

## REBRANDING NIGERIA AS A NATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

**Okunola Olufumilayo Grace**

08036350774; Email-Olufunmilayookunola@Yahoo.Com

Faculty of Languages Education, Federal University of Education, Kano

### **Abstract**

Rebranding or remarketing as used in this paper is a marketing strategy in which a new name, term, symbol, design, concept or combination thereof is created for an essential brand with the intention of developing a new, differentiated identity in the minds of consumers, investors, competitors and other stakeholders. The term is used in reference to Nigeria content as a wakeup call to all the concerned on the need to do the needful. Rebranding Nigeria is a project which every Nigerian citizen should embrace because it is aimed at social change and re-orientation of Nigerians through character transformation, civil education and commitment to national assignment all geared to make the country a better place. This paper takes a look at the concept of intercultural communication skills and its roles in the current rebranding program. The work also discusses on the concepts of communication, rebranding, intercultural communication skills and how these can come together to redeem and promote the good image of Nigeria in all spheres of life. The work reflects that good intercultural communication skills are vital in rebranding Nigeria. Recommendations are made on the ways by which intercultural communication skills can be used in rebranding process.

**Keywords:** Rebranding, Effective, Intercultural, Communication Skills.

### **Introduction**

Communication is a basic requirement in the life of any group of people. Since communication is done through language, it remains an important factor in national development and national consciousness. Nigeria by nature has a national division through the rivers Niger and Benue, into three major areas and these divisions correspond with the three major language groups in the country, namely, Hausa in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West. Beyond these three major groups, however “Nigeria is made up of more than 250 ethnic groups with a conservative estimate of 400 languages” (Olusoji 2012). Unlike the homogenous societies which have no problem with communication because they have one common language, Nigeria is characterized by diversity of languages. According to Saje (2010), the justification for the ‘Rebranding

Nigeria' campaign finds justification that Nigeria as a nation is obviously in trouble and needs the attention of all and sundry in order to re-direct its course. The modern man can hardly enjoy communal life without the instrument of language with which he communicates. It is a truism of universal acceptability that the world is fast becoming a global village. The frontiers of knowledge are constantly being pushed especially with the current knowledge explosion occasioned by science and technology. Therefore, it is important that Nigerians make use of the globalization terms to improve the already dwindled image. It is a reality that with effective intercultural communication; the needed socio political changes could be brought about.

### **Concept of Communication**

The term communication refers to imparting or exchange of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium. According to Shittu (2010). Communication is the process by which information is passed between individuals, organization etc. by means of previously agreed symbols. The medium of communication may be through oral or written language. It may be through Para-language such as gestures, or any type of body movement. It could be through telephone, telegram, fax, telex, email, photograph etc. Ahmad (2013) sees communication as referring to the complex web of symbolic process at work in a society through which the production and exchange of meaning takes place. Ismail (2013) on the other hand, maintains that communication in its most general sense is a link or chain of events in which the significant link is the message. Communication is a source and extension of imagination in form that can be learned and shared. Communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another mind is influenced and in that other mind an experience, occurs which is like the experience in the first mind, and is caused in part by that experience. (Egunjobi, 2002)

Ndolo (2002) also sees communication as "a dynamic, ongoing, transactional process. It is dynamic. It is constantly in motion, ongoing because

it has no fixed beginning or end and transactional because the elements occur simultaneously and the people communicating are interdependent.” Communication goes on between people or groups of people. It helps to maintain or create a favourable environment in which any organization can operate and function successfully. Communication, therefore incorporates elements of environment and it brings people into contact through exchange of ideas.

### **Concept of Rebranding**

Historically speaking, branding has been associated with products and services rather than countries, places or cities as it seen in recent times. Nilson [2002] writes that "a brand is really just a symbol with tremendous potential, and that this symbol can be expressed in many different ways". This is particularly true as such symbols as the Nike swoosh and many others. According to Cowking and Hankinson (1996) "a brand is simply a product or service which can be distinguished from its competitors". Such distinguishing aspects could be tangible and intangible. In recent times, however, there has been increasing movements towards place branding. This is in order to increase a country's international profile, attract foreign investments and make the place ideal destination for tourism and trade. Place branding can be defined as the process whereby a town, region, country (place) actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity for itself, with the aim of positioning it internally and externally as a good destination for trade, tourism and investment. (Nworah, 2004).

