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Brand-Building: Its challenges in the Non-Traditional Exports (NTEs) Sector in Ghana

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Abstract:
Brand-building in SMEs is an area of study in its infancy. However, considering how literature has been published about branding in general, all theories and studies are based on large firms.
The purpose: This paper proposes exploring understanding of branding practices among SMEs in the NTEs and the possible challenges they face in their attempt to brand in this competitive marketing environment.
Design/methodology: A qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews with six (6) SMEs in the NTEs was undertaken. Striking results were obtained from this exploratory study.
The findings: The study found that SMEs in the NTEs have a shallow understanding of brand building; used at least two brand elements with the brand name, logo and symbol dominating.
The study also revealed that limited understanding of brand-building; difficulty in getting sufficient funding; general slowness and time related challenges; operational-level challenges in marketing communications campaigns; and the increasing costs of new product introduction are the challenges facing SMEs in the NTEs. Other notable challenges emerged out of the study were lack of technical expertise among SMEs; difficulty in obtaining a patent right; the proliferation of brands in the market place; and the pronounced economic crisis.
Research limitation: The findings of the study is limited to only NTEs in the manufacturing sector in Ghana and may not be necessarily projected on to SMEs in other sectors of the Non-Traditional Exports in Ghana and hence the sample size is relatively small.
Practical implication: The directors of NTEs see branding as something that belongs to only the big companies. However small companies (NTEs) with limited resources are not restricted to branding and therefore can brand their products or services as well. Also, the means of brand ignore often different. The current study encourages SMEs in the NTEs to systematically think of the potential benefit of branding for their business and develop innovative, targeted and affordable approaches for brand- building in their respective firms.
Originality/value: The recent empirical study makes an original contribution to the existing literature by augmenting knowledge of branding in the context of SMEs in the NTEs sector.

Keywords: Brand-building, small and medium enterprises, non-traditional exports, challenges of brand-building

1. Introduction

Brand-building is a moderately new area of study, and one in which real interest was shown only during the final decade of the last century. This was also the time when the most important theories were formulated and the most valuable literature produced. However, what is outstanding is that attention was focused on only large and multinational companies. So it was only these companies (large and multinational) that theories were based on and about which the articles were also written and developed. Interestingly, any marketing management book basically open at random is a good bet that you will find Coca Cola, Nike, Levis, Sony, Philips, Panasonic, Unilever, Shell etc used as the practical examples.

This completely ignores the fact that at least 95% of all businesses belong to the small and medium-scale enterprise (SME) group (Storey, 1994), just as it also neglects the fact that in the Advanced countries such as USA, small businesses have shown the way for the big ones(Thurik, et al, 2003). This indeed is something rarely mentioned in business literature. The bottom line is that, when brand-building is discussed in books and journals, SMEs are often left out as a separate entity. Nevertheless, everyone is fully aware of the stories about a comparatively small business that knew how to build a popular brand. The question usually asked is that, how long does such a business remain a "small business"? Brands such as Microsoft, Philips and Nike all started as small businesses and have now grown into worldwide brands. It is imperative to note that Philip Knight, the founder of Nike, began working in his spare time in his garage and had to stretch every cent he owned as far as it would be appropriate.

In order to achieve the objective of the Economic Recovery Program in 1993, the government of Ghana has subsequently stepped out a modality to assist in the development and improvement of the Non-traditional export sector;

called the Non-traditional Export Strategy in 2012 (MOTI,2012). Also, in the context of vision 2020, the government expects that total revenue by the year2020 should be in the region of about US$ 60 billion, and non-traditional exports alone should be contributing about US$ 12 billion of the total amount in that same year. It is important to note that most of these NTEs in Ghana are made up of Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs) (MOTI, 2012) and hence, are used in place of firms in NTEs. However, global development characterized by the growing internationalization of small firms and competitive environmental forces; is increasingly driving these NTEs in adopting new based strategies and business practices in order to survive. According to Davis and Spekman (2004), one important way to maintain and sustain the competitiveness of firms is to adopt the concept of branding. Branding provides a differentiating statement and a competitive advantage for NTEs if it is used appropriately (Spence and Essoussi, 2010). Thus to be able to make a product unique and convey its distinctiveness, branding has been recommended (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991).Even though, in Ghana, evidence shows that there have been increasing numbers of Small and

Medium-sized businesses expanding into foreign markets, they do not meet the international standard due to their poorly branded nature (Akusika, 2013). This is attributed to lack of understanding the concept of branding and hence, their competition level is not encouraging internationally (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994; Jones, 1999; Torres and Julian, 2005).

