International Journal of Social Sciences and Conflict Management
ISSN: 2536-7234 (Print) : 2536-7242 (Online)
Volume 5, Number 2, June 2020
http://www.casirmediapublishing.com

CORPORATE REPUTATION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY OF SOAP DEALERS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

Corporate reputation has attracted interest from a wide range of academic disciplines. It is also a growing focus for business and media attention. This paper examines the construct of corporate reputation, first by untangling the terminological problems that have been caused by the interdisciplinary nature of much of the earlier work in the area. The construct of reputation and the allied constructs of image and identity are each reviewed. A structure is proposed in which the three constructs can be seen as labeling different but allied concepts.The study then move on to consider how reputation has been measured. The paper uncovers considerable confusion in the use of what might appear to be basic terms and links this to a subsequent lack of grounded measurement tools in the sector, until relatively recently. With a clearer understanding of the construct of corporate reputation and the allied constructs of image and identity, researchers are now well placed to test the relationships widely claimed by practitioners between corporate reputation and other variables such as commercial performance and employee and customer satisfaction. The review ends by illustrating some of the issues that can be assessed from the basis of a clearer conceptualization of reputation. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse return research instrument. Hypotheses were tested using the Spearman ranked order correlation. Findings reveal strong relationship between corporate reputation with corporate image and identity. Further study can expand the horizon by looking at other sector other than the soap dealers market.

Key Words: Corporate Reputation, Corporate Loyalty, Soap Dealers

INTRODUCTION

Corporate reputation is the overall estimation in which an organization is held by its internal and external stakeholders based on its past actions and probability of its future behavior. While being something that is so vitally important, many companies do not give a second thought about corporate reputation. Corporate reputation affects the way in which various stakeholders behave towards an organization, influencing, for example, employee retention, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Not surprisingly, CEOs see corporate reputation as a valuable intangible asset (Institute of Directors 2019). A favorable reputation encourages shareholders to invest in a company; it attracts good staff, retains customers (Markham 2017) and correlates with superior overall returns(Robert&Dowling 2017; Vergin&Qoronfleh (2018). However, many of these claims have been challenged as being anecdotal or based on measures of reputation that are flawed or conceptualizations of reputation that are unclear. There are a number of issues here relevant to academics working in the emerging area of reputation studies. Corporate reputation is still relatively new as an academic subject. It is becoming a paradigm in its own right, a coherent way of looking at organizations and business performance, but it is still dogged by its origins in a number of separate disciplines.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

A good brand or reputation stimulates purchase by simplifying decision procedures for customers. In the services marketing literature, the common link between reputation and satisfaction is perceived quality. A good reputation for high quality means more customers, fewer dissatisfied customers and profitability increases. Existing customers will provide positive word of mouth (Weigelt& Camerer (2018). Anderson and Sullivan (2013) claim that 'high customer satisfaction develops positive reputation'. In this case, reputation is seen as microeconomic consequences of satisfaction (Anderson &Fornell2014). Anderson (2014) found that reputation is positively correlated with satisfaction and loyalty, but no relationship was found between satisfaction and loyalty. Reputation was measured by asking 100 executives to rate their own company on six items: offering good services, having long-run perspectives, adjusting to the needs of customers, being inventive, having competence, and overall reputation). Andreassen and Lindestad (2018) also found a relationship between relatively simple measures of satisfaction and reputation. However, despite the popular view that satisfaction links a firm's reputation to profitability, the association of reputation, satisfaction and financial performance has not been empirically studied within the reputation domain in the context of soap dealers in Port Harcourt. In particular, links between customer satisfaction and the image of an organization have been under-researched, thus; the aim of this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the link between corporate reputation and customer loyalty in the soap dealers market in Port Harcourt. Specifically, this study aims at

i. Identifying the relationship between image dimension of corporate reputation and customer loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.
ii. Evaluate the influence of corporate identity dimension of corporate reputation and customer loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

The study will attempt to answer the following research questions

i. To what extent does image dimension of corporate reputation relate with customer loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.
ii. To what extent does corporate identity dimension of corporate reputation influence customer loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt

Research Hypotheses

This study is anchored on the following research hypotheses:

The study will attempt to answer the following research questions

H_{01}: Image dimension of corporate reputation has no relationship with customer loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.

