

Nigeria's Five Greatest Living Legends: lessons for brand builders: part two

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You will agree with me that successful brands are not haphazard creations; they emerge from a consistent reinforcement of a point of view that secures permanent placement in the consumers' hallowed space as an ageless, borderless, and timeless influencer of choice. This by implication demands that such brands are not just functionality-driven and thrive on basic category membership but have evolved to earn an elevated space that weaves them seamlessly with the consumers' self-definition and expression.

The projection of these brands is also skewed towards consumers' deeper motives and finding affection at the core of consumers' sense of being. They therefore do not just sell products; but promote enduring issues like hope, optimism, relationships, nostalgia, family values etc., things that we genuinely care about. Looking at the five Nigerians who got the highest number of votes and cross-validating it with some high-level proprietary researches, we can advance an hypothesis that a brand will stand like a legend if it delivers on four stepwise concentric manifestations, which are explained below using the core attributes of the five winners.

1. Symbolic and deeper purpose dimension: Represented by the moral standing and the spiritual transformation associated with the person and the ministry Pastor E.A. Adeboye.
2. Social cause ownership: Epitomised in Kanu Nwankwo and his social impact initiatives
3. Conferral of identity: Dim Ojukwu and the genuine search for the Igbo essence.
4. Populist activism through service (or sacrifice): Doubly typified by Chief Gani Fawehinmi and Professor Wole Soyinka

1. Symbolic or the power of higher purpose allows a brand to touch the core of the consumer's being by “enhancing” consumer inner self whilst providing a “renewed” imagery of their desired self. This elevated role is anchored on the unseen power of conceptual relevance and personal testimonials (of the consumers) built on a sustained usage ritual that the consumer treasures and relishes.

The symbolic power of a brand allows it to transit from the rational world where features and benefits reign to the allegorical space where associations, experiences and feelings rule. When talking reliability, price, aesthetic, our kind of brands are engaging the consumers at the level of deeper meaning like adventure, independence, originality, nostalgia, truth etc.

Popular campaigns like Dove “real beauty from within” and Axe ‘success’ fantasies of an underdog lover are examples of how the spiritual dimension of a brand is enhanced through the provisioning of compelling answers to life, inspiring confidence in the users and challenging consumers to be the best they can be.

This deeper brand space becomes stronger when consumers can capture special and individualised meaning for the experiences that the product delivers like a personal religious testimony. The individualised “aphrodisiac” perception of Guinness Extra Stout and the Seaman's Aromatic Schnapps association with the unseen world of the ancestors, even without any scientific proof are examples of symbolic magical moments that are compelling enough to provide a transgenerational anchor that makes for a “cult” brand. These are the magical moments every brand must seek to create as perfectly crafted memories that outlive times, heighten emotions and create a feeling of a stronger bond that provides the ignition for repeat purchase and sustained referral.

These local examples have shown us that brand building is far more than the intrinsic qualities of a product or service; it is about generating compelling narratives. Does a heritage bank like First Bank see its 'elephant' as a symbolic property for brand reinforcement or a mere passive entity in the logo or just a public offer activation gimmick? Has Nestle taken the positive aura of “Milo Clap” beyond just an identifier sound to a reinforcing mnemonics of sonic brand expression?

2. Social power of brands speak to the ability of a brand to create unending spheres of influence through a focused social intervention that intersects or overlaps a definite consumer or societal concern while making a tangible impact in the world where its consumers live in. Beyond the grandiose corporate posture is the need to own a populist cause that is perfectly aligned with the brand's eternal purpose. It is not just about corporate philanthropy, but a genuine act of involving the brand in what your defined stakeholders feel passionate about, something they will take on themselves and champion on your behalf.

Brands must grow to become a genuine giver like Kanu who gave his talent and became our Atlanta 1996 hero and also translated his personal challenge to a common good that now addresses the need of a largely neglected segment. Fidelity Bank environmental support intervention remains one of the most focused social involvements in the Nigerian brand space; same as MTN Foundation's 1% profit after tax made available to make our world a better place to live in. Guinness “Water of life” project and the popular Nedbank's solar billboard remain excellent references.

