are using to align consumers sensory perception towards a brand and it is taking interesting turns (Michael, 2009). The sense of hearing have been recently controlled by advertisers as they help one to be selective of what to say. This is as a result of the problem of being bombarded with different sounds of voices/and music all the time. Our sensory receptors of touch (skin) and taste (tongue) are not left out by advertisers. Taking considerations of the above stated facts this study tends to find out if aligning consumers’ sensory perception of advertisement towards boosting the purchase of locally manufactured brands in Nigeria such as the native black soap will enhance its patronage.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

It is an open secret that Nigerian brands both at home and abroad are regarded as being inferior when compared to foreign one. As a result, locally produced goods have low turnover, such as the case of native black soap. The penchant for the purchase of anything ‘foreign’ also pertains to clothing, shoes, cosmetics, groceries, cars, food and drinks. In fact, the list is endless, hence the tag by economists that “Nigeria is a dumping ground”. Other researches have been carried out on how to increase sales using the promotional mix but none has been on aligning sensory perception on consumers’ patronage of native black soap. In this regard this paper tends to fill this gap by focusing on aligning the consumers’ sensory perception through advertisement placed in the right media of communication which on the

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long run will boost the sales of locally- manufactured brands such as the native black soap and enhance the economic standing of the country.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The broad objective of this study is to depict how sensory perception can be used to encourage brand preference and loyalty while the specific objectives are:

1. To find out if aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap will help to enhance their preference for it?
2. To ascertain the advertising appeal that can be used in aligning consumers' sensory perception towards the advertisement of native black soap in Delta State, Nigeria?
3. To determine the media/medium that would be employed to align consumers' sensory perception towards the advert of native black soap?

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. Will aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap help to enhance their preference for it?
2. What advertising appeal can be used in aligning consumers' sensory perception towards the advertisement of native black soap in Delta State, Nigeria?
3. What media/medium should be employed to align consumers' sensory perception towards the advert of native black soap?

### **Justification of the study**

This study is necessitated by the need to help boost Nigerian brands against foreign ones by aligning the sensory perception of consumers through advertising as it is proven that most successful brands are the ones that deliver feelings and emotions (Marijn, 2016). Ironically, foreign brands most times sell more than our local brands due to proper packaging, extra chemical contents (for instance; higher toning -ability of the skin) and fragrance which on the contrary the local black soap does not have as it is naturally processed. It is on this premise that the research paper sets to educate Nigerians on the need to consume locally manufactured product such as the Native Black Soap and not to tag them as fake or inferior products to foreign products because, each has a particular need to fulfil.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Advertising as a profession in this 21<sup>st</sup> century to a large extent has come of age. Advertising “is defined as communication that is paid for, identified by a sponsor, directed at a target audience, through the various mass media like radio, television billboards, newspaper and magazine, with the aim of creating awareness about goods and services” (Asemah2019,3). Arens and Bovee (1994) cited in Nwabueze (2014) see advertising, as the non-personal communication usually paid for and persuasive in nature about products or ideas by identified sponsor through various media. On a bajo (2012, 1) defined advertising as “a structured form of applied communication applying verbal and non-verbal elements that are composed to fill

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specific space and time formats determined by the sponsor... most advertising is paid for by sponsors to carry the advert on radio, television, newspaper and so on.” The craft of advertising does not just happen in a utopian state rather it goes through a medium or media which can be the traditional, electronic, print and online media. It is pertinent to note that, for advertising to work best, the manufacturer/advertiser in line with the advertising agency have to choose the right kind of channel that will best reach and align with the target consumers whether active or potential ones.

Also, advertising is a “process of persuading potential customers to buy products or promote its service.” (Asemah 2011, 3). It is used by companies to convince and communicate with buyers. It involves a group of planned activities aimed at disseminating information in a paid form concerning an idea, product or service to compel action in accordance with the intent of the identified sponsor from this functional perspective. In the case of the native black soap, creating an advert for it has to be properly crafted to align with the right kind of appeal. It is pertinent to note that, advertising needs the proper kind of appeal too for it to be effective. Sex, rational, emotional, scarcity, humorous, fear and music appeals guide the production of advertising messages.

