

INTERNATIONAL BRANDING STRATEGIES OF GLOBAL FOOD PROCESSING COMPANIES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY TO SMEs IN KANO STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzed essential worldwide branding techniques, including brand positioning, brand differentiation, and brand communication, and their relevance to SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. A quantitative study approach was used, and structured questionnaires were sent to chosen food processing SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. The obtained data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and multiple regression techniques. The study's findings indicate that all three previously stated branding tactics positively and significantly impact SME performance. Brand Differentiation appeared as the most significant predictor, following by Brand Positioning and Brand Communication. The regression model yielded an R-Squared value of 0.698, indicating that the three branding methods together account for 69.8% of the variance in the performance of food processing SMEs. These results underscore the significance of branding in improving competitiveness, client retention, loyalty, and overall company success in SMEs. The research suggests that SME managers need to see branding as an investment, use global digital platforms for enhanced exposure, and synchronize their branding with worldwide standards. Furthermore, authorities and entities like SMEDAN and WIPO need to enhance branding support initiatives to augment SME competitiveness and foster sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Branding Strategies, Brand Positioning, Brand Identity, Food Processing Companies, Market Expansion.*

INTRODUCTION

International branding strategies significantly influence the competitiveness of the food manufacturing sector (Smith, 2022). Branding profoundly affects customer perceptions, influences purchase patterns, and fosters competitive advantage. Effective branding strategies enable organizations to distinguish their products in a saturated market, fostering customer trust and creating a strong emotional connection (Kapferer, 2021). Dinnie (2020) asserts that trademarks in the food processing industry represent not just quality and safety but also communicate cultural values and authenticity, which are particularly significant in various worldwide marketplaces. Investing in branding enables food processing firms to adeptly address regulatory obstacles, broaden market reach, and leverage growing consumer trends, thereby ensuring a sustained competitive advantage in the global market (Aaker, 2022). The food processing sector in Kano State is defined by a combination of traditional methods and contemporary industrial processes (Abubakar et al., 2021).



Small and medium-sized enterprises in Kano have distinct problems, including as resource limitations, financial and infrastructural limits, and diverse client preferences (Ogundele & Olusegun, 2023). The unique agricultural advantages of Kano State are not complemented by adequate branding efforts, leading to little market differentiation and a competitive disadvantage. Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria play a crucial role in employment, innovation, and value chain integration. Nevertheless, up to 80% of food processing SMEs in Kano State, igeria, fail within five years owing to significant challenges in sustaining growth beyond the first phase. This problem arises from insufficient adoption of global branding strategies, which constrains their impact on local economic growth and results in inadequate performance. Despite the efforts by organizations such as SMEDAN and WIPO to provide branding and intellectual property management assistance, some SMEs are either unaware of or unable of effectively using these resources. This research is to examine significant worldwide branding tactics used by global food processing firms and assess their possible relevance for SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. This research aims to provide practical advice for SMEs to improve their branding strategies and attain sustainable development in a competitive global market, based on an analysis of current literature and case studies.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Numerous SMEs, particularly in industries like food processing, persist in underachieving compared to their potential. A significant but insufficiently addressed factor contributing to this underperformance is branding: the manner in which SMEs position, distinguish, and convey their offers, particularly in their use of international branding strategies to penetrate wider markets and improve performance. This highlights the need of examining the particular issue: why food processing SMEs in Kano State are not successfully implementing good worldwide branding strategies and how this deficiency hinders their performance. Numerous SMEs in Nigeria continue to exhibit insufficient, informal, or reactive brand management, despite branding being recognized as a key asset for all company types. A recent empirical research on SMEs in Nigeria found that brand image and its components—brand awareness, distinctive identity, brand reputation, customer engagement, and digital branding—significantly and positively influenced sales growth. This indicates that branding is crucial for the success of SMEs; nevertheless, many organizations fail to develop these competencies. In the context of food processing enterprises in Kano State, this inadequacy may manifest as limited brand awareness outside local markets, inferior packaging and labeling, an absence of export-ready branding standards, and inadequate use of digital platforms for brand advancement. Resolving this issue necessitates examining the degree of branding strategy implementation, recognizing the obstacles to adoption, and comprehending how such adoption (or its absence) influences SME performance within the particular context of Kano State's food processing industry.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Examine the effect of brand positioning strategy on the profitability of food processing SMEs in Kano State.
2. Assess the impact of brand differentiation strategy on the market share of food processing SMEs in Kano State.
3. Evaluate how brand communication strategy influences customer loyalty among food processing SMEs in Kano State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a) To what extent does brand positioning strategy affect the profitability of food processing SMEs in Kano State?
- b) What is the impact of brand differentiation strategy on the market share of food processing SMEs in Kano State?
- c) How does brand communication strategy influence customer loyalty among food processing SMEs in Kano State?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H₁: Brand positioning strategy has no significant effect on the profitability of food processing SMEs in Kano State.