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Ho2: Corporate identity dimension of corporate reputation does not influence customer loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Reputation Paradigm

The term 'paradigm' is usually used in the literature to explain various groups of approaches to a certain field of study. For example, Smircich (2013) suggested that five different paradigms exist in the study of organizational culture, including one involving the use of metaphor, an approach of relevance to this paper. While the topic has become increasingly popular, from an academic perspective, the concept of corporate reputation remains unclear. Within the reputation paradigm, there is arguably no one source as yet which captures the entirety of the concept of reputation. Authors used the analogy of 'Scaling the Tower of Babel' (Hatch & Schultz 2017) or 'fog' (Balmer 2016) to describe the definitional problem in the identity and reputation related literatures. Some of the definitions within this literature overlap and some of them conflict. The treatment of reputation will vary depending upon which theoretical perspective is invoked (Whetten 2017). Fombrun& van Riel, 2017) have defined corporate reputation from the perspective of six distinct academic subject areas. The most marked difference exists in the definition of reputation from an economist's perspective: the perceived likelihood that it will defend its markets (Clark &Montgomery 2018; Weigelt & Camerer 2018), and those working from a marketing or strategy perspective who define it as the accumulated impression that stakeholders form of the firm, resulting from their interactions with and communications received about the firm (e.g. Fombrun & Shanley 2019). Reputation has been seen as a valuable intangible asset from an accounting perspective. Enron and other similar cases have added further focus on the accounting perspective: for example, over- statement of profits and the use of financing methods that allow companies to incur debts without disclosing them on their balance sheets. Wrong accounting practices can threaten not only a firm's reputation, but also the accounting firms who audited the firm's accounts. The reputation literature emphasizes that employees stay longer with a firm with a good reputation (Markham, 2017). The Enron scandal, however, teaches a slightly different lesson.

Robin Harrison, counsel in the planned class action lawsuit, said that The people who worked for the company the longest are the people the most hurt. They have the least amount of time to recoup their loss' (Financial Times,2012). Here, the financial and organizational aspects of reputation cannot be seen in isolation. The trend is consistent with marketing and organizational behaviour perspectives too. Linking organizational culture to marketing issues, for example, has received broad attention (Deshpande &Webster 1989). Within the organizational perspective, internal issues such as mission and vision are being related to external image (Hatch & Schultz 2017). This may reflect the increasing aware- ness by practitioners and academics of the fact that the internal and external aspects of organization reputation cannot be treated separately (Balmer, 2016). The distinction, therefore, between the perspectives of corporate reputation adopted by different academic subject areas (as shown in the Table 1) is becoming blurred and less useful for under- standing the reputation paradigm. The inter- disciplinary or cross-disciplinary nature of research into reputation is then a source of insight in itself but, as I have indicated earlier, it is also a source of problems, the most obvious being terminological (Melewar & Jenkins 2012). The main terms most often used inter-changeably with, or as key variables of, reputation are 'image' and 'identity' (Whetten &Mackey, 2012). The following section suggests an alternative approach to understanding the reputation paradigm.

Table 1: Categorization of Corporate Reputation Literatures

Discipline	Categorization of reputation
Accountancy	Reputation seen as an intangible asset and one that can or should be given financial worth.
Economics	Reputation viewed as traits or signals. Perception held of the organization by an organization's external stakeholders.
Marketing	Viewed from the customer or end-user's perspective and concentrating on the manner in which reputations are formed.
Sociology	Viewed as an aggregate assessment of a firm's performance relative to expectation and norms in an institutional context.

Source: Fombrun and van Riel (1997).

THREE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

It is possible, in the author's opinion, to identify three schools of thought that are in current use within the reputation paradigm: evaluative, impressionable and relational. The differences between them relate more to which stakeholders are taken as the focal point, rather than their subject area or epistemological base. Stakeholders can typically be grouped as internal (e.g. employees, managers) and external (e.g. customers, shareholders). Whereas the 'evaluative' and 'impressional' schools are concerned mainly with single stakeholder interests, the relational school is based upon stakeholder theory which recognizes that different stakeholders may have different expectations of a company (Clarkson 1995; Freeman 1984). The relational school focuses on the views of both 'internal' and 'external' stakeholders and appears to provide a relatively new lens for the development of the reputation paradigm. In the evaluative school, reputation is assessed from its financial value or from the short-term financial performance of the organization. Rooted in the areas of strategy and economics, reputation research had been pre- occupied with performance (Rindova&Fombrun2018). The view became popular once reputation began to be recognized as a 'competitive advantage' (Hall 2012) or an 'intangible asset' (Grant 2015). Media reputation rankings such as *Fortune's* Annual America's the Most Admired Company (AMAC) survey and various approaches to brand valuation

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fall within this school of thought. The key audiences are 'explicit' stakeholders, whose main interests are the firm's financial attributes, such as shareholders, the CEO or investment advisers. Since 1990, there has been greater interest in the stakeholder's emotional association with a firm, which will influence the firm's long-term financial performance. Researchers whose interests concern implicit stakeholders and a firm's non-financial attributes can fall into either the impressional or relational schools. Image, identity and personality are typical terms used in the impressional school. Here, reputation is assessed in terms of the relevant stakeholders' perceptions or impression of the organization rather than any financial figure or performance. Many reputation studies by marketing and organizational researchers in the 1990s fall within this school (e.g. Balmer 2016., Dutton &Dukerich,2019., &Dutton et al.2014).