It is evident that Ghana's imports surpass its exports. This can perhaps be attributed to low Non-Traditional Exports (NTEs) in Ghana. An anecdotal evidence in the sector shows that SMEs in Ghana do not meet the international standard due to quality issues and poorly branded nature of their products (Abimbola, 2001; Douglas et al, 2001; Krake, 2005 and Xie, 2012). In accordance with this, the government of Ghana has been offering support to the sector since 1980s (Owusu- Frimpong and Mmieh, 2007). Currently, Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA) has placed measures to increase earnings from the country's non-traditional exports thus projecting NTEs to contribute US$ 5 billion as export revenue annually (GTV business news bulletin, October, 2015). This move is intended not only to help the country increase its exports which in turn will close its gaping current account deficit but also to improve the quality and branding standard of Ghanaian products internationally. Despite the support of the government and other stakeholders, however, the sector at large has still not seen any significant development in this direction (MOTI, 2012). Also, a cursory look at the sector indicates that most of these SMEs have the capacity to grow and brand but seem to be encountering some challenges. Moreover, looking at the extant literature from Ghana, studies conducted on NTEs were mainly focused on issues such as E-business and small Ghanaian exporters (Hinson and Sorensen, 2006); Market orientation and business performance among NTEs in Ghana (Mahmoud, 2011); Baskets weaving and social weaving; young Ghanaian artisans' mobilization of resources (Olwig and Gough, 2013); and Boasting the Bolgatanga basketry industry; inputs from the India-Africa (Wemegah, 2014) while studies on branding concentrated on issues like key drivers of automatic brand choice in Sub-Saharan Africa (Narteh, Odoom, Braimah and Buame, 2012); and Branding for international market; evidence from the Non-Traditional Exporters in Ghana (Akushika, 2013). The indication is that little studies have been conducted on NTEs in Ghana and poses three questions such as what are the NTEs understanding of branding as a concept?; what are the brand elements used by the NTEs?; and lastly, what are the challenges or difficulties involved in branding these NTES in Ghana. The study therefore, seeks to close the aforementioned issue and contextual gap in literature. Hence, an empirical study exploring the understanding of the concept of brand-building among NTEs in Ghana and some possible challenges that they face with regard to branding remains the focus of the study.

2. Literature

2.1. The Evolution and Concepts of Branding

The concept of branding has since time immemorial been a way of distinguishing one product or service provider from that of competitors for centuries. The word" brand" is originally derived from the old Norse word "brander "which means to "burn" as it was practiced by producers on tothe products that they made to identify them (Hong, 2013) Although it has always played a central role in the trading business, the contemporary meaning of a brand has witnessed a significant shift and increase of importance for many companies, hence, become one of the mainpillars in marketing (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013; Abimbola and Kocak,2007).

Centuries ago, when people owned animals like cattle, sheep and horse, trademarks, symbols, signs, posters or pictorial signs were used as an identifier or differentiator. Craftsmen imprinted trade marks on these creations to indicate the owner and origin (Levy and Mumane, 2012). In sodoing, paint or pine tar was then used to brand these animals. Further down the line, hot iron was introduced as a way of branding these animals. This technique was later extended to Humans. For instance, slaves were branded to mark ownership while criminals were marked to brand disgrace (Levy, 2012; Kozinets and Sherry, 2004). Therefore, the idea of branding can therefore be posited as originating from this assertion.

According to Stern (2006), branding emerged as a central part of marketing in the twentieth century and that the word 'brand' entered marketing precisely in 1922 as a compound expression; translating trade or proprietary name. The concept was further developed and more firmly reputable in the 1970s and 1980s (Hampf and Lindberg-Repo, 2011). It became an important research area within the realm of marketing where interest and debate on the theories behind marketing blowup (Hunt & Burnett, 1982; Moore & Reid 2008). Before this era (1970s),firms mainly used brand commercials to distinguish their products only by quality and performance, thus associating branding with mass production and mass communication (Hampf and Lindberg-Repo, 2011). However, brands in the 1970 and 1990 were created to have meanings for

consumers and urbanized to become story- telling brands (Roper and Parker,2006). This was brought about by emergence of service sector where firms decided to communicate what immaterial value their products could offer in relation to their competitors (Hampf and Lindberg-Repo, 2011).

