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Effect of Self-Regulation on Corporate Branding in the Food and Beverage Industry in Southeast Nigeria

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Article Information

Keywords:
self-regulation, corporate branding, Quality assurance, Code of ethics, Dispute Resolution, Accreditation standard

Article History

Received: 28 Aug. 2024
Accepted: 30 Sept. 2024
Published: 15 Oct. 2024

Abstract

The main objective of this paper was to examine the effect self regulation and corporate branding among selected firm in food and beverage South East of Nigeria. The research design was survey research design. The population of the study was all the registered food and beverage firms in Nigeria with operational base as South Eastern Nigeria. Available records from Nigeria Directory of statistics show that there are ninety-five (95) registered food and beverage firms in South Eastern Nigeria. The study adopted the total population of the study as the sample size because it was relatively small. Judgmental sampling technique which is a non- probability sampling technique was used in the study because of the nature of the respondents. The source of data for this work was primary. Data was collected through self-administered copies of structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The findings showed that quality assurance systems, codes of ethics, internal and external markets dispute resolution schemes and accreditation standards have significant effects on corporate branding the implication of the result is that organizations must implement compliance strategy such as quality assurance systems, codes of ethics, an effective market dispute resolution scheme and adherence to accreditation standards of corporate operation in corporate operation in order to build corporate brand.

Introduction

Organizations in the same and different industries share a common reputation, as many companies suffer when any lone actor engages in acts that undermine or damage the industries shared reputation (Barnett & King, 2008). As a result, crisis frequently acts as a catalyst for shifts in stakeholders' perceptions of any given industry or industries (Werth, 2019, Behr & Witt, 2002). Concerns about the dependability of other organizations in the same or comparable industries might encourage regulators, suppliers, and the public to revise their ideas about the reliability of other firms in the same or similar industries, leading to broad and

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unjustified conclusions (Werth, 2019, Yu, Sengul, & Lester, 2008). As new public trends influenced by social movement activism influence organizational responses and behavior (Georgallis, 2017; King & Soule, 2007; Reid & Toffel, 2009), crisis causes firms to institute self-regulatory measures (Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006), to reduce the degree to which transgressions by one organization harm others in the same or similar industries let to the introduction of self regulation (Barnett & King, 2008).

According to Mendoza, Dekker and Wielhouwer (2020), Self-regulation broadly refers to the influence that industry actors exert on firm regulatory compliance. Self-regulation refers to the regulation of an industry with the objective of achieving agreed, important goals (Dorbeck-Jung et al. 2010). It is a procedure in which members of an industry, trade, or sector of the economy monitor their own compliance with legal, ethical, or safety norms rather than having an outside, independent body such as a third-party organization or governmental regulator to monitor and enforce those standards. Self-regulation, according to proponents, has substantial advantages over direct government regulation since it is intrinsically more efficient, less expensive, and less complicated (Chang, 2020; Black, 2001). Self-potential regulation's for developing shared values, cultivating a sense of ownership and participation in decision-making, and encouraging voluntary compliance with resulting norms is often highlighted by proponents (Chang, 2020; Omarova, 2010). These self-regulation activities in firms and industries, according to Oko (2014), cover a wide range of issues in advertising, broadcasting and the media, direct marketing, financial services sector; general industry schemes; pharmaceutical and proprietary medicines, professional associations, retail sector schemes; and telecommunication, and are aimed at ensuring quality standard performance for good and acceptable quality services to micro and macro target markets.

In order to capitalize on these advantages, many Nigerian organizations or industries have implemented a variety of self-regulatory measures designed to bring companies practices in line with prevailing public sentiments including corporate compliance and ethical programme, codes of ethics, employee grievance procedures, accreditation standards, quality assurance systems, and informational campaigns (Evan, 2012)which food and beverage industry happens to be part of and these self regulations tend to help these firms and industries create unique characteristics which in turn help the concerned bodies(natural and artificial) in building corporate brand.
The goal of corporate branding is to give an organization its own personality (Rode & Vallaster 2005), hence increasing the company's chances of success in the market. A corporate brand, according to Aaker (2004), is a symbol of an organization that reflects its history, values, culture, people, and strategy. When compared to product branding, corporate branding is a broader word. Corporate brand includes the whole company instead of just the marketing department, and all external stakeholders rather than customers (Gil, 2022). The corporate brand is the heart and soul of the firm thus building it is a holistic process that is planned, strategically focused and fully integrated (Rode & Vallaster 2005). It is also noted that corporate brands are not necessarily limited to the overall organization, but do include corporations, their subsidiaries or groups of companies (Balmer & Gray 2003).

The role of employees is important in creating and maintaining a good corporate reputation in all encounters with external stakeholders (Davies & Chun 2002). These stakeholders in their systematic process of corporate branding create favorable corporate image and maintain brand reputation through interaction within themselves (Chang, Chiang & Han, 2015) and with the help of industrial self regulation, consumer confidence can be enhanced, and the image of businesses be improved.

However, firms in the food and Beverage industries like those in other industries are challenged by environmental problems that call for formal and informal forms of management. In the formal are practices that fall below standard. Those below standards practices have implicit cost effects on customer perception, turnover and loyalty as well as profitability as legal charges for breach of standard is considered high. These cost effect affect corporate image. To manage these negative standards, firms as well as industries adopt the strategy and tool of self regulation. Moreover, Self-regulation is an oft-overlooked mechanism for ensuring the adoption of and adherence to sustainable business practices in Nigeria and it is an important enhancement to government oversight.