The major stakeholders here are employees or customers. While the organizational literature has focused on relationships between employees and their organization (e.g. Dutton &Dukerich,2019), the marketing approach has focused on ideas relevant to customers and corporate image management (Abratt,2018) or corporate identity management (Balmer, 2016). Brown and Dacin (2017) introduced the term corporate association into the reputation literature, defined reputation as a set of mental associations possessed by an individual outside the company, which is similar to image as used by market scholars (Brownetal.2015). In contrast, several authors have considered a multiple stakeholder approach in defining reputation. For example, 'reputation is a syn- thesis of the opinions, perception and attitudes of an organization's stakeholders including employees, customers, suppliers and investors and community' (Post & Griffin 2017). Corporate reputation is 'a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describe the firm's appeal to all of its key constituents' (Fombrun2016). Since such conceptualization represents multiple stakeholders' perceptions, corporate reputation here represents a collective and multidimensional construct which is an aggregated perception of many individuals (Fombrunet al. 2017). Therefore, an organization does not have a single reputation – it has many. For this group of researchers, including the author, 'image' is distinguished as the out- sider's perception, whereas reputation includes both internal and external stakeholders. Since such conceptualization represents multiple stakeholders' perceptions, corporate reputation here represents a collective and multidimensional construct which is an aggregated perception of many individuals (Fombrun et al. 2017). Therefore, an organization does not have a single reputation – it has many. For this group of researchers, including the author, 'image' is distinguished as the out- sider's perception, whereas reputation includes both internal and external stakeholders. While researchers in the impressional school tend to see reputation as a reflection of the accumulated perception of the single stake- holder, the relational school sees reputation as an equal reflection of the internal and external view of the organization (e.g. Davies & Miles, 2018; Hatch & Schultz 2017). This school emphasizes differences between the views of different stakeholders but also contains the idea that internal and external views are linked. Hatch and Schultz (2017) contributed to the conceptual background of the 'relational school' by linking image, identity and culture. Davies and Miles (2018) saw reputation management as the alignment between three elements, 'how others (the customers) see ourselves', 'who we really are' and 'what we say we are'. In a case where stakeholders have differing views of the same company, an unfavourable reputation might contaminate a favourable reputation (Carter & Deephouse2019). Any 'relational differences' (Hatch & Shultz 2017) or 'gaps' between the external and internal views has been seen as crucial in reputation management .These ideas are intuitively attractive but are conceptually based. Recently, empirical studies have challenged the idea that gaps are bad, especially when employees' views are more favourable than those of customers (Davies & Chun 2012); or that alignment is a necessary condition for commercial success, as different stakeholders have different sources of satisfaction (Chun & Davies2016).

DIMENSIONS OF CORPORATE REPUTATION

It is then important to define explicitly the key variables that are used in any research into corporate reputation as well as to delineate formally the expected relationships between those variables (Whetten, 2017). The definition of reputation used by individual authors is dependent on how these other key elements, identity and image, are defined. Reputation is often used synonymously with image, and this can lead to confusion (Markwick&Fill, 2017).

Image: 'How Others See Us'

In the marketing literature, the terms image and reputation are used interchangeably with- out making clear any relationship between what can be usefully seen as two distinct concepts. Early research into corporate image focused on retail store image and corporate (brand) image in the marketing discipline. Martineau (2018) associated the image of a preferred retail store with the self-image of the individual shopper, suggesting a model of how image affects patronage: people become customers where the image of the provider is similar to the image they have of themselves. From this early work came a number of retail image studies. Studies on corporate image have generally focused on the effect of advertising (Winters 2016), corporate logo, brand preference (Hardy,2017) or interaction with employees (Kennedy,2017).

Kennedy (2017) showed the effects company employees have on external image, irrespective of what their employer might desire. Bernstein (2018) argued that the image the customer perceives cannot be separated from the reality of the customer's experience. Worcester (2017) suggested four image categories: product class image, brand image, user image and corporate image. His last factor, corporate image, is subcategorized as product reputation, customer relations, employer role, ethical reputation and others. Although initially reputation was regarded as an independent variable which drives corporate image, it was later regarded as a dependent variable, some- thing that resulted from being a good employer, being seen as offering good service and being honest and reliable. However, the two terms, image and reputation, have continued to be used interchangeably in much of the service quality literature. The most common and recent definition of image in the context of reputation

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ISSN: 2536-7234 (Print): 2536-7242 (Online)
Volume 5, Number 2, June 2020
http://www.casirmediapublishing.com

is a 'summary of the impressions or perceptions held by external stakeholders' (Bromley,2013). Within this definition, 'a self is considered from the position of the other' (Hatch &Schultz 2017). Among external stakeholders, the main focus is on customers, so that image is defined not as what the company believes, but what customers believe or feel about the company from their experiences and observation (Bernstein 1984).