H₂: Brand differentiation strategy has no significant impact on the market share of food processing SMEs in Kano State.

H₃: Brand communication strategy does not significantly influence customer loyalty among food processing SMEs in Kano State.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

This study is important as it offers an in-depth insight of the branding strategies used by food processing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Kano State, Nigeria. The study is to identify and analyze successful international branding strategies to provide practical insights that help improve the competitiveness, sustainability, and performance of firms in local and worldwide marketplaces. This research is pertinent due to the escalating globalization of food markets and the heightened acknowledgment of branding as a strategic instrument for competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Keller, 2021). In a time when consumer choices are shaped by perceptions of quality, authenticity, and brand reputation, SMEs that adeptly manage their brand identity are more likely to attain sustained profitability and market dominance. The results of this study will function as a pragmatic reference for SME proprietors, managers, and marketing specialists in Kano State and beyond. Numerous SMEs in Nigeria prioritize manufacturing efficiency and cost reduction, overlooking the strategic significance of branding. This study will assist managers in seeing branding as an investment instead of a cost. By comprehending the impact of effective international branding strategies, including consistent brand communication, brand distinctiveness, and innovation, on client perceptions and loyalty, SME managers can make more educated choices to enhance their brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The American Marketing Association defines branding as a distinctive name, design, symbol, or a mix of these aspects that identifies and distinguishes a product or firm from its rivals (Sandra et al., 2018). A brand transcends mere identification, since it incorporates the whole of a customer's experience with a product or firm (Sandra et al., 2018). International Branding Strategies pertains to the techniques and methodologies used by corporations to promote their goods or services worldwide. These tactics enable organizations to preserve a uniform brand image while accommodating the distinct demands and tastes of diverse foreign markets. By comprehending and implementing these tactics, including localization, digital marketing, environmental efforts, or strategic collaborations, SMEs may improve their competitiveness and successfully seize global market possibilities. Nguyen and Tran (2023) performed a quantitative analysis of 250 SMEs in the manufacturing and food-processing sectors in Vietnam to investigate the impact of business innovation capabilities on the link between branding strategies and market performance. They employed a systematic survey and multiple regression analysis; they defined innovation capability as a composite of product innovation, process innovation, and marketing innovation; branding strategy as an aggregate index of brand positioning, packaging, and communication; and performance through sales growth, market share variation, and export occurrence. The study revealed that innovation capability moderated the statistically significant positive correlation between branding strategies and firm performance (β values between 0.28 and 0.42, $p < 0.05$); specifically, firms with high innovation capability achieved superior performance outcomes from branding activities compared to those with low innovation capability. International branding tactics significantly depend on digital and social media marketing. Research by Lee and Kim (2021) indicates that big food processing firms use these platforms to directly communicate with customers, augment brand awareness, and gather real-time consumer data. Implementing cost-effective digital marketing tactics to enhance brand recognition, interact with target demographics, and compete internationally may significantly help SMEs. This empirical study highlights the significance of using digital platforms to address resource limitations and successfully engage varied client segments. Empirical research conducted by Dr. Naveen Prasadula et al. (2026) indicates that customers increasingly choose companies that emphasize sustainability and ethical practices within the food processing sector. Major corporations such as Nestlé and Unilever have effectively incorporated sustainability into their branding strategy, enhancing their brand image and customer loyalty. Small and medium-sized enterprises may emulate these practices by enhancing openness in procurement, minimizing environmental effect, and participating in community projects. This strategy not only improves brand perception but also conforms to global consumer trends favoring responsible purchasing and corporate social responsibility. Kumar and Ramani (2023) examined the role of strategic partnerships and cooperation in worldwide branding initiatives. Multinational corporations establish partnerships with local distributors, merchants, and influencers to enhance market presence and adapt to local market conditions. Small and medium-sized enterprises in developing economies, such as Nigeria, may use these collaborations to access distribution networks, improve brand exposure, and adeptly manage regulatory obstacles. These empirical results highlight the strategic benefits of collaborative branding strategies for SMEs seeking to enhance their market presence and compete with bigger industry competitors.