Furthermore, scholars have examined the relationship between self-regulation, legal strategy, and the business environment but there has not been a study on the potential of using self-regulatory mechanisms to build corporate brand thus creating knowledge gap on the effect self-regulation on corporate branding. Therefore, this research study was carried out on the effect of self regulation on corporate building (using different dimensions of self-regulation and corporate branding) in food and beverage industry in the South East political zone Nigeria using stakeholder's theory to fill the gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Conceptual framework

Self-Regulation

There are several definitions of self-regulation, but for the purposes of this study, self-regulation refers to a collection of enterprises in a certain industry or an entire industrial sector that agree to act in certain ways based on a set of rules or principles (OECD ,2015). Firms' participation in the organization is frequently optional, but it may also be legally mandated. According to Mendoza, Dekker and Wielhouwer (2020), Self-regulation broadly refers to the influence that industry actors exert on firm regulatory compliance. Self-regulation refers to the regulation of an industry with the objective of achieving agreed, important goals (Dorbeck-Jung et al. 2010). It is a procedure in which members of an industry, trade, or sector of the economy monitor their own compliance with legal, ethical, or safety norms rather than having an outside, independent body such as a third-party organization or governmental regulator to monitor and enforce those standards.

Evan (2012) carried out a study on Self-Regulation topic: Managing the Business Environment through Compliance. This study examined the influence of self-regulatory mechanisms on value creation, results showed that a greater positive relationship exist between improved public image and compliance programs. According to Augustine, Osagie and Oghenero (2015) adoption of a business ethical code of conduct and employee adherence to laws and regulations boosts corporate growth and, as a result, improves corporate image also Andrade, Hamza, and Xara-Brasil (2017) discovered that codes of ethics provide tools to help an organization and its people avoid or resolve morally troubling issues that could harm the company's reputation. The Impact of Workplace Conflict Management on Organizational Performance: A Case of a Nigerian Manufacturing Firm was the topic of Olukayode (2015). A descriptive research design was used in this study. The empirical tests revealed a significant positive link between conflict management tactics (collective bargaining, compromise, and accommodation) and organizational performance. On the other hand, Augustine, Osagie and Oghenero (2015) stated that there is no correlation between corporate growth and compliance with rules and regulations, also Oko and Ogwo (2014) investigated the relationship between the quality of self-regulation in service industry firms and the quality of corporate output and discovered that there is no linear relationship between standard of self-regulation and quality output of services.

Despite the studies that have been found to analyze the impact of self-regulation, legal strategy, and the business environment limited studies have been found related to the effect self-regulation mechanisms on corporate branding. Therefore, this research study was carried out on the effect of self regulation on corporate building (using different dimensions of self-regulation and corporate branding) in food and beverage industry in the South East political. Also based on argument on the above reviewed literature, we propose the research hypothesis thus:

> *$H0_1$: There is no significant effect of self regulation (quality assurance systems, codes of ethics, dispute resolution scheme and accreditation standards) on corporate branding in the Food and Beverage Industry in Southeast Nigeria.*

Self-regulatory measures is categorized into corporate compliance and ethical programme, codes of ethics, employee grievance procedures, accreditation standards, quality assurance systems, and informational campaigns according to Evan (2012), but in the context of this study self-regulatory (SR) measures was decomposed into quality assurance systems, codes of ethics, dispute resolution scheme and accreditation standards.

Thus, the following hypothesis as shown in **Fig 1** are developed to test the impact of each SR dimensions on corporate branding.