The definition is close to the definitions of 'corporate image' used by marketing scholars such as 'attitudes and feelings consumers have about the nature and underlying reality of the company' or 'the result of how consumers perceive the firm. Other researchers, in particular from the organizational behaviour discipline, define image as the internal members' belief about outsiders' perceptions, and use reputation to refer to an outsider's perception of an organization. For researchers who define both image and reputation as specific to an outsider's perceptions, reputation is distinguished as having an accumulated historical meaning. For example, corporate reputation is seen as evolving over time as a result of consistent performance, reinforced by effective communication, whereas corporate image is fashioned more quickly through well-conceived communication programmes (Gray & Balmer 2016). Image here differs from reputation in that, whereas the former concerns the public's latest belief about an organization, reputation presents a value judgment about the organization's qualities built up over a period and focusing on what it does and how it behaves. This distinction between image and reputation is useful, in that we can form an image of an organization without any real experience of it, whereas something deeper, often referred to as reputation, implies something grounded in experience. Image may be quicker to change by means of advertisement than reputation is, which requires more time and consistent effort to build internally and externally. However, in a crisis, both image and reputation can be damaged very quickly.

For example, when Gerald Ratner famously described his stores' jewelry products as 'crap', he proactively mismanaged his reputation and created a perception shift (without any actual change in the products he sold). The market responded immediately, and customers queued for a refund for the gifts they had bought for friends. It was the perception, not the reality, which kept people out of Ratner's stores for a decade. Employees felt betrayed; their perception of Ratner's had changed too. In summary, corporate reputation might best be seen as involving the alignment between the internal and external stakeholders' perceptions of a firm, especially those of the most important stakeholders, employees and customers (Hatch& Schultz 2017), as both can be affected and will interact.

Identity: 'How We See Ourselves'

Identity is variously defined in the literature but there are two main themes, organizational identity and corporate identity. Organizational identity is an answer to the questions 'who are we?' or 'how do we see ourselves?', in other words, the employees' perception of the organization (Albert & Whetten 2015). It refers to what members perceive, feel and think about their organization

(Hatch &Schultz 2017) and concerns those organizational characteristics that are most central, enduring, and distinctive (Albert & Whetten 2015). Culture and organizational identity are similar concepts in many ways. If identity is 'how we see ourselves' and culture is 'how we do things around here', one will relate to the other. Barney (1986) asserts that culture can be a source of competitive advantage when it involves a unique personality, history and experiences of those who work within it. It then provides a sustainable difference between firms. The implied definition of culture is very close to Albert and Whetten's (2015) 'enduring and distinctive characteristics' in their definition of identity. Hatch (2013) differentiates between the two, saying that'(organizational) identity which is how we define and experience ourselves is influenced by our beliefs which are grounded in and justified by cultural assumptions and values'. Culture is not something easily changed by top management strategy (Hochschild,2013) nor something that is readily manipulated (Smircich, 2013). In contrast, identity, how people understand themselves in relation to culture and values, is more conscious and more reflexive, and thus more amenable to change. Culture can be changed only when identity changes. Identity is more open than culture to 'outside' influence (Fiolet al. 2018). Albert and Whetten(2015) also support the idea that 'instability' of identity arises mainly from its ongoing interrelationships with image. Although Downey (2016) argues that culture is a consequence of organizational identity, corporate culture or personality has been more popularly seen as an input to corporate identity creation (Abratt,2019), in that a mission statement is a projection of culture through the adjectives used to define it (Swales & Roger2015).

The Concept of Customer Loyalty

Loyalty building requires the company to focus the value of its product and services and to show that it is interested to fulfill the desire or build the relationship with customers (Griffin 2012). Casidy and Wymer (2016) conceptualized customer loyalty as "one's feelings of devoted attachment to the loyalty object, rather than repeated commercial transactions. Thakur (2016) defined attitudinal loyalty as a customers' intention to remain committed to specific provider in the marketplace by repeating their purchasing experiences. Oliver(1999), defined customers' loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviours. Customer loyalty is viewed as the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude and re-patronage. Customer's loyalty can be characterized as one of the important success measurements for different Customer's loyalty can be characterized as one of the important success measurements for different businesses in the marketplace (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). Marketing practitioners would ultimately embrace appropriate marketing strategies and approaches in order to maintain loyal customers towards their businesses (Zhang et al., 2016).Thomas and Tobe (2013) emphasize that "loyalty is more profitable." The expenses to gain a new customer is much more than retaining existing one. Loyal customers will encourage others to

International Journal of Social Sciences and Conflict Management
ISSN: 2536-7234 (Print): 2536-7242 (Online)
Volume 5, Number 2, June 2020
http://www.casirmediapublishing.com

buy from you and think more than twice before changing their mind to buy other services. Customer loyalty is not gained by an accident; they are constructed through the sourcing and design decisions. Designing for customer loyalty requires customer-centered approaches that recognize the want and interest of service receiver. Customer loyalty is built over time across multiple transactions.

MEASURES OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Upselling

This tracks the ratio of customers who have bought more than one type of product divided by the customers who have bought only one. This sounds similar to the Repurchase Ratio, but it is different because it concerns another product. Buying new products is a clear indication of customer loyalty. The trust a firm gained through their customer's previous experiences has reflected on other product offerings. The more different the added product is from the first product, the more significant an indication for customer loyalty it is. The most loyal customers are receptive to products in addition to the one they intended to buy. For instance, if a customer goes to an e-commerce store for a specific type of item and ends up buying both the intended item and an item from a totally different product category, there is a strong indication the customer is loyal to your store.