RESEARCH GAP

In Nigeria, research on SMEs has mostly focused on financial, infrastructural, and managerial limitations, but branding has been comparably under-examined as a strategic driver of success. Furthermore, current research often employs cross-sectoral viewpoints, neglecting the unique dynamics inherent to high-potential industries like the food processing sector. Empirical studies evaluating the direct impact of certain branding techniques, including brand positioning, brand distinctiveness, and brand communication, on quantifiable performance metrics of SMEs are notably few, especially in Northern Nigeria. Thus, there is a lack of localized information illustrating how worldwide branding techniques convert into measurable performance results in the food manufacturing industry of Kano State. This research fills these gaps by offering sector-specific and contextually relevant empirical data, demonstrating that branding techniques substantially account for differences in SME success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a descriptive design with a population of 500 respondents, comprising managers/owners, marketing/brand managers, operational personnel, financial staff, and sales and marketing personnel from food processing SMEs in Kano. The study sample was obtained using a stratified sampling procedure to ensure the selection of appropriate respondents who would provide valuable information for the research (sample size = 226). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were classified into three tiers according to their sub-sectors: food production, beverage manufacturing, and condiment/snack processing. Respondents were randomly picked within each strata. Primary data were gathered using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. All hypotheses were evaluated at the 0.05 significance level.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

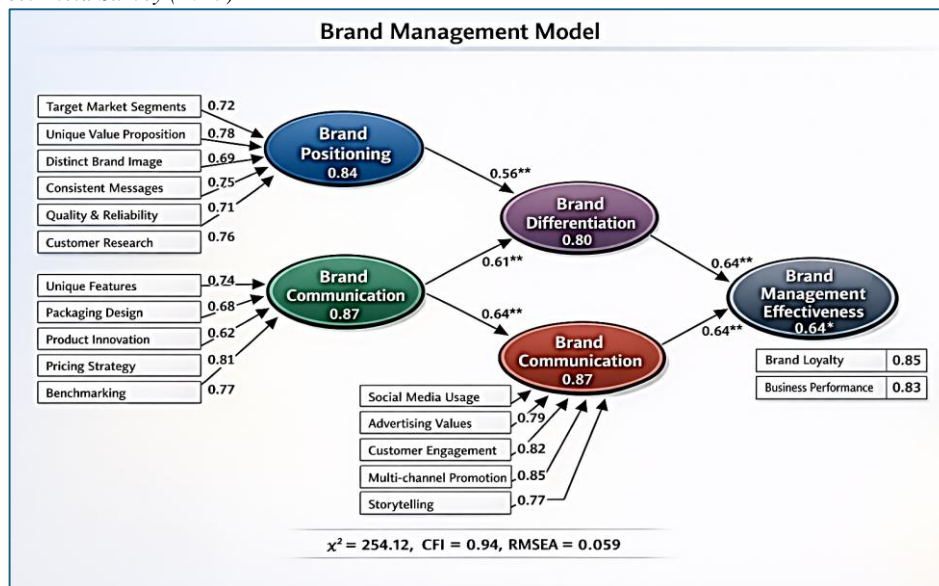
Table 1 below demonstrates that brand positioning strategy influences the profitability of food processing SMEs in Kano State, with respondents confirming the successful identification of target market categories using customer segmentation and CRM technology. The brand differentiation approach affects market share by highlighting the significance of originality, packaging, innovation, price, and customer involvement, with an emphasis on research and development and other product assessments. Ultimately, brand communication strategies need cohesive digital marketing, proficient content production, narrative development, loyalty initiatives, and customer relationship management to strengthen emotional bonds and improve customer retention.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

BRAND POSITIONING	N	Mean	Std.Dev
Our business clearly defines its target market segments.	226	3.916	0.81
We communicate a unique value proposition to our customers.	226	3.518	0.74

Our brand's image is distinct compared to competitors.	226	3.354	0.79
We maintain consistent brand messages across all marketing channels.	226	3.341	0.86
Customers easily associate our products with quality and reliability.	226	3.434	0.74
We use customer perception research to strengthen brand positioning.	226	3.664	0.78
BRAND DIFFERENTIATION			
Our products offer unique features not found in competitors' products.	226	3.46	0.352
Product packaging helps our brand stand out in the market.	226	3.34	0.782
We invest in product innovation to create differentiation.	226	3.07	0.506
Our pricing strategy reflects our brand's uniqueness and quality.	226	3.72	0.683
We leverage customer feedback to refine our brand's uniqueness.	226	3.64	0.742
We benchmark our brand against top-performing international brands.	226	3.78	0.537
BRAND COMMUNICATION			
We use social media effectively to communicate our brand identity.	226	3.82	0.627
Our advertising messages reflect the values of our brand.	226	3.62	0.450
We maintain strong relationships with our customers through consistent engagement.	226	3.55	0.463
We use multiple communication channels (radio, TV, online, etc.) for brand promotion.	226	3.77	0.564
We monitor customer feedback to improve brand communication effectiveness.	226	3.64	0.712
Brand storytelling is a key part of our marketing communication.	226	3.58	0.506

Mean cut off: 2.5 Source: Field Survey (2025)