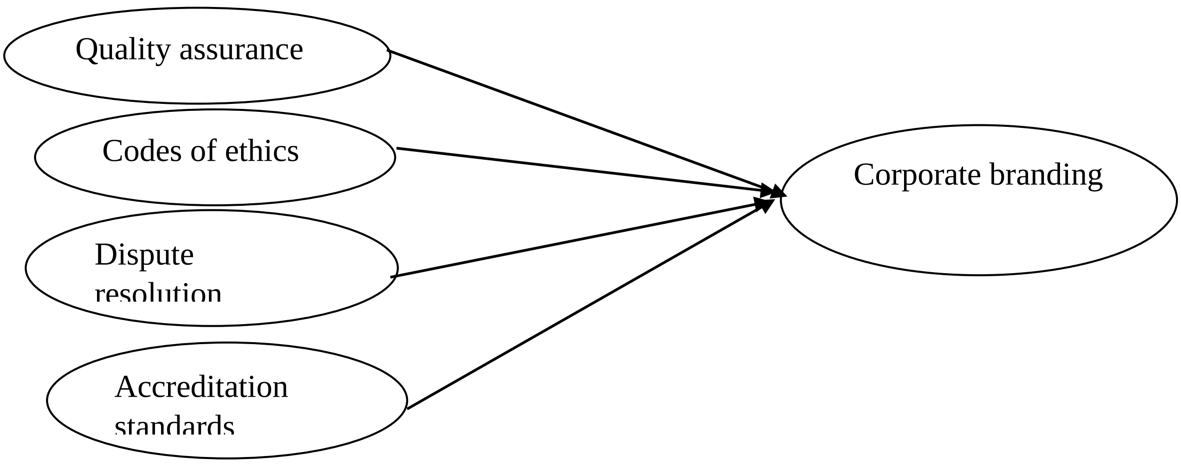

Fig.1 Research Framework

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is described as the systematic and deliberate prevention of quality problems, with a focus on systems and procedures rather than outputs or outcomes (Kishu, 2016). Quality assurance, according to Oko (2014), entails the establishment and maintenance of industrially acceptable quality standards in the acquisition of human and material inputs, guaranteeing that providers and supplies meet stated quality specifications and descriptions. As a result, quality assurance attempts to attain and ensure quality by implementing cost-effective quality control systems and conducting external inspections and audits (Obadara and Alaka, 2013). Quality control establishes a standard, which, when followed, is regarded as self-regulation, thereby enhancing a company's image. When done correctly, quality assurance can help companies develop the trust, personality, and integrity they want and require with their customers (http://www.m-inc.com, 2018). When quality assurance is followed through, it prioritizes trust (that is, it stamps dependability and credibility on the company in a way that distinguishes it from competitors), it conveys personality, and it gives the company image a spine (that is, it states what the identity is and what company is about rather than shovelling features and affordances that buyers rapidly muffle).

Codes of Ethics

A code of ethics, also known as an ethical code or a code of conduct, is a set of principles that drive an organization's activities, policies, and commercial decisions (Chandrashekhar and Mahavir, 2017). It (the company's code of ethics) outlines the company's values, ethics, goals, and duties (Singh and Prasad, 2017). The code of ethics is a set of behavioral guidelines that employees should adhere to in order to protect the company's reputation (Chandrashekhar and Mahavir, 2017). Regardless of the company's size, well defined codes and closely monitored transactions should keep it from breaking the law and make it a place where employees feel safe doing the right thing (Chandrashekhar and Mahavir, 2017). Employees are guided on how to deal with particular ethical issues by a well-written code of ethics (Chandrashekhar and Mahavir, 2017). Every code of ethics is unique, and it should reflect the culture, values, and business style of the firm (Chandrashekhar and Mahavir, 2017). A code of ethics is a structured means to communicate and establish reputation with both internal and external audiences. It can be defined as a committed effort and a communication action used to establish an image in a broad sense (Andrade, Hamza and Xara-Brasil, 2017). A code of ethics improves a company's reputation and image (Caracsco & Singh, 2003). From an internal corporate perspective, establishing a code can be viewed as an attempt to institutionalize the company founders' morals and values in such a way that they become part of the corporate culture and aid in the socialization of new employees (Adams, Tashchian and Shore 2001).

Dispute Resolution

The tactics and activities involved in aiding the peaceful resolution of disputes and retaliation are referred to as dispute resolution (Wikipedia, 2019). It refers to both containment (dispute management) and resolution (dispute resolution) techniques and approaches (Thakore, 2016). Committed group members try to settle group conflicts by actively communicating information to the rest of the group about their opposing motives or ideologies (intentions; reasons for having specific beliefs) and engaging in collective negotiation (Forsyth, 2009). Finally, there are a variety of ways and procedures for resolving conflict, including negotiation, mediation, mediation-arbitration, diplomacy, and creative peace building (wisegeek, 2016); nevertheless, the effective use of these methods is dependent on the individual and organizational condition. When a good conflict resolution strategy is applied, it improves business productivity and organizational performance (Olukayode, 2015): It allows business owners to work through complicated challenges without fear of harming their brand or reputation (Winghart,2019), it aids in the organization's mission and goal, and it aids in the maintenance of the organization's mission and goal (Winghart,2019).

Accreditation Standards

Standards specify how items, processes, and people interact with one another and with their surroundings (ISO,2017). It establishes rules, specifications, norms, or qualities that may be applied consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes, and services are appropriate for their intended use (ISO,2017). In essence, a standard is a set of agreed-upon procedures. Standards provide a stable foundation for setting shared expectations, whether that "something" is producing an item, delivering a service, or managing a process. As a result, standards have become a cornerstone of economies all across the world, decreasing risk while also boosting consumer protection. As industries embrace a more global perspective, the requirement for standards that are consistent across different markets becomes increasingly important. However, in order for a standard to be considered effective, it must be simple to determine whether a product or process complies with the standard. The conformity assessment process determines if a product or system satisfies the required requirements. Inspection bodies (the examination of a design, product, service, process, or installation to guarantee operational safety) and bodies that certify management systems, products, and personnel are all examples of conformity assessment bodies (CABs).

Accreditation, on the other hand, is a strong, independent affirmation of an organization's competence, the validity and suitability of its procedures, the appropriateness of its equipment and facilities, and ongoing assurance through internal quality control that is internationally recognized. An accreditation body's (AB) job is to ensure that CABs are qualified. Simply put, if CABs are the checkers, ABs are the checkers' checkers. One of the key strengths of a quality infrastructure is that it can be applied to almost any industry sector and business situation, from food safety and product testing to environmental impact and construction. There are thousands of distinct standards and tests that are currently accredited. Accreditation is a legal obligation in some areas, but for the most part, the adoption of "voluntary standards " is becoming the norm. Typically, voluntary stand the implementation of standards through an accreditation program increased views of teamwork and decision-making participation (Salmon, Heavens, Lombard and Tavrow 2003). In order to understand what the company's beliefs and vision are, identity is becoming increasingly vital. Identity is the foundation for a wide range of interconnected ideas, including brand identity, corporate identity, and organizational identity