So upselling ratio is a measure of customers who were "upsold" and added unrelated products to their orders, against the number of customers who bought only one product. The formula is the number of customers who made multi-item purchases divided by the number of customers who made single-item purchases. It is calculated by dividing the number of customers with multiple products by the number of customers with a single product.

1. How likely are you to recommend us to your friends or contacts?
2. How likely are you to buy from us again in the future?
3. How likely are you to try out other of our products/services?

Customer Engagement

According to Bingham (2017), customer engagement is the most effective predictor of customer loyalty. He argues that customer engagement metrics are easier to measure, to influence, and that they are more strongly correlated with revenue and profits. Bingham explains that customer loyalty results out of positive interactions and experiences with firm's brand. These nurture emotional attachments that shields customers from competitor influence.

Through this, says Bingham, customer engagement:

1. Stimulates repurchasing
2. Lowers price sensitivity
3. Promotes referrals

Customer engagement is indeed an interesting area, especially for online businesses – for which its metrics are relatively easy to track. For offline products and services, though, the tracking is much harder. Customer engagement is sometimes referred to as user engagement and their definitions are largely the same. Companies using the term "customer engagement" typically embrace a high-touch relationship model. "User engagement," on the other hand, is most often used by organizations leveraging a low-touch relationship model. Teams focused on customer engagement may invest more in in-person product training, for example, whereas teams focused on user engagement may invest more in their in-product user onboarding experience. The difference between a high-touch and low-touch relationship model can be defined by the one-to-one vs. one-to-many approach of customer interaction.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Image and customer Loyalty

The service quality literature has often operationalized reputation as a one-dimensional constructor often as an image scale. Reputation has been typically included as an endogenous variable to examine satisfaction and perception of quality, and therefore measured simply on a one-dimensional (favourable unfavourable) scale. Zeithaml (2000) used reputation as one of the variables in her research, which linked service quality to profitability, and points out that there is a lack of data on perceived reputation coming from real customers. With a one-dimensional scale, the findings may not be meaningful. A good image or reputation is probably better than a bad image, but the results in the literature have infact been inconsistent. For example, some have found that the relationship between company image and product preference is negative (Hardy 1970) or that no relationship exists (Shimp&O'Bearden 1982) whereas others have found a positive link (e.g.Keller1998; Keller & Aaker 1998). These contradictory results, according to Brown and Dacin (1997), are because company reputation or image is not one-dimensional, 'good' or 'bad'. Companies may have the same overall degree of favorability, but their character might not be the same. Exxon may be seen as an 'innovator' but not 'socially responsible': is this good or bad? Brown and Dacin (1997) then specified two dimensions of corporate image (referred to as 'association'): Corporate Ability(CA) and Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR). They argue that there is a need to develop and validate measures of corporate image that capture the full dimensionality of the concept. Such work implies that reputation should be measured as a multidimensional construct, and researchers have measured corporate image or store image in this way. LeBrancand Nguyen (1996) defined five factors of corporate image:

(1) Identity
(2) Reputation
(3) Service offering,
(4) Physical environment
(5) Contact personnel

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Bernstein (1984)'s cobweb method for eliciting descriptions of a company's image used eight 'personality' dimensions; integrity, quality, imagination, reliability, service, social responsibility, technical innovation and value for money. Respondents can mark a company's perceived performance and desired performance on a nine-point scale. Various measurement techniques have been used to measure 'store' or 'corporate' images using Likert or semantic differential scales, Fishbein models, multidimensional scaling, and open-ended questions (Hawkins et al. 1976 – 77). Van Riel et al. (1998) compare various measurement methods for corporate image: attitude scales, Qsort, Photosort, laddering, Kelly Repertory Grid (KRG) and Natural Grouping (NG). The findings indicate that Photosort tends to emphasize the more human and emotional components of corporate image: corporate personality, compared with sort and attribute scales. There were no large differences between laddering, KRG and NG, although the laddering method provided more elaborate results. Menezes and Elbert (1979) tested four dimensions of retail store image using various scale types on 250 business school students. The dimensions were (1) store appearance: clean, décor, cluttered, displays, (2) service: checkout, helpful, friendly, (3) product mix: wide selection, brand names, quality, and (4) price: good values, prices, specials. Based on the foregoing, these study hypotheses thus:
Ho_1 Corporate does not influence Customer Loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.