### **The Essence of Branding Products**

Many products are out there competing for patronage by potential customers. For example, when you enter a supermarket, you will see varieties of bottled water, each with its own formulation, brand name and loyal consumers. From this instance, water which is in itself the original product, has been converted into a brand. In this context, the native black soap is a brand name in the world of soap production. Branding is the culmination of a range of activities across the entire marketing mix, leading to a brand image which conveys a whole set of messages to the consumer about quality, price, expected performance and satisfaction. The key components of a brand are; brand identity, brand communication (such as logos and trade marks), brand awareness, brand loyalty, and various branding management strategies. Branding is a marketing practice in which a company creates a name, symbol or design that is easily identifiable as belonging to the company. This helps to identify a product and distinguish it from other products and services” (Smithson 2015, 2). In the same vein, branding promotes recognition, helps to set you apart from competition, tells people about your business; provides motivation and direction for your staff, generates referrals, helps customers to know what to expect, represents you and your promise to your customers; helps to create clarity and stay focused and provides business value(<https://strategynewmedia.com>). Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain those added values in the face of competition. Another notable importance of a brand is that, it helps to reduce the decision-making time and also the effort of evaluating competing products.

### **Aligning Sensory Perception of Consumers with brands through Advertisement**

To give a brand a positive niche, it is wise to align the sensory perception of consumers with the product. Perception as Cherry(2019) puts it is our sensory experience of the world around us and involves both organizing environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. It involves the five senses of touch, sight, sound, smell and taste. Dan (2013) opines that our perception of a brand is made up of impressions that are formed by what we see, read, hear and experience across all our senses. Marketers and advertisers should endeavour

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to influence the brand by positioning it well through properly designed advertisement in order to align the brand with the consumers' perceived way of seeing this said product.

This is to say that impressions matter, therefore advertisers and manufacturers of these locally – manufactured goods like the native black soap, should endeavour to create adverts that will align with the consumers' perception through mental images that will work on their minds. According to Dan (2013), impressions whether positive or negative, form associations about a brand which on the long run will influence the purchase of the brand/ product by the consumer or dissuade the consumer from taking such step. Good brands should have consistent lasting impressions for this is advantageous for the brands unlike those that cannot measure up with brands that can emotionally build long lasting impressions.

### **Sensory perception**

One way that consumers' interact with products is through sensory perception. The unique sensory quality of a product can play an important role in helping it to stand out from competition especially if the brand creates a unique association with the sensation. Sensation is the immediate response of our sensory receptors (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin). Perception on the other hand, according to Longman Contemporary Dictionary is "the process by which people select, organise and interpret these sensations." (Michael (2009, 79)

The perception therefore focuses on what we add to these raw sensations in order to give them meaning like computers, we undergo stages of information processing in which we input and store stimuli. Unlike computers, we do not passively process whatever information happens to be present. Of all the stimuli that we are exposed to, it is the ones we choose to attend to that we consider. There are three stages that make up the process of perception which include exposure, attention and interpretation. (79)

- (a) **Exposure-** This occurs when a stimulus comes within the range of someone's sensory receptors. Consumers concentrate on some stimuli and unaware of others. They even ignore some messages that have been received.
- (b) **Attention-** Attention refers to the extent to which processing activity is concentrated to a particular stimulus. Often times, consumers are in a state of sensory over load which involves being exposed to more information that need to be processed.
- (c) **Interpretation-** This refers to the meaning assigned to sensory stimuli. As we differ on how we perceive things, so we vary in the meaning that we assign to these stimuli. Generally speaking, we often interpret a product stimulus in the light of what we know about a product category and the characteristics of existing brands. Good branding of a product happens when perceptions align to what you want them to be" (Dan 2013, 23). But the question then is how does a marketer determine where a brand actually stands in the minds of the consumers? According to Michael (2009), one of the techniques is to ask what attribute is important to consumers and how they feel about the competitors rate on these attributes. This is accomplished through perceptual mapping which is a vivid way to paint a picture of where products/brands are located in the brand as perceived by the target audience.

### **Empirical Studies**

A study by Hassan and Iqbal (2016) titled "Employing Sensory Marketing as a Promotional Advantage for Creating Brand Differentiation and Brand Loyalty" sought to establish how

the five senses of vision, smell, taste, touch and sound enhance the feeling and emotion that increase the sale of a product and customer loyalty. The study was carried out among the students of Islamia University Bahawalpur in Pakistan who regularly visited fast food restaurant. The objectives of the study sought to identify the impact of sensory marketing on consumers to generate brand differentiation; to generate impact of sensory marketing on brand loyalty and using the sensory marketing to gain promotional advantage over competitors.

The study employed survey research method and questionnaire was used in collecting data from 478 respondents and SPSS 21 was used in analysing data. The responses were measured on 5 point Likert Scale. Findings from the study showed that brand loyalty was achieved by developing pleasant and memorable moments with the product and service loyalty enhanced sales; that sensory marketing enhanced customer purchases and profit, valuable and profitable weapon, in gaining competitive advantage in the form of brand differentiation and attaining customer loyalty.