(Buil, Catalán, and Martnez, 2014, citing Currás, 2010). Each corporation's identity is held internally and is distinct (Sorensen, 2011). As a result, requiring compliance with accreditation (standard) as a minimum requirement for food and beverage products provides a significant competitive advantage, and when goods are produced and certified in accordance with accreditation (standard), corporate image is enhanced, preventing external bodies from regulating the firm

Corporate Branding

The concept of corporate branding is growing more complex and hazier because of a plethora of studies available. According to Gil (2022), corporate branding is the image of an organization that reflects its history, values, culture, people, and strategy. According to Othmam (2022), corporate branding is the act of branding of a corporate body. Corporate branding helps firms to target most suitable segment of their product for their promotions and marketing (Othmam, 2022). Corporate branding is perfectly suited as a strategic source of growth and sustainability, as well as a competitive advantage for many stakeholders (Urde, 2013). Companies begin with a series of activities that may be considered as the process of corporate brand building in order to build favorable associations and reputation with all stakeholders. Balmer and Gray (2003), on the other hand, provide a comprehensive definition of the corporate brand concept. Corporate branding, according to them, is defined as communicating fundamental values through various market differentiation techniques and approaches to positively affect stakeholders. Corporate branding is also defined as a systematic procedure used by a company to build a positive brand image and preserve its reputation by interacting with internal and external stakeholders (Chang, Chiang & Han, 2015). The process of building, fostering, and maintaining a mutually gratifying connection between a firm and its internal and external stakeholders is known as corporate branding (Raj and Choudhary, 2008). "Corporate branding refers to how a company expresses its identity" (Kazi, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was reviewed in this study. When making decisions to optimize value, managers should consider the interests of all stakeholders, according to stakeholder theory (Jensen, 2001). When an organization carefully considers the interests of its stakeholders as well as its own, it will be able to maximize value for itself and society. Employees, customers, owners, and investors, as well as the public, are all stakeholders (Jensen, 2001). Employees expect the company to create a safe working environment, provide adequate training for their employment, pay a fair wage or salary, provide fringe benefits, and provide after-work perks that will help them retire comfortably. Customers want reasonable rates, high-quality goods and services, and courteous and helpful service. Owners and investors who have committed their time and resources to ensuring the business's success want a return on their investment. To run successfully, the business must integrate and reconcile the needs of its stakeholders with the needs of the organization (Enikanselu, 2008).

The stakeholder hypothesis (Freeman, Wicks and Parmar 2004) assumes that values are an integral component of doing business, and asserts that ethics and, more specifically, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), are mutually exclusive. Stakeholder theory, according to Freeman (1984), is primarily a normative theory with instrumental and descriptive components. It instructs managers and organizations on how to respect stakeholders' interests in a moral and appropriate manner in order to keep the firm healthy and prosperous throughout time. The stakeholder theory is based on the ideology that all stakeholders participating in an enterprise do so to obtain benefits and no set of interests and benefits take priority over the other. Self regulation organizations collaborate with stakeholders, including those representing consumer and public interest. These stakeholders participate in self regulator process such as helping to craft rules and monitoring compliance. As a result, Self regulation organizations may address concerns beyond the narrow self-interest of the industry such as to protect workers, consumers, or another stakeholder. However, employees, shareholders, regulators, the community, suppliers, and customers are all target audiences for corporate brands. Studies show that self-regulation can decrease, quell, or even reverse growing public support for official legislative, regulatory, or judicial interference in business matters, given that corporate brand building promotes corporate image construction through self-regulation (Peterson, 2012). Public acceptance of legal changes may be harmed by self-regulatory measures (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2003). Because self-regulation represents actual implementation of compliance measures, it is more likely to result in less stringent government regulation and improved business image (Peterson, 2012). Compliance programs, for example, include the benefits of a code of ethics by building processes to implement that code by mandating standards and procedures meant to avoid illegal conduct.

Finally, this theory was chosen because it is distinctive that is, it explain and guide the structure and operation of the corporation. The stakeholder theory views the firm as an entity through which diverse participants achieve multiple goals which leads to the positive corporate image, protecting corporate value and manage company reputation.

Methodology

The research design was survey research design. Survey research design was chosen because it allows us to describe the characteristics of a large population which no other research method can provide this broad capability which ensures a more accurate sample to gather targeted results in which to draw conclusions and make important decisions (Kendra, 2020 and Ponto, 2015), it also allows us to investigate, describe, and record information in their natural setting.

The study area was in South East of Nigeria. South East of Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones in the country. The region consists of the following states; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. South East was studied because majority of food and beverage processing firms are located here. This opportunity created some convenience for researcher to collect data accurately by deriving a proportionate sample from such big population.

The population of the study was all the registered food and beverage firms in Nigeria with operational base as South Eastern Nigeria. Available records from Nigeria Directory of statistics show that there are ninety-five (95) registered food and beverage firms in South Eastern Nigeria.

Since the population is known and relatively small, the researcher made use of the whole population for sample size. According to Kalu, Unachukwu and Ibiam (2018), a researcher can adopt the total population when it is relatively small to serve as a sample size. Hence, the study adopted the total population of the study which is 95 as the sample size.

On sampling technique, judgmental sampling technique was used. Hence, the head of legal/compliance department from each of the firm was our respondents. Judgmental sampling technique was used because the head of legal/compliance department are in the place to give a suitable answer regarding to the phenomenon in question making it possible in collecting reliable data quickly from the respondents.