Identity

The empirical measurement of identity has received less attention than has its conceptual underpinnings (Hatch & Shultz 2000, 28). Some measure identity as it 'is' (mainly organizational identity) whereas others measure identity as it 'should be' (mainly corporate identity); some use quantitative methods, whereas some use qualitative methods; some use predetermined dimensions, whereas some use an inductive approach. A few examples are available, but many of them use purely qualitative or a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, van Rekom (1997) identified a procedure for measuring identity. In order to uncover characteristics that are specific to an organization, he interviewed 25 employees as a first step using the 'laddering technique'. Since the application of the laddering technique is limited to a small sample, the identified characteristics were tested using a questionnaire survey and a seven-point semantic differential scale as a second step. The results were compared with a semi-structured laddering technique. Balmer and Soenen (1999) developed a tool called the 'Acid' (Actual, Communicated, Ideal, Desired Identity) Test of Corporate Identity Management. The qualitative methods used include in-depth interview, desk research and content analysis to identify 15 identity/corporate image 'interfaces'. In order to examine each interface, they suggest various research techniques. For example, in order to measure the interface between actual identity (e.g. values, history, structure) and desired identity (e.g. visions), a range of qualitative research techniques such as interviews, observation, history audit and focus group are recommended. Gioia and Thomas (1996) explored the relationship between identity and image but both from a senior management perspective. They used the triangulation method, which adopts both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Initially, a case study and in-depth interviews. Based on the foregoing, these study hypotheses thus:

Ho_2 Identity does not significantly influence Customer Loyalty of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.

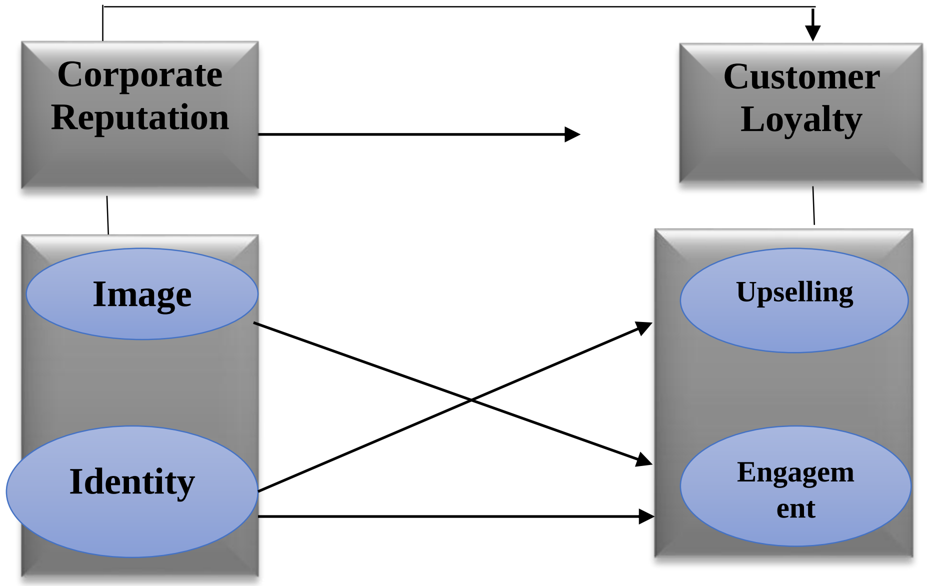

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the relationship between corporate reputation and customer loyalty.

Sources: Bingham, C. L. (2017) Customer Loyalty indicators; Jaja, S. A. (2009) Corporate Image dynamics in the Niger Delta.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This explanatory study adopted a causal investigation to establish a relationship between corporate reputation and customer loyaltyof the soap dealers in Port Harcourt. The study variables were not manipulated or interfered with by the researcher. The choice of research design was not influenced, as Sankaran (2016) noted, by the nature of the study, purpose of the study, study setting, unit of analysis and the time horizon of the study. Considering all these factors, the cross sectional survey research design in a non-contrived (normal or natural) setting (mobile telecommunication companies) offered us the best opportunity. The cross sectional study involves a study at a single time. This study therefore involved the collection of standardized information from a sample selected from a population. The sample is also representative of key characteristics of the population from which it was drawn.

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Population of the Study

The target organisation in this study is soap dealers firms operating in Port Harcourt. The soap dealers in Port Harcourt are numerous and have no registered association from where to obtain a sample frame; therefore the population of this study is infinite. Again since study is at the micro level, and also seeking information from the soap dealers' customers which are infinite, the population may be unknown. However for the purpose of this study an estimated accessible populationof 1,000 customers of soap dealers in Port Harcourt was used.

Sample Size Determination

Determining a sample size is necessary because of the constraints of cost, time and accuracy. Anyanwu (2016) posited that key issue in sampling is representativeness. This is to enable the researcher have a true picture of the soap dealers in Port Harcourt. Since, our study unit is the dealers customers, the population of the study was estimated to 1,000customers of dealers firms in Port Harcourt. Using the Taro Yamen sample size determination formula, we obtained thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n= sample size required
N = number of people in the population
e = allowable error (%)

Substitute numbers in formula:

1000/1+1000 $(0.05)^2$
1000/1+1282 x 0.0025
1000/1+2.5
1000/3.5
286.
Thus, the sample size of this study is 286customers of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.