During the early 1970s, the idea behind the concept of positioning became yet another significant landmark in the evolution of branding (Hampf and Lindberg-Repo, 2011). Al Ries and Jack Trout was the first proponent of the word positioning. They introduced the word in their 1972series of articles "The Positioning Era" which was published in a business magazine (The Advertising Age). The foremost authors posited positioning as being mostly about the target audience rather than the product (Ries and Trout, 1981). According to Hampf and Lindberg-Repo (2011) the main objective of marketers then was to situate the product in the mind of consumers. Inferring from these scholars, positioning has now become a popular strategy, particularly among advertising agencies.

The beginning of 1980s also saw the emergence of a new concept in the field of marketing. This concept became the most researchable area in the study of marketing: namely, brand equity (Hampf and Lindberg-Repo, 2011). This concept has hitherto, holds the sole most central aspect of marketing. To this end, the concept of brand equity has witness a number of publications and probe critical interest in the area of branding, thus, it popularization in both academia and industry (Brodie, Glynn, and Van Durme, 2002). In this vein, extant literature have emerged with various definition of brand equity, but some scholars have identify essentially three different perspective for considering brand equity; the financial perspective (Permits businesses to source the financial brand value from the overall value of the firm), the consumer-based perspective(Evaluating how customers respond to a particular brand) and the combined perspective (Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Keller, 1993; Shocker, Srivastava, and Ruekert, 1994; Kim, Kim and Ann, 2003).

Even though branding has been practice for over two thousand years, it can be predominantly viewed as a twentieth century phenomenon (Lury, 1998; Schultz et al 2002; To karczyk and Hansen, 2006; Keller, 2013).Currently, brand builders and managers have now been propelled to deliver something that goes far beyond functional benefits in order to make their brands exceptional (Hong, 2014). This trend has been attributed to the circumstances of financial downturn, narrow market situation, permanent growth of brands launched and the decisive changes in our present civilization which is characterized by globalization, economic growth as well as highly advanced and widely spread technologies (Hong, 2014). For instance, Schultz et al,(2002) described the connection that the individual makes with the brand as a unique and amazing feature of today. According to Hong (2014), branding has now become an indispensable tool that need to be prudently managed to secure and maintain market share. This is as a result of the sophisticated and demanding buying behavior of consumers (Hong, 2014). It is therefore sagacious to state that, branding has now developed into a modern concept that is applicable to products, services, companies, people and countries (Clifton et al, 2014).

In this ever increasing competitive marketing environment branding has emerged as a prime marketing management practice that can transform and enhance the operations of SMEs and large organizations at large (Krake, 2005; Inskip, 2004; Boyle, 2003). In supporting this assertion, Calabro (2005) underscored the main objective of branding in organizations as something that drastically reduces the cost of sales and customer acquisition among businesses and increasing their return margins rather systematically. Additionally, some scholars are of the view that branding if applied appropriately, is the only route, to create, maintain and sustain the competitiveness of firms and also gives the distinguishing statement and competitive urge for businesses (Davis, 2007; Spence and Essoussi, 2010).

2.2. The NTEs Brand-Building Concept

Abimbola (2001) saw organizations understanding of brand-building process as paramount to the adoption of branding as a concept particularly the SMEs and Keller (2013) brand-building and management strategies are the responsibility of the top-management. Abimbola (2001) is of theview that an organization cannot undertake branding practices without knowing the insight ofbrand-building strategies and implementation. According to Keller (2013), though there is quite anumber of branding challenges facing firms, they occur at the time the firm is under taking branding and is fully aware of what it entails as an organizational framework (Keller, 2013).