The source of data for this work was primary. Hence, questionnaire schedule was used. Questionnaire was used to generate information. Data was collected through self administered copies of structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two (2) questions relating to dimensions of self regulation (such as: quality assurance systems, codes of ethics, dispute resolution scheme and accreditation standards) and questions relating to corporate brand building (as adapted from literature. The questionnaire was structured based on a five-point likert scale ranging order from 1 – Neutral; 2 – Small Extent; 3 – Medium Extent; 4 – Large Extent; and 5 – Very Large Extent. A focused questionnaire about self-regulatory practices adopted by the companies was sent to the legal/compliance department of each firm but in a situation where a particular company does not have legal/compliance department, the questionnaire was given to the Managing Director.

Contents validity was used, the questionnaire was given to experts in the field of marketing to ascertain whether or not the items on the questionnaire are related to the objectives and to find out if the contents of questionnaire cover all the intended dimensions of the research. The validity exercise also helped in eliminating questions that are not necessary. In response to this, modifications and adjustments were made.

To analyze the data, multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data.
This test is analyzed using the multiple regression statistical model shown as equation thus:
Y1
CB =F(SR)
CB =F(QAS,CE,DRS,AS) ------------------- Implicit function
$CB= \beta_0+ \beta_1X_1+ \beta_2X_2+ \beta_3X_3+ \beta_4X_4 +e$

$CB= \beta_0+ \beta_1 QAS + \beta_2 CE+ \beta_3 DRS + \beta_4 AS +e$ -------Explicitly function

Where:

β_0= represents the intercept; β_1-β_4= represent coefficients of regression model
e = represents the error term; CB= corporate branding; $X_{1=}$ Quality Assurance System (QAS); $X_{2=}$ Codes of Ethics (CE); $X_{3=}$ Dispute Resolution Scheme (DRS); $X_{4=}$ Accreditation Standards (AS).

For this research work, the decision rule was to reject null hypothesis if the P-value is less than 0.05, w and accept the alternate hypothesis, but where P-value is greater than 0.05, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternate hypothesis. Furthermore, Durbin Weston was used to test for autocorrelation in the study. The acceptable threshold is that the value must be close to two.

Given this, the analysis is based on data in table 2 below:

Table 1 Responses on Self Regulation standards on Multiple Variables = 73

	Basis of evaluation	VLE	LE	ME	SE	N	% of agreement
	Quality assurance scheme						
1	Quality expectation and corporate Innovativeness.	20 (27.5)	35 (47.5)	11 (15.2)	5 (6.1)	2 (3,7)	75.0
2	Organizational standard and corporate value centricity	17 (23.4)	27 (36.9)	16 (22.1)	9 (11.9)	4 (5.7)	60.2
3	Operational variables and corporate Creativity	18 (24.6)	31 (42.2)	6 (8.6)	14 (18.4)	4 (6.1)	66.8
4	Tactical variables and corporate Efficiency	15 (20.1)	29 (38.9)	10 (12.3)	15 (20.1)	4 (8.6)	59.0
5	Technical variables in corporate Competency	5 (6.1)	20 (27.9)	3 (4.1)	30 (40.6)	15 (21.3)	34.0
	Code of ethics						
6	Adherence to beneficence and corporate integrity	9 (12.3)	18 (25.0)	18 (24.6)	19 (25.8)	9 (12.3)	37.3
7	Compliance to non-maleficent and Partnership	14 (19.7)	16 (22.1)	10 (13.5)	26 (35.7)	7 (9)	31.1
8	Compliance to procedure justice and corporate diversity	9 (12.3)	18 (25.0)	18 (24.6)	19 (25.8)	7 (12.3)	37.3
9	Compliance to social justice and corporate Idealism	14 (19.7)	16 (22.1)	10 (13.5)	26 (35.7)	7 (9.0)	31.1
10	Compliance to veracity and corporate Honesty	13 (17.6)	24 (33.2)	10 (13.9)	16 (22.1)	10 (13.1)	50.8
	Dispute Resolution						
11	Negotiation and industrial relevance	10 (13.9)	24 (52.4)	27 (37.3)	8 (11.1)	4 (5.3)	46.3
12	Mediation and corporate collaboration	18 (24.6)	31 (42.2)	6 (8.6)	14 (8.4)	4 (6.1)	66.8
13	Arbitration and inter firm functionality	29 (20.1)	9 (38.9)	15 (12.3)	6 (20.1)	9 (12.3)	59.0
14	Facilitation and position differentiation	20 (27.2)	36 (49.6)	6 (8.6)	8 (10.3)	3 (12.3)	77.5
15	Expert determination and functional publicity	13 (17.2)	19 (26.2)	9 (12.3)	15 (20.1)	18 (24.2)	43.4
	Accreditation standard						
16	Holistic, integrated and preventive accreditation standards and corporate desig	16 (21.7)	23 (30.7)	18 (24.2)	8 (11.1)	9 (12.3)	52.5
17	Food control, shared responsibility and corporate culture	26 (35.7)	22 (45.9)	6 (8.6)	14 (18.4)	5 (6.1)	81.6
18	Prioritizing activities risk analysis and corporate communication	18 (24.6)	23 (31.1)	9 (12.7)	13 (17.6)	10 (13.9)	55.7
19	Product development standards and Corporate behavior	22 (30.3)	27 (36.5)	10 (13.9)	7 (9.43)	7 (9.43)	66.8
20	Voluntary standards, product information and corporate communication	17 (23.8)	10 (13.9)	4 (5.3)	26 (35.6)	17 (21.3)	37.7

Source: Field Survey 2024.