Sampling Method

This refers to the different ways a researcher can draw samples from any given population (Anyanwu, 2000) or the procedure adopted in selecting a smaller group to represent the target population (Ibekwe, 2002). Anyanwu (2010) asserts that the sampling procedure explains the process applied in implementing the sampling method – how the researcher operationalized the method. Two forms of sampling techniques exist – probability and non-probability (Saunders, Lewis &Thunhill 2009). Because of the nature of this study and the respondents involved, a simple random probability sampling method was adopted in this study. Customers of soap dealers in Port Harcourt who participated in the study were included in the sample unit. This is the procedures adopted to elicit information from the respondents. 286 Copies of questionnaire were distributed to Customers of soap dealers in Port Harcourt who participated in the study were included in the sample unit. The respondents include any customer who have used soap dealers products in Port Harcourt and who had indicated interest to participate in the survey.

Validity of Research Instrument

This study adopted face, content and construct validity measures. Our measuring instrument were given face, content and construct validity by senior academics of the Department of marketing Ignatius Ajuru University of Education who copies of our questionnaire were given for vetting. Based on their responses the final questionnaire items were prepared and administered.

Reliability of Research Instrument

The reliability of the instrument underwent two stages. The first stage was done before the collection of data while the other was done after the collection of data. This is to ensure a proper data quality of our research instrument. In the first instance, the research instrument was given to the supervisor of this work. Comments were received and corrections made. Later, the new instrument was given to four soap dealers customers in Port Harcourt for contribution to the research instrument. The essence of this process was to ensure test re-test reliability. All observations and inputs received from this process were effected in a more reliable instrument that was used for the study. After the collection of data, another reliability test was done to test inter-item consistency using a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.7 as the threshold as recommended by Nunnally (1978). All items below 0.7 after the reliability test using the aids of the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) were deleted. All the items were found to be reliable haven exceeded the threshold of 0.7. The composite Crombach Alpha coefficient of 0.83 also indicates that the instrument is highly reliable. This implies that the instrument can be used for further analyses. The next section shows the results from the study.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2: Frequencies on Item of Corporate Reputation Responses

S/N	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	Total	Mean	Remark

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ISSN: 2536-7234 (Print): 2536-7242 (Online)
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1	I have a good feeling about the company	214 (63.4%	26 15.2%	29 21.5%	0 0%	0 (0%	269 (100%	4.4	Agree
2	I admire and respect the company	198 (54.5%	51 40.7%	0 0%	20 4.9%	0 (0%	269 (100%	4.5	Agree
3	I trust this company	100 (27.1%	150 40.7%	7 1.9%	12 (13.6%	(16.8%	269 (100%	3.5	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed on each of the three items of corporate reputation (i.e. mean scores greater than 3.0). The grand mean is equally greater than 3.0; indicating that corporate reputation has a positive effect on customers shopping.

Table 3: Frequencies on Item of Corporate Image Responses

S/N	Items	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total	Mean	Remark
1	I have a good feeling about the company	0 (0% 0	56 15.2% 112	88 23.8% 264	100 27.1% 400	125 (33.9% 625	369 (100% 1401	3.8	Agree
2	I admire and respect the company	55 (14.9% 55	28 7.6% 56	33 8.9% 99	98 26.6% 392	155 (42.0% 775	369 (100% 1377	3.7	Agree
3	I trust this company	15 (4.1% 15	78 21.1% 156	19 5.1% 57	106 (28.7% 424	151 (40.9% 755	369 (100% 1407	3.8	Agree
4	Recognizes and takes advantage of market opportunities	0 (0% 0	0 0% 0	99 26.8% 297	108 29.3% 432	162 (43.9% 810	369 (100% 1349	4.2 1539	Agree
	Total	78 78	162 324	239 717	412 1648	593 2965	1484 5732	3.9	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 3 shows that the respondents agreed on each of the four items of corporate image (i.e. mean scores greater than 3.0). The grand mean is equally greater than 3.0; indicating that corporate image has a positive effect on customer shopping of soap from dealers.

Table 4: Frequencies on Item of Corporate Identity Responses

S/N	Items	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Total	Mean	Remark
1	Develops innovative products and services	5 (1.4% 5	34 9.2% 68	105 28.5% 315	122 33.1% 488	103 (27.9% 515	369 (100% 1391	3.8	Agree
2	Offers high quality products and services	0 (0% 0	105 33.1% 210	30 8.1% 90	122 33.1% 488	112 (30.4% 560	369 (100% 1348	3.7	Agree
3	Offers products and services that are good value for money and service	15 (4.1% 15	15 4.1% 30	105 33.1% 315	177 (48.0% 708	57 (15.4% 285	369 (100% 1353	3.7	Agree
4	Looks like a company that would have good employees	5 (1.4% 5	0 0% 0	57 15.4% 171	179 48.5% 716	128 (34.7% 640	369 (100% 1361	3.7 1539	Agree
	Total	78 78	162 324	239 717	412 1648	593 2965	1484 5732	3.9	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 4 shows that the respondents agreed on each of the four items of corporate identity (i.e. mean scores greater than 3.0). The grand mean is equally greater than 3.0; indicating that web interactivity has a positive effect on customer shopping of soap from soap dealers.