An analysis of the word rebranding shows that it is made of two words. First, is re, a prefix which means to do again; and second, brand which has already been explained above. By implication, rebranding presupposes that a form of branding was in place at a particular time and space. Hence the present rebranding of Nigeria is an offshoot of some attempts which has failed. Such programmes include War Against Indiscipline [WAI] Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance [MAMSER] War Against Indiscipline and Corruption [WAI-C] and National Orientation Agency [NOA]. These were embarked upon by different

administrations to redress the nagging political, economic and social problems with a view to transforming the characters of Nigerians. The motives behind the setting up of these programmes by the different administrators include creating awareness about their ideologies among the people as well as bring to the grassroots of their various attempts to the right things.

### **Meaning of intercultural communication skills.**

Intercultural communication skills are the abilities needed to communicate effectively with people from different cultures, and compassing, understanding nuances, respecting differences and adapting communication styles. Intercultural communication skills therefore include: Adaptability, cultural awareness and sensibility, active listening, empathy and perspective-taking.

### **Key aspects of Intercultural Communication Skills.**

- a. **Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity:** Recognizing one's cultural biases and assumptions, and how they might affect one's interaction with others.
- b. **Self Awareness:** Recognizing one's cultural biases and assumptions, and how they might affect one's interaction with others.
- c. **Respect or diversity:** This is about valuing and appreciating the differences between cultures, even when they differ from one's own.
- d. **Empathy and perspective-taking:** Understanding and relating to other experiences, even when they differ from one's own.
- e. **Active Listening:** This involves paying attention to what others are saying, both verbally and non-verbally, and seeking to understand their perspectives.
- f. **Adaptability and flexibility:** This refers to how a person reacts to change and develops strategies when navigating challenges and ability to shift ground when necessary. Being adaptable is crucial in an intercultural communication attempt.

- g. **Communication style:** A communication style is the way people express themselves when they talk or interact with others. It includes both the words they use and the non-verbal expression employ in communicating.
- h. **Languages differences:** By linguistic differences, we refer to the variations in language usage and structure among different groups, which can influence communication, culture and identity.
- i. **Conflict resolution:** Intercultural conflict resolution system in communication is the type of communication that involves managing conflicts that arise between individuals or groups from different cultures.

### **Inter-Cultural Communication Skills as Instruments for Socio-Political Rebranding of Nigeria.**

Intercultural communication skill is the ability of successful communication with people of other cultures. A person who is inter culturally competent captures and understands, in interactions with people from foreign cultures, their specific concepts in perception, thinking, feeling and adapting Inter cultural communication creates understanding between people of different cultures, backgrounds, and communication patterns.

According to Porter and Samovar (1989) inter cultural communication occurs when a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another. It can also be defined as acts of communication undertaken by individuals identified with a group of people exhibiting or showing inter group variations in shared social and cultural patterns (Ahmad, 2013).

### **Levels of Intercultural Communication Skills.**

There are two levels of interactional communication skills, namely intra and inter personal inter cultural communication levels. Inter-personal level involves the speaker's own personal perception of life shaped by his private experiences This affects his communicative process This perception which is centred in the individual psyche, reflects some of the cultural values shared by fellow culture bearers but is expressed in unique and individual ways due to the

communicator's personal experiences and social history. (Rohflich, 1983) It is at this stage that culture shock is experienced, and perhaps overcome. At this level ethnocentric behaviours are deployed. Selfishness or lack of consideration for others flourishes in language behaviours. Speakers who use abusive words and expression bring their private perception into the act of communication. The individual view of the world collides with other views and this brings about conflict.

### **Interpersonal Level.**

This level involves the act of communication concerned with interpretation. It brings into contact two or more individuals who are wrapped as it were in their own psycho cultural worlds of values, beliefs, ways of behaving and evaluating of others' behaviours. It is worth noting that no two individuals can share the same personal, social and cultural experience; hence we say that all act of communication can be described as inter cultural to some degree. It is at this level that inter cultural interaction takes place. Individuals use their own cultural experience to judge other people's language behaviour. Effective communication therefore requires the knowledge of cross cultural varieties of communication styles and the problems of interpretation and translation.