Table 1 shows the responses on self regulation standards on multiple variables of quality assurance and corporate personality, codes of ethics and core value, dispute resolution schemes and corporate brand positioning and accreditation standards and corporate identity. Most of the constructs measuring quality assurance were significant; operational variables scored (66.8%) and tactical variable (59.0%). It is observed that compliance to procedural justice scored (50.8%) that is considered low; compliance to social justice recorded (46.3%). This is also low. In the same vein, technical variables do not show great importance in self regulation, as most members of the target market do not notice these technical variables issues questions on the effect of the sub variables of (34.0%) in corporate operations. Procedural justice has implicit score (37.3%) while social justice also showed negative value of (31.1%).

Mediation as variable in dispute resolution schemes is valued high at (66.8%) as well as expert determination at (77.5%), holistic, integrated and preventive variables of accreditation standards were also considered high at (52.5%), food control, shared responsibilities and corporate culture were rated at (81.6%). It is important to note that voluntary standards do not attract the relevance in most firms, as studied thus scored (37.7%).

To test for the effect of the multivariables of quality assurance, code of ethics, dispute resolution schemes and accreditation standards on self regulation systems, the multiple regression is given in table 3 below:

Table 2: Effect of Self Regulation on corporate branding

Variable	Beta Estimate	Std. Error	T	Significant	Remark
(Constant)	21.590	4.976	4.864	.000	
Quality Assurance	.246	.081	2.220	.007	significant
Codes of Ethics	.224	080	2.124	.006	significant
Dispute Resolution	.272	.048	2.120	.001	significant
Accreditation Standards	.182	.082	2.220	.007	significant
R	.867				
R^2	.758				
Adjusted R_2	.684				
Standard Error	1.672				
D –watson F-value	1.842				

Dependent variable (corporate branding)

The main objective of this paper was to examine the effect self regulation and corporate branding among selected firm in food and beverage South East of Nigeria. Quality assurance, codes of ethics, dispute resolution and accreditation standards were used as components of the independent variable (self regulation) to examine the effect self regulation and corporate branding. From the regression equation CB= β_0+ β_1 QAS + β_2 CE+ β_3 DRS + β_4 AS +e, we substituted the functional notations with their respective values gives the model summary as;
CB=21.590+ .246(QAS) + .224(CE) + .272(DRS) + .182(AS).

The β_0 which is the intercept of the regression is 21.590 implying that if the various independent variables are held constant at zero, the corporate branding will be 21.590. Thus, result of the analysis on table 2 above showed that Quality Assurance has a positive and significant effect on corporate branding with (β=.246. t= 2.220, $p<0.005$);

Codes of Ethics has a positive and significant effect on corporate branding with (β=.224, t= 2.124, p<0.005); Dispute Resolution has a positive and significant effect on corporate branding with (β=.272, t= 2.120, p<0.005) and Accreditation Standards has a positive and significant effect on corporate branding with (β= .182, t= 2.220, p<0.005). It implies that the self regulation has a significant positive impact on corporate branding. The adjusted R^2 is 0.758, this means that 75.8% of the change in acceptance of self regulation systems among firms in the food and beverage industry in South East Nigeria is explained by the listed variables inclusive of quality assurance, codes of ethics, dispute resolution and accreditation of standards, hence a lean 24.2% is unexplained which can be attributed to the error term. By implication, there are other factors that significantly determine corporate branding other than the factors highlighted. However, the four dimensions of self regulation systems: were significant predictors of self regulation systems and they have significant effect of corporate branding. Given this analysis, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, hence the accepted assertion is that self regulation systems have significant effect on corporate branding among firms in the food and beverage industry in South East states of Nigeria. Furthermore, Durbin Weston was used to test for autocorrelation in the study. The Durbin Weston value according to the result is 1.842. The acceptable threshold is that the value must be close to two. In this study, the value is close to two. The overall fit of the model is acceptable at F-statistic level of 44.842. This is significant at 5% critical level. This is shown as correct based on the result of the regression statistic.

Discussion of findings

The work measured the cumulative effect of quality standards of self regulation and corporate banding among selected firms in the food and beverage industry in South East Nigeria. Quality assurance systems have reasonable and significant effect on corporate branding. Thus, quality assurance systems as internal check variable in most firms' operations have reasonable and significant check on corporate operations, hence, significantly contributes to the building of corporate branding of firms as observed among firms in the food and beverage industry South East Nigeria. This implies that an increase in the level of adoption of quality assurance systems results in increase in the selected firms' corporate branding. Quality assurance system as adopted among Nigeria firms in the food and beverage industry involves expected output based on innovativeness, value centricity, corporate creativity, efficiency, and competency as anchored on organizational standards, operational guide, tactical adjustments and technical viability. This result is in line with the works of Loff & Crammand (2010). They reported that quality assurance systems are part of self reputation programmes of firms that ensure corporate survival, goodwill building and sustenance. These are vital for personality building and maintenance. Quality assurance systems of firms as integral of self regulation systems is expected to be based on practices that protect business interests but not at the expense of consumers' interests (Sharma, Teret & Brownell, 2010; Wilde 2009). The desire to be quality assurance biased as a motivation involves the combination of various public relations threats and concerns for litigation exposure as well as legislative and regulatory actions that have direct and explicit impact on sales (Septh, 2008). Hence, to avoid attacks for the production and promotion of harmful, dangerous, or exploitative products and or practices, in the face of negative public attitudes, firms as a regulatory tendency are conscious of the quality of input based on well planned quality assurance systems.