TESTING OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

As specified in earlier, the hypotheses were tested using the spearman's rank correlation coefficient. To know the direction of the relationships between the variables, Table 5 is used to interpret the nature of the relationships.

Decision Rules

The strength of association and statistical significance decision are made and interpreted based on the following table 4.5.0.1 below; Where (+) stands for positive relationship and (-) means negative relationship.

Table 5: *Decision table for the Strength of variable relationships*

International Journal of Social Sciences and Conflict Management
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S/ No	Statistical Significance	Association/ Relationship
i.	± 0.0 – 0.19	Very Weak
ii.	± 0.2 – 0.39	Weak
iii.	± 0.4 – 0.59	Moderate (Significant)
iv.	± 0.6 - 79	Strong
v.	±0.8 – 1.00	Very strong

Source: Desk Research, 2019

Relationship between Measures of Image and Corporate Identity of soap dealers in Port Harcourt

Table 6: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between Image, Identity and Corporate Reputation

Correlations			Reputation	Image	Identity
Spearman's rho	Corporate Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.863**	.864**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	369	369	369
	Corporate Image	Correlation Coefficient	**	1.000	.**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.	.
		N	369	369	369
	Corporate Identity	Correlation Coefficient	.864**	.**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.
		N	369	369	369

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2019, SPSS 21 Output

Decision

Table 6 reveals a spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.863 and 0.864 for Corporate Reputation, image and identity respectively with probability value of 0.000 (**PV< 0.05**). This result indicates that corporate reputation has a very strong positive and significant relationship between corporate image and identity of soap dealers in Port Harcourt. Therefore, we reject the null hypotheses and accept the alternate hypotheses which state that corporate reputation has a significant relationship with corporate image and identity of soap dealers in Port Harcourt.

DISCUSSION

Relationship between Corporate Reputation, Image and Corporate Identity

The result of Ho_1 and Ho_2 indicated that very strong and positive relationship exist among corporate reputation, image and identity with a spearman's correlation of *0.863 and *0.864. Moreover, it has been revealed that the findings of the study are in affirmation with theoretical and empirical studies of other researchers in similar subject matter. For instance, Robins and Holmes (2008), observed in their study that corporate reputation has great link with trust and credibility while Schenkman and Jonsson, (2000) holds that visual appearance of corporate websites has effects on online shoppers' overall impression about the site. Moreover, the responses of soap consumers show that 63.4% of them strongly agreed that *corporate reputation indices*and over 40.7% agreed *that "image and identity"* also depicts a positive link between the elements of corporate reputation and soap shopping. Fortune's annual AMAC survey is probably the most obvious source of linkages between reputation and financial performance. Many researchers who have suggested that reputation has a positive impact on profitability have relied heavily for their reputation measures upon the *Fortune* Rankings. For example, higher *Fortune* scores correlate with superior returns overall (Roberts & Dowling 2017; Vergin&Qoronfleh2018). However, since financial performance is a major input to the *Fortune* rankings (Fryxell &Wang 2014), the measure is heavily influenced by a financial halo (Brown & Perry 2014). The links between reputation and financial performance may not be direct but may be influenced by other variables, such as gaps between image and identity, customer and employee satisfaction and loyalty. These intervening variables can be either antecedents or consequences of a firm's reputation, which may lead to a good financial performance in the long-term.

CONCLUSION

The constructs of corporate identity, image and reputation are often referred to in the literature but with varying views as to the meanings of each. I have tried to distinguish between what is generally meant by corporate reputation, and its key elements, image and identity. I emphasize what I see as the most useful approach to defining each construct: corporate reputation as an umbrella construct, referring to the cumulative impressions of internal and external stakeholders. I would argue that it is useful to distinguish between the three in this way, as 'managing reputation' can then be seen to refer to the overall activity in an organization, image as to the external view and identity as to the internal view, which may require different foci in terms of both academic discipline and commercial function. It is useful to differentiate between what I have labeled as reputation and image. The former is based upon wide experience. Image is more tractable, as people can have images of organizations they have had little experience with. Identity, as it concerns employees with actual experience, is also less tractable. However, if image and identity interact, changing image may require a change in identity. Theory and anecdotal comment both claim that these three constructs (however defined) interrelate and have an impact upon other constructs of significance. We have reviewed measures of corporate reputation, image and identity and the emerging measures that aim to assess all three. We believe that a clearer and more widely agreed understanding of what the main constructs refer to and valid measures for each will open up what is a new discipline in academe. In particular, it is now possible to assess many of the claims made about the interrelationships between reputation and other variables, which will link to financial performance in the long term.

In summary, this study believes it is useful to see corporate reputation as the summary view of the perceptions held by all relevant stakeholders of an organization, that is, what customers, employees, suppliers, managers, creditors, media and communities believe the organization stands for, and the associations they make with it. Image and identity can be usefully seen as the main components of reputation. Gaps between them can be undesirable but, for reputation to become a new line function in organizations, ways have to be found of managing both to 'align' them. Essentially, reputation management can be about managing what happens inside an organization to influence external perception.

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Volume 5, Number 2, June 2020
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