The duo recommended that sensory marketing is beneficial to managers looking to widen the scope of their current marketing policies in an attempt of targeting and retaining customers. There is no gain-saying that if producers of Local Black Soap employ sensory marketing strategies it will stand out from both local and foreign products hence, attracting high patronage and brand loyalty.

Second, is a study by Marijin Keizer – Keijzer (2018) titled “How to use Sensory Marketing Tactics to Create Irresistible Brands” This study proved that using sensory branding strategy that appeals to the target consumers’ senses is good in enhancing their positive perception concerning the brand and influencing a purchase. That, sensory aligning of brands with the senses of the consumers helps boost their preference for it.

The third study is on the Attitudinal Dimensions to Home brands of shoes as compared to foreign brands by Okpara (2008) in which he discovered the presence of what he termed Consumption Complex Syndrome (CCS) as being responsible for local consumers’ preference for foreign branded shoes over the local branded counterparts. Okpara’s model suggests that once consumers are exposed to the awareness and knowledge of a brand of product, they either like or dislike it. Allusion to Consumption Complex Syndrome suggests that when a consumer asserts preference for a particular brand of shoe (foreign) and cannot in a blind brand experiment clearly pick out that brand, then he possesses the syndrome. The implication of this study is that foreign products are more advertised than locally manufactured products hence the need to correct this anomaly by local manufacturers such as the native black soap.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on framing theory. Framing refers to a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups and societies organize, perceive and communicate about reality. Framing theory explains the inevitable process of selective influence over the individual’s perception of the meanings attributed to words or phrases. It involves the organization of information or messages to give a predetermined focus, or thematic account of events, issues and advertisements. The framing and presentation of events, news, adverts and issues in the mass media can systematically affect how recipients of the news, trends, advertisements and issues come to understand these trends (Price, Tewksbury & Powers,

1995, 4). This is more so as the mass media have the power to set an agenda that the people will follow (Katz; 1973 cited in Dunu, Ukwueze & Ekwugha, 2015,).

The concept of framing “suggests the way a firm tries to create an impression/image for the product in the consumers' mind by specifying/changing a frame of reference. In some ways, framing could be classified as a subset of positioning, but unlike positioning, it does not tweak with the 4Ps to change the perception in the consumer's mind, it only re-frames the consumers' point of reference.” (Shekhawat, 2016, 1). Thus, framing theory centres on how the media draws public attention to certain topics, as it decides what people think about by selecting topics and presenting them through news analysis, adverts/ commercials, commentaries and editorials using a particular language, tone and setting to convey a particular meaning. The framing theory is relevant to this study because if advertisements are framed to suit the sensory perception of the audience (consumers) and the ideology of Nigerians in general in such a way as to develop liking for the purchase of locally manufactured products like native (black) soap it will go a long way in breeding a healthier population and enhance the economic standing of Nigeria among the committee of nations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey design was adopted for this study. The population of this study comprised the residents of Delta State, Nigeria which according to the National Population Commission (2016) is made up of Five Million, Six Hundred and Sixty Three Thousand, Four Hundred persons (5,663,400) and a sample size of 400 was determined using the Taro Yamene sample size calculation formula which is:

$$n = \frac{N}{N + 1(e)^2} \text{ (Yamene (2002) cited in Egbulefu (2018, .46))}$$

The purposive sampling technique was employed in drawing the sample from the population of study while the questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection.

### **Analysis of Data**

Out of the 400 persons administered the questionnaire, 390 copies were returned indicating a return rate of ninety- eight percent (98%) while 10 copies representing 2% were not returned. Hence, the 390 copies of the questionnaire returned were used for the analysis.

Table 1, showed that there were more males than females with (66%), while those that are between the ages of 18-39 years of age were 67%. Those who had B.Sc. / HND were 46.6%. The reason for this as outlined on the table above could be that, this set of respondents are concerned with encouraging made in Nigeria products thereby enhancing the self –reliance and entrepreneurial skills of the people.

Research Question 1- Will aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap help to enhance their preference for it?

To answer this research question a question was raised which says; do you think that aligning consumers' sensory perception enhance their preference for it?

Table: 1 Socio- demographic data of the respondents.