The quality assurance systems are adopted to lower the threat of negative outcomes as this has the propensity of building trust on the firms and their offer (Rayner, Scarborough, and Kaur,2013). The cumulative effect of quality assurance systems as adopted by firms causes increase in corporate and brand personalities. Personality as the distinguishing features of a person natural or artificial is vital for corporate survival (Reeve and Magnusson, 2013) especially in the competitive food and beverage industry in Nigeria. Because of this, most of the firms in the food and beverage industry in Nigeria spend many resources in ensuring high level of quality of input based on well planned and executed quality assurance programmes that are systems based. This allows for inter and intra departmental checks, monitoring and supervision of personnel based on well articulated mapping of responsibilities.

In the area of codes of ethics, the codes of ethics thought not significantly valued among firms in the food and beverage industry South East Nigeria also have significant effect on corporate branding. This implies that Nigerian firms in the food and beverage industry show adherence to beneficence activities, compliance to non-maleficent activities, respect for procedural justice as well as social justice as bases for veracity and corporate honesty. This result is in line with the work of Montgomery and Jeff (2014) who reported that codes of ethics have significant relationship with corporate core values and that adopting codes of ethics for core value creation among firms as permissive by government has associated risk especially when promises are not fulfilled given weak industrial standards or ineffective enforcement of same, allowing companies to continue to serve self interests as the expense of consumers. This is however relative to the backgrounds and philosophies of ownership of the firms. This as a self regulatory policy input is advocated for as it conserves government resources as it is less adversarial, more flexible, timelier than government regulation (Federal Trade Commission Self-Regulation ,2008). Codes of ethics guide internal operations of the firms as markets as well as the relationship between the internal and external markets, hence, are vital for core value creation, development, and sustenance (Brownell and Warner ,2009). Codes of ethics are required for the coordination and sustenance of existing and existence of industrial trade associations, production systems as keys for relationship with other organizations especially in the areas of supply and for vertical integration within the industry (National Wildlife Federation, 2008). It is also vital for the attraction of industrial players, as such firms perceive it as an economic benefit especially as it improves market incentives given the management of threats of intensified boycotts as deterrents to resisting certification and strengthened market benefits as rewards for undertaking certification (Cashore, Auld & Newson ,2004; Cashore, Auld, Bernstein & McDermott 2007 and Steelman & Rivera ,2006). The values created based on codes of ethics are vital for the creation of goodwill and corporate reputation as considered the implicit value of the firms as going concern.

Codes of ethics as adopted by firms in the food and beverage industry South East Nigeria are vital as compliance with and adequate stringencies that are incorporated in public reporting, hence, are considered programmes of relevance in the management of activities of rival industries. The introduction of a code of ethics helps build a value-driven organization, according to the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) 2007 (as cited by Augustine, Osagie, and Oghenero, 2015), and typically deals with an organization's underlying values, commitment to ethical behaviour, and so on. Furthermore, according to McMurran and Matulich (2006) (as cited by Augustine, Osagie, and Oghenero, 2015), business ethics contribute to profitability by lowering transaction costs, establishing a foundation of trust with stakeholders, fostering an internal environment of successful teamwork, and maintaining social capital that is part of an organization's marketplace image. The reduction of fraud, corruption, theft, and mishandling of employee funds can also be considered as a benefit of a code of ethics (Augustine, Osagie and Oghenero, 2015). These ethical difficulties generate norms that the organization maintains as regulatory policy, which may or may not necessitate external regulation if the policy is deemed to be in line with macro-society structure.

Dispute resolution schemes have reasonable and significant effect on corporate branding; hence, the management of the internal market conflicts contributes to the satisfaction generated given services to the external market. Thus, the success achieved by schemes and systems of internal and external markets disputes resolution generate significant effect on corporate branding among firms in the food and beverage industry in the South East Nigeria.

This implies that firms in the food and beverage industry South East Nigeria adopted the strategies and principles of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, facilitation and the use of expert advice. These contributed significantly to the positioning of the firms and their products as acceptable personalities and brands respectively. Dispute management is vital for the management of the diversity in fundamental activities of exchange and transaction relationships in respect of acquisition of human and material resources, size of workforce, workers' future, age of workforce, future jobs and workforce qualifications among others. These resolution techniques are expected to achieve competitive advantage through the different diversities.

Dispute management techniques as adopted aided the selected firms as studied fulfil social responsibilities; attract, retain and motivate employees and other stakeholders; gain greater knowledge of the diversified marketplace; promote creativity, innovation and problem-solving skills and ability; and enhance organizational flexibility, as are vital for positioning and re-positioning of the firms and their offers. It is important to note that these dispute management activities did not achieve optimized results, as the Nigeria business environment is besieged with challenges inclusive of low level of personnel motivation and cohesiveness, communication barriers, mistrust and tension as observed management and labour force stereotype behaviours. Dispute resolution is considered relevant in the food and beverage industry especially in the South East Nigeria given the intra regional cultural value variations associated with the environment, self and individual and group specified societies (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2001).

The management of these cultural variations as part of internal and external markets dispute management schemes have significant impact on customer/consumer behaviour given that environmental values are relevant in problem solving, risk-taking and bearing and performance assessment, self oriented values related to the management of credit platform of exchange and transaction relationships as well as gratifications associated with exchange and transaction (Hawkins, Best & Coney ,2001).