Most of these SMEs in the NTEs do not really understand the meaning and strategy of brand building as an organizational concept and hence, their inability to practice branding (Abimbola,2001). The SMEs management's understanding of the meaning and strategy of brand-building(Abimbola and Kocak, 2007) and recognizing the crucial role it plays in marketing management of their firms and each stage of the strategic brand-building process proposed by Keller (2013) isthe first step of its readiness to adopting the concept of branding (Abimbola, 2001; Keller, 2003).

2.3. Brand-building Issues Faced in NTEs

Despite the importance of brand-building and management to both organizations (marketing processes) and its consumers, it is still not been given the needed attention, support, and recognition in SMEs (Abimbola, 2007). This could perhaps be attributed to the narrow winter pretation by SMEs management that organizations adopt different strategies to build and manage their brands (Wong and Merrilees, 2005).Recognizing this, (Krake, 2005) agreed that, most of the managers in SMEs do not really understand the meaning of brand-building. Some academic scholars also argued that the ownersor directors of SMEs who are supposed to take a lead in brand-building, are not even aware of brand-building as a concept themselves (Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2007). Presumably, if the owners/directors do not actually focus on brand-building, how then would their employees pay attention to it (Krake, 2005)? These scholars have demonstrated that SMEs are

not mature in the market place (Boyle, 2003; Krake, 2005; Spence and Essoussi, 2008), due to lack of understanding of the real meaning of branding; emphasizing that small businesses may not even be able to identify and acknowledge the existence of brands (Wong and Merrilees, 2007). More importantly, Krake (2005) had stressed that the names of most SMEs are usually not the same as their brand name and that it is difficult to gain people's attention and support, thereby, loosing vast opportunities in their businesses. Even if their brand name is the same as their firms' name, with some little knowledge about the brand, they still do not see the brand-building as the most crucial aspect of their business(Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Krake, 2005; and Abimbola and Kocak, 2007). It has been stated from the owners' point of view that, brand-building is restrictedto only advertising, brand name and the logo, where advertising devices like television and promotional leaflets were all necessary to branding, but do not seem to be critical in SMEs rather than personal selling (Wong and Merrilees, 2005).

Furthermore, another common issue confronted by SMEs is their limited time, resources, structures and processes to carry out branding exercises (Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Spence and Essoussi, 2008). It is also conceived that theem ployees of SMEs (Harris and De Chernatony,2005) should be identified as brand "ambassadors" since they are the point of contact between the brand's internal and external environments and can impact positively on consumers' perceptions of both the brand and the firm. Firms are therefore called upon to adopt the concept of corporate branding and combine their strategic vision and culture throughout the entire organization to be explicitly employed as part of it specialty (Balmer, 2001).

Also, according to Krake (2005), most of the SMEs pay less or no attention to brand-building astheir daily activities. This is because brand-building decisions and policies rest with the owner ordirector as a key person, for its implementation and changing the brand elements such as names and logos (Krake, 2005). Also, brand identity strategy directs brand decisions and warrant the coherence of marketing plans through time (Madvaharam, Badrinarayanan and McDonald, 2005)and should be in turn associated with specific and limited core values that are complementary tothe organizational values and cultures (De Chernatony, 2001; Urde, 2003).The entrepreneurs arethe visionary leaders in their respective firms who are the resource persons for brand-building and identity creation, suggesting that there should be a clear link between the entrepreneur'scharacter and the brand as he/she is the personification of the brand (Krake, 2005).

For Abimbola and Kocak, 2007; Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2007), 50% of the SMEs have their company name the same as their brand name, because they usually used one or two brand names and this can lead to a reduction of their chances to gaining people's attention and hence their businesses (Krake, 2005).

Most of the SMEs do not co-brand or cooperate with other businesses to gain more brand value and make their business a plus through brand-building (Shocker and Srivastava, 1994). Though, the features of a brand and the product or the company are entirely different, there are some connections among them, only certain few characteristics can distinguish them (Krake, 2005).

2.4. Brand Elements

These are the key factors that create room for a brand to be established. Brand elements also refer to as brand identities, are those trademark able devices which serve to recognize and differentiate a brand (Keller, 2013 and Kotler, 2003). Abimbola and Kocak, (2007), also define sit as any special aspect of the brand that is in the awareness of the brand and facilitate the creation of strong, favourable and unique brand associations or obtains positive brand judgments or feelings. In this vein, brand elements consist of brand name, logo, symbol, package/design oran integration of them that help the consumers to distinguish it from other brands (Abimbola,2001; Spence and Essonssi, 2008; Kotler, 2003 and Keller, 2013). These brand elements, according to academic scholars must be memorable, meaningful, likeable, transferable, adaptable and protectable as a criterion for selection (Aaker, 1997, Kotler, 1988; Keller, 2003). There are several kinds of brand elements reported in extant literature as follows.