Variables	Frequency		Percentage
Gender	Male	258	66%
	Female	132	34%
	Total	390	100%
Age (years)	18-28	121	31%
	29-39	140	36%
	40-50	72	18%
	50 and above	57	15%
	Total	390	100%
Educational qualification	SSCE	50	12.8%
	OND	70	18%
	B.Sc./ HND	181	46.4%
	M.Sc./ M.Ed.	89	22.8%
	Total	390	100%

Source: Field Report, 2019

Table 2: Aligning consumers' sensory perception enhance their preference

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, I do	390	100%
No, I don't	0	0
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Report, 2019

From the table 2 above, it shows that the number of respondents number who stated Yes to the fact that aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap will enhance their preference for it were three hundred and ninety (390) representing (100%) with zero number of respondents for No and Undecided options

To also answer research question one a question was asked; will the advertisement of native black soap positively influence the consumers' sensory perception?

Table 3: Advertisement of native black soap positively influence the consumers' sensory perception

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	211	54%
Do not agree	170	44%
No idea	9	2%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Report, 2019.

From table 3 above, the data gathered indicated that the number of respondents that agreed with the idea of positively influencing the sensory perception of consumers through advertisement were two hundred and eleven (211) representing (54%) while the respondents



that did not agree to that were one hundred and seventy (170) representing (44%) and nine respondents representing 2% said they had no idea.

**Research Question 2:** What advertising appeal do you think is best for aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap in Delta State, Nigeria? The answer to this research question is shown in the table below.

Table 4: Advertising appeal that is the best for aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex appeal	110	28%
Emotional appeal	61	15.6%
Fear appeal	52	13.3%
Rational appeal	129	33%
Others	38	9.7%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Report, 2019.

Table 4, revealed that respondents that one hundred and twenty nine (129) respondents representing (33%) were of the view that rational appeal was needed in advertising Native Black Soap while respondents who were in support of using sex appeal to advertise were one hundred and ten (110) representing (28%). Respondents who said that emotional appeal was suitable for advertising native black soap were sixty one (61) representing (15.6%), fear appeal were fifty- two (52) representing (13.3%) while those who chose the option 'others,' were thirty eight (38) representing (9.7%) respectively.

**Research question 3:** What mass media/ medium should be employed to align consumers' sensory perception towards the advertisement of native black soap? This research question was answered in the data shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Mass media/ medium to be employed to align consumers' sensory perception towards the advertisement of native black soap.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Interpersonal/ Face to face	60	15.4%
Television	202	51.8%
Radio	90	23%
Online medium	23	6%
Print	15	3.8%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Report, 2019

From table 5 above, the data gathered revealed that a higher number of two hundred and two (202) respondents representing (51.8%) were of the view that using television should be employed to align consumers' sensory perception with native black soap while ninety respondents (90) representing (23%) to be agreed that radio should be the medium used. However, sixty (60) representing (15.4%), twenty three (23) representing (6%) and fifteen (15) respondents representing (3.8%) agreed that interpersonal/Face – Face, online and Print media should be used.

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## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings revealed that aligning consumers' sensory perception with native black soap will help enhance their preference. This is in agreement with Holt's (1998) position that to give a brand a positive niche, it is wise to align the sensory perception of consumers with the product that this happens every other day as we gradually form conventions from images, stories and thought patterns from experiences that we hold or perceive dear.

It was also found out that rational advertising appeal is most suitable in aligning consumers' sensory perception through the advertisement of native black soap in Delta State, Nigeria, as rational appeal speaks logically to the target audience in question. This will on the long run improve on the use of locally – manufactured brand of soap like the native black soap in Nigeria than that of its foreign counterparts. Furthermore, it showed that although aligning consumers' sensory perception of advertisement towards boosting the purchase of locally-manufactured brands in Nigeria can be done through interpersonal/face to face medium, print and online media, that television and radio can serve as primary and secondary media for the advertisement of Native Black Soap which will enhance its patronage.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the crave for foreign products by Nigerians, this study has elucidated the fact that a locally manufactured product such as the Native Black Soap can still be patronized by Nigerians if advertised using the right appeal by aligning the sensory perception of the consumers to boost its sale. In this regard, it is advocated that the producers of the Native Black Soap should not compromise quality since advertising no matter how good it is does not encourage the patronage of a bad product.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Taking consideration of the postulations so far, the study therefore recommends the following:

1. That to boost the sale of the Native Black Soap, the manufacturers should endeavour to maintain high quality standard and good packaging too.
2. That television and radio should be employed in the advertisement of the Native Black Soap because they have wide audience patronage and can be used for product demonstration and airing of commercials.
3. That mass media programmes should be constructed to help change the peoples' ideology of thinking that Nigerian made products are always inferior to foreign products.
4. That Nigerian government should encourage local entrepreneurs by giving them soft loans, tax exemption for some years and open international markets for them. Furthermore, it is advocated that the consumption of locally made products such as the Native Black Sap should be encouraged by health institutions in Nigeria.

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