Poor dispute management results to dissonance as well as factor disposition situation (Hawkins, Best & Coney ,2001), hence takes any or a combination of dis-satisfaction actions such as complaining, stopping of patronage, warning of associates and friends, complaining to private or public sector organizations or initiation of legal actions. These lines of actions are capable of generating dysfunctional publicity for the firms in the food and beverage industry in South East Nigeria; and where no action is taken, the less favourable attitude of the target market may often cause decline in sales value and volume (Oko ,2016).

Accreditation standards were seen to have significant effect on corporate branding. These standards are holistically, integrative and preventive in application; hence these as standards affect corporate market offer design. Responsibilities intra firm were shared among internal stakeholders, thus made for effective control principles in quality and standards of food items produced. Management equally gave recognition to the issues of situation analysis for the reduction and or elimination of uncertainty of future events. This was based on whether or not more exact information would be useful in arriving at decisions and whether or not specific items of investment decision should be rigorously controlled after a strategic decision must have been taken. These responsibilities sharing virtue is considered vital as it ensures that the individual units' operational objectives are achieved as related to common goal of self regulation (Appleby ,1981). Management, as part of internal responsibilities sharing activities ensured that acceptable level of intra and inter departmental communication was achieved.

Product development standards were adhered to as this was considered part of corporate behaviour. Standard as the process of obtaining agreement or result showed relationship with products, as range of products and procedures were integrated harmoniously for goal actualization. They were standards of performances, testing, method of manufacture in composition and dimensions (Agbonifoh, Ogwo, Nnolim & Nkamnebe ,2007). These standards facilitated interchange ability between parts (units) of the firms and reduced cost of operations. In –applicable standards among the firms were avoided.

Firms in the food and beverage industry in South East Nigeria were found to have been adopting voluntary standards as additional check and self regulatory policies as behaviours and activities that the firms found desirable and considered value dictated by the business environments. These were vital to enhanced brand identity of corporate offer. Given these, most of these firms developed and sustained various means of communicating with members of their internal markets as well as other stakeholders for idea generation and exchange of knowledge as well as for functional publicity creation (Oko, 2014). Product development standards are practiced among these firms recognized the importance customers/consumers attached to key attributes of offers as means of providing meaningful way to understanding needs thus, formed benefit segments. The ideal level of performance indicates the consumers' desired level of performance in the satisfaction of these needs. The ideal level of product performance as standard based, provides valuable guideline in the development of new products or the reformulation of existing products. The firms also adopt product standards for the creation of product concepts that relatively match the ideal profile. These concepts when translated into an actual products, aided the definition of corporate behaviour as acceptable by the market. Firms in the food and beverage industry South East Nigeria given the adopted product concepts as guided by standards generate information that corporate management further improves on for actual product and for the alignment of actual performance with ideal level of performance prior to market introduction or re-introduction of offer (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2001). The articulation of accreditation standards cumulatively aids corporate internal brand identity, hence aids self regulation efforts of the firms for corporate branding.

These listed sub-variables of self regulation systems show significant effect on corporate branding. These, as adopted among selected firms as studied are vital for positioning firms in the food and beverage industry. The implication of the result is that organizations must implement compliance strategy such as quality assurance systems, codes of ethics, an effective market dispute resolution scheme and adherence to accreditation standards of corporate operation in corporate operation to build corporate brand.

Conclusion

The food and beverage industry in South East Nigeria is experiencing acceptable growth and development in the adoption of the principles and systems of self regulation in the building and sustenance of corporate brand and branding. This is sequel to the adoption of quality assurance systems, internal and external markets conflict resolution (management) schemes, codes of ethics, as well as accreditation standards.

It is however important to note that substantial limitations exist in the process of administering, monitoring, and enforcing the existing codes of ethics as well as paucity in the adoption of standards of practices especially in the area of voluntary standards. This is based on the existence of variances in sub-cultural variables of the society as well as variances in corporate ownership and management business philosophies.

In the face of these, the study recommends among others, the adoption of specific and general approaches to enlisting cooperation among members of the industry based on good quality industrial leadership. These approaches include education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation and cooptation as well as explicit and implicit coercion.

This must however recognize the associated advantage and drawbacks of these cooperation enlistment strategies given the desire to optimize their benefits to the advantage of the target markets.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

For the food and beverage industry in the South East Nigeria to achieve the objective of corporate branding through the instrumentality of self regulation systems.

Quality has to remain a trademark of firm products as a source of competitive advantage not just on the end products a company produces; but also on how company employees do their jobs and the work processes they use to create products or services.

In setting codes of ethics, the management should ensure that codes developed are flexible enough to adjust to inhospitable regulatory environments and also codes as introduced are expected to be based on realism rather than idealism, hence must have manageable moderating variables.
The management should always maintain a good dispute management in order to avoid dissonance as well as factor disposition situation
The management should always ensure that their product or process complies with the standard (that is whether it satisfies the required requirements).
Industrial players are expected to establish a flow (level) mark for self regulation standards. This refers to the minimum conditions firms must attain to earn

membership of the industry. These minimum standards are capable of aiding players in the industry as firms earn trust for the self regulatory efforts.

The government/ policy makers or regulatory agencies have to formulate food and beverage friendly policies that may help or boost the growth of the industry and economy at large. Nigeria boasts of the largest economy and largest market in Africa and as such these policies may assist the country maintain its position as the largest economy in Africa.

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