In line with the rebranding program that was been emphasized in Nigeria, the inter personal level should be encouraged because it involves two or more individual. It is very important that every Nigerian should work toward the improvement of the nation 'image through improved intercultural communication at all the time.

### **The Need for Effective Inter-Cultural Communication Skills for Socio-Political Rebranding**

The multi ethnic composition of Nigeria has made it difficult for its people to live together in harmony. Almost all of its citizens still have primordial attachments to their immediate and core ethnic groups. The recent religious cum tribal conflicts in many states of the federation is an attestation to this.

Furthermore, the long years of political bickering between the three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo) have made reaching a national consensus on major issues almost difficult. It is against this backdrop that the writer feels that there is the need to re examine the nature of communication between and amongst the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Hence, proposals for effective inter cultural communication as an instrument for socio political rebranding of Nigeria. It hoped that effective Inter cultural communication will guide the process of exchanging meaningful and unambiguous information across cultural boundaries in a way that will preserve mutual respect and minimize antagonism. For these purposes, culture is a shared system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations and norms of behaviour. It will facilitate understanding and make it possible for previously static cultures to meet in unstructured situations.

### **Steps in Intercultural Communication.**

To effectively participate in intercultural communication, the individual needs the following communication skills as a tool.

1. Ability to think clearly about the message to be delivered to the recipient[s]. He/she should also be able to organize the whole communication situation in order to ensure that communication takes place. With regards to recipient, the individual need to be aware and conscious of the recipient's background in terms of age, sex, rank, educational background level of intelligence, knowledge of subject matter and so on.
2. Ability to arrange ideas logically in order to facilitate the understanding of the message so intended. Certainly, without logicity a message so intended may fail to serve the purpose for which it is intended.
3. Ability to make clear expressions devoid of ambiguity. Ambiguity in speech is often a source of confusion and subsequent communication breakdown. A speaker who is vague or unclear in his speech runs the risk of being misunderstood.



4. Ability to use words and register appropriately. Appropriate use of words and register will promote understanding and this avoid misunderstanding. Absence of aPPropriate use of words, terminologies and register can hinder intercultural. Communication in a multi-ethnic setting like Nigeria

### **Obstacles to Effective Intercultural Communication.**

These come from the fact of the differences created by the following

**Level of education:** The level of education of a person is important in intercultural communication. It influences choices of words and what to say. It also affects the listener's communication ability.

**Level of exposure or experience:** It affects expectation and meaning on the part of the hearers.

**Prejudice:** Fear, emotional factors, distraction, etc can inhibit interpersonal relationship. A biased speaker does not listen to hearer's Complaints before jumping to conclusion.

Others include self concept, extent of self disclosure, listening ability and sincerity of purpose.

### **The Need for Improving Intercultural communication.**

It is important to research the cultures and communication conventions of the people whom an individual propose to communicate with. This minimizes the risks of making elementary mistakes. The following are some of the ways to improve inter cultural communication; Avoid using slangs and Idioms, choose words that will convey only the specific denotation meaning

1. Listen carefully and if in doubt, ask for confirmation of understanding.
2. Recognize that accenting and intonation can cause meaning to vary significantly and therefore respect the local communication formalities and styles and watch out for any changes in body language.
3. Investigate their cultures perception of your culture by reading literature about through their eyes before entering into communication with them.



This will allow you to prepare yourself for projected views of your culture you will be bearing as a visitor in their culture.

**Promoting intercultural communication.**

In order to ensure effective Inter-cultural communication amongst Nigerians and the world at large, the following agents have to be responsible

**Family:** A primary socializing agent has a very significant role to play in ensuring effective inter cultural communication. Essentially, the individual's attitudes to life in all ramifications are imbibed in the family It is often said that “Good begets Good” and “Evil begets Evil” A good and positively inclined family will give birth to individuals with such characteristic features. It is therefore mandatory that the family teaches the individual the mechanics of living together and the importance of intercultural communication.