Beyond our quest for market share, great advertising etc., we must always ask this lifelong question, “what shall my brand be remembered for?”

3. Identity conferral is the ability of a brand to deliver a feeling of uniqueness to the consumers as an exclusive complement to their desired self statement. Consumers will always be attracted to brands that elevate their sense of pride, evoke individuality and create a feeling of being different from the crowd. Such brands provide a tool of identity formation and forge a “mosaic of the self” within certain perceptual boundaries that ultimately hoist consumers' self worth.

These brands act like exclusive membership tags similar to the sincere drive of the great Ikemba to give every Igbo man a sense of uniqueness captured by Biafra's collective identity blueprint.

Brands must provide some form of identity like a distinct communal space that consumers desire to belong to. Users must feel like the brand says something unique that is true to their roots and must provide opportunity to explore their miniature space, cherish their differences and inspire some inimitability. Dunhill's “Cosmopolitan aristocrats”, Nike's “Everyday Heroes”, Ribena's “Bullies breakers”, Tura's “Brainy beauties” and Mimeo's “Adventurous palate” are all identity labels for brand definition and personality profiling.

Brands that also facilitate the consumer's desire for customised experience, mix-and-match bundle and do-it-your-way services fall within this space. Milo in cans identify with always-on-the-move transumers, also are Indomie pepper soup variant, Bank PHB's Pink Account, FRSC customisable plate numbers, Mimeo's 6-in-1 Bumper pack and MTN's Do-It-yourself CallerTunez Reloaded appealing to this identity space. How convincing have LG's Electronics Naija Tele, Nokia with Nigerian native languages, Nollywood and Etisalat's 9ija been articulated and configured to serve for consumer self projection?

4. The power of activism or service is the most basic expression of any brand that has a mention on the legendary hall of fame. Brands that have genuine interest in the people who provide their hard-earned in exchange for its delivery. These

brands understand that they must serve the consumers in a way that they feel they are getting more than is paid for. This captures the service dimension of a brand.

An activist brand understands the imperatives of delivering on the basic product core like quality because its mantra is that the consumers must never at any time feel cheated in the value transfer. Activist brands develop a customer service culture that does not see customers as statistics, but as people that have the right to get what they pay for. Like any activist, these brands are burdened by consumers' concerns, worries and agitations and remain driven by their standpoint for an egalitarian society where there is neither cheating nor deception for every customer's penny. This for me is the most primitive expression of a brand because it reinforces the need to be of requisite quality and sold at a fair price and available whenever needed.

Like Chief Gani Fawehinmi and Prof. Wole Soyinka, service brands swear by this rule - "an injustice to one is an injustice to all" and will not consider it a loss to recall a product line if a single customer lodges a formal complaint. Like the concerns of every activist every brand owner must ascertain if you are serving the interest of the large populace of the end-users (i.e. common man) who keep you in business or serving the ambitious drive of a very privileged few (the profit sharers).

A multi-language call centre like MTN's creates a sense of equality where every Nigerian can freely express themselves in their mother tongue. Low unit portion packs initiated by Cowbell milk or Orbit's new global campaign that claims it will refund any excess if a customer finds a price less anywhere else. Deliberate concern for the downtrodden like GT Bank being the only bank that has a walkway for customers in wheelchairs and HiTV's compelling entry as the common man's succor to entertainment are manifestations of this dimension.

In conclusion, like Sir Hector Laing said, "Buildings age and become dilapidated. Machines wear out and cars will rust, but what live on are brands". This is an eternal truth to always ponder on as we continue our search for truly Nigerian global brands. We must appreciate the fact that the business of brand building is retelling collective experiences like stories that help us feel good about ourselves. If we consciously elevate our users to heroes, we elevate our brand to the status of legend.

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