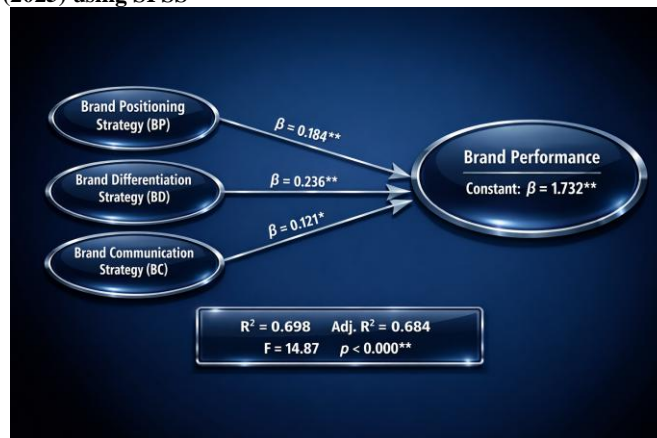
TEST OF HYPOTHESES

The results of the regression analysis examining the impact of international brand strategies on the performance of food processing SMEs in Kano state are presented in the table below:

Table 2: Regression Results

Variables	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-Statistic	P-Value
Constant (β)	1.732	0.587	2.95	0.004**
BP (Brand Positioning Strategy)	0.184	0.071	2.59	0.011**
BD (Brand Differentiation Strategy)	0.236	0.068	3.47	0.001**
BC (Brand Communication Strategy)	0.121	0.055	2.20	0.029**
R-Squared	0.698			
Adj. R-Squared	0.684			
F-Statistic	14.87			0.000**

Source: Computed by Researcher (2025) using SPSS



A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of international branding strategies (brand positioning, brand differentiation, brand communication) on the performance (profitability, market share, customer loyalty) of food processing SMEs in Kano State, Nigeria. Table 2 above represents the regression coefficients, standard errors, t-statistics, and significance values. An R-squared value of 0.698 was obtained, indicating that the branding strategies explain 69.8% of the variation in SME performance. The Adjusted R of 0.684 also confirms the model's strong explanatory power. All three variables were positive and statistically significant at the 5% significance level, indicating that any adjustments/improvements made in any of these branding strategies will lead to a meaningful increase in the performance of food processing SMEs in Kano State.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis highlights the significance of branding strategies in improving business outcomes for food processing SMEs. It emphasizes that Brand Positioning Strategy ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.011$) greatly enhances profitability by enabling firms to establish a distinct market presence, which fosters customer loyalty. Brand Differentiation Strategy ($\beta = 0.236$, $p = 0.001$) is noted as the strongest predictor, indicating that unique product attributes can lead to higher profits by attracting customer interest and allowing for premium pricing. Additionally, Brand Communication Strategy ($\beta = 0.121$, $p = 0.029$), while having the smallest impact, is important for enhancing customer loyalty and overall performance through effective brand messaging. These findings underscore the critical role of brand differentiation, positioning, and communication in driving superior performance and competitive advantages in resource-limited contexts.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study examined the international branding strategies of global food processing companies and their applicability for SMEs in Kano state, Nigeria. Results indicate that SMEs are moderately adopting branding practices, with mean scores above benchmark levels, reflecting increasing awareness of brand management. Multiple regression analysis shows that branding strategies positively and significantly impact SME performance at a 5% significance level, with brand differentiation as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.236$). The model explains about 69.8% of the variability in SME performance, confirming the significance of joint effects on these businesses. The findings highlight that effective international branding strategies enhance profitability, market share, and customer loyalty among food processing SMEs, positioning branding capabilities as essential for competitiveness in emerging markets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Food processing SMEs should continuously differentiate their products through innovation, superior quality, and attractive packaging.
- SME owners and managers should invest in defining clear brand identities and unique value propositions that resonate with target markets.
- SMEs should leverage multiple communication channels, including social media, advertising, and customer relationship management tools, to enhance brand visibility and engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that international branding strategies used by global food processing companies offer important lessons for small and medium-sized enterprises in Kano State, Nigeria. Practices such as clear brand positioning, product differentiation, consistent communication, quality assurance, and customer-focused marketing have proven effective in helping global firms build strong market identity and long-term competitiveness. These strategies are not limited to large multinational companies alone; they can also be adapted in a practical and scalable manner by SMEs operating in local and regional markets. The study further shows that SMEs in Kano State can strengthen their business performance by adopting branding approaches that emphasize uniqueness, trust, and customer value. Although resource limitations may prevent small firms from fully replicating global branding models, they can still apply core principles such as attractive packaging, consistent brand messaging, improved product quality, and digital promotion. These efforts can enhance customer loyalty, improve market visibility, and support business expansion. In addition, the applicability of international branding strategies depends on proper adaptation to local realities, including consumer preferences, cultural context, and financial capacity. SMEs need branding models that are flexible, affordable, and relevant to their operating environment. Therefore, the study highlights that effective branding is not merely a promotional activity but a strategic tool for survival and growth. If properly applied, international branding strategies can help SMEs in Kano State become more competitive, resilient, and sustainable in today's dynamic business environment.

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