**School:** The role being played in this can never be over emphasized. Specifically, the school gives formal, planned and conscious training in this direction. In the course of learning, individuals from different social, cultural, economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds come together under the auspices of education. The school should therefore put more effort in maintaining the status quo.

**Mass media:** At a time like this in which Nigerians, everywhere in the world, are battling with the issue of the image of the country, the mass media has a great role to play in this direction. The Radio, the Television and News papers have to work hand in hand to improve communication. Television advertisements, as well as Radio jingles should stress the importance of inter cultural communication in their themes. The outdoor advertisement agencies can also be part of this noble gesture by dedicating and erecting billboards and providing spaces on these boards for advertisement on intercultural communication. This can be done in collaboration with the different government agencies and private organizations.

**Religious organizations:** These also have a role to play in ensuring effective inter cultural communication. The mosque and the church at all times assemble a large number of people from different cultural and language background.

Therefore, all efforts should be on fostering effective inter cultural communication. The religious leaders should be saddled with the responsibility of promoting good inter-cultural communication through their sermons.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, the writer takes a look at the concept of inter cultural communication and its roles in the current rebranding efforts of the Nigerian government. Particularly, it has been seen that effective intercultural communication is very essential if the efforts at rebranding is to be successful in the country. There is the need for a change of attitude and orientation towards Nigerians and all that we stand for. It is time we say goodbye to corruption and the menace of 419 all of which have contributed to dwindle image of Nigeria abroad. It is important to say that at this stage of our nation' history, it will be catastrophic. Hence, there is the need for effective intercultural communication.

### **Recommendations**

The paper therefore recommends that:

- The capacity to communicate with people from diverse cultures is referred to as intercultural communication.
- Interacting effectively across cultural lines requires perseverance and sensitivity to one another's differences. This encompasses language skills, customs, ways of thinking, social norms and habits.
- At the core of effective intercultural communication lies the recognition and respect of cultural differences.
- The key to successful intercultural communication is to strike a balance between focusing on commonality and focusing on differences.
- In order to accomplish the mission of rebranding Nigeria locally and internationally, the people and the government need to work hand in hand.
- The task of rebranding must be seen as the one to accomplish.

- Every stakeholder at different stages of the nation activity needs to go an extra mile to remarket the national programmes and identity globally.

## References

- Ahmad, R.H. (2013). The role of Communication in English in the important of English proficiency and educational attainment of students in Secondary Schools. *Tambari Journal of Education*, FCE Kano pp.23-29
- Cowkings, P and Hankinson, G (1993) *Branding in Action*. Berkshire: McGraw hill.
- Egunjobi, T.O [2000] "Communication and Professional Writing Skills For Planners" Proceedings of Mandatory Continuing Professional Development Programs pp 1-15
- Ismail, L.A. (2013). The Challenges in utilizing information communication Technology (ICT) as institutional materials in English Language: NCE programmes in Focus. *Tambari Journal of Education*, FCE, Kano. pp 58 – 61.
- Ndolo I. K (2002) "Communication and Professional Writing Skills" Proceeding of Mandatory continuing Professional Development pp 1-8
- Nworah, U. (2006) Rebranding Nigeria, "A *Critical Perspectives on the Heart of Africa Image Project*" [http://www.brandchannel.com/papers/reviews.asp?sp\\_id=604](http://www.brandchannel.com/papers/reviews.asp?sp_id=604)Porter and Nelson, H.T. (2005). *Competitive Branding*. Chichester: John Wiley and sons.
- Olusoji, O.A (2012). Effects of English Language on National Development *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* 2(4) PP134-139.
- Rohrlich, P (1983) Towards a unified conception of inter cultural communication an integrated systems approach *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. pp 48 – 59
- Saje U, (2010). Literature as instrument for rebranding Nigeria: Abubakar in Gimba's Trial of Sacrifice as case study. *Huda-Huda, Journal of Languages*, F.C.E Kano pp 26-32.
- Samovar, L. and Porter, R. (1982) *Approaching inter cultural communication in Samovar*. L. and Porter R (eds)
- Shittu, F.M (2010). Effective Intercultural Communication Skills as an Instrument for Rebranding Nigeria. *Huda – Huda Journal of Languages*, FCE Kano pp 91 – 92.