2.5. Types of Brand Elements

2.5.1. Brand Name

This is the core component of the brand since it often captures the central theme orkey associations of a product in a very simple and economic fashion (Kapferer, 1997, Keller,2013). According to Kotler (1988) and Keller (2008), a brand name must be easy to spell and simple to pronounce in order to register its meaning and memory in consumers' minds. This must be carefully chosen since it is the most difficult element marketers cannot change like any other brand element (Aaker, 1997; Benent, 1988; Angus, 2004; Kotler, 1988; Keller, 2008).

2.5.2. The Logos and Symbols

These are visual elements that also play a critical role in creating brand identity, despite the fact that the brand name is basically the central element of the brand (De Charnatony, 2001; Krake, 2005; and Keller, 2013). Unlike brand names, logos and symbols can easily be changed overtime to realize a more contemporary look and have a strong history as a means to show origin, ownership or association (Abimbola, 2001). Kotler, (2003), opine that when the meanings of logos and symbols are explained through an integrated marketing communication, it compels customers to think about the organization anytime they see these logos and/or symbols, be they on a vehicle, television or magazine, hence, making the company and its products recognizable (Kotler, 2003; Ambler, 1992).

2.5.3. The Uniform Resource Locations (URLs)

These are websites and are popularly known as domain names (Kotler, 1988; Keller, 2008).They are usually registered and paid for as companies are clamoring for space on the web, and the number of registered URLs is increasing significantly (Kotler, 1988; Keller, 2008). Companies wishing to create a web site for their brands are often advise to make it more attractive and compelling (Papadopoulos and Hamzaousi Essoussi, 2015).

2.5.4. Characters

These are special types of brand symbol that take the form of a human face or real –life characteristics (Kotler, 1988; Keller, 2008). Brand characters play a crucial role through advertising campaigns and package designs of a brand (Berthol et. al, 2008; Keller, 2003). Brand character is often colorful and rich in imagery and tend to draw the attention of consumers and create awareness (Kotler, 1988; Keller, 2008) Krake, 2005).The likability aspect of the brand can be enhanced through the element of brand character (Kotler, 1998; Keller, 2008) and can help create perceptions of the brand as fun and interesting.

2.5.5. Slogans

These are usually short phrases that communicate the descriptive and persuasive information about the brand and usually reflect in advertising, which plays a vital role in packaging of the brand and other elements of the marketing programme (Abimbola and Kocak, 2007; Spence, Harnzaous and Essoussi, 2008; and Keller, 2013). Slogans are perceived as powerful branding elements because they are efficient , short hand ways to build brand equity, and can function as useful looks or handles to assist consumer understand the meaning of a brand, what is it and what makes it special (Keller, 2003). As a result of this, branding plays a crucial role in the marketing of goods and services in a competitive market place.

2.6. The Possible Challenges of Branding

There are quite a number of possible challenges confronting brand-builders in their attempt to build or manage their brands (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1997; De Chernatony, 2001). This refers to brand barriers or obstacles (Saxena, 2012) that prevent SMEs to particularly undertake business activities regarding branding of their products. The obstacles are the major limitations on financial and human resource and time management (Wong and Merrilees, 2005).The absence of these resources force firms to concentrate on what they can comparatively do best in their daily performance and this short-term focus becomes a challenge for them developing a long-term branding strategy (Wong and Merrilees, 2005).

The possible challenges of branding encountering SMEs are well documented and traditionally centers around time and money (Parrot et al, 2010) and has explained the role branding plays as a comparative strategy (Abimbola, 2001). This is because SMEs have limited resources and technical know-how, requiring greater focus and effectiveness (Rode and Vallaster, 2005).Branding strategies require large amount of investments in media communications, media coverage, eroding traditional media effectiveness (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013).The costs of which may even grow higher as a result of the absence of established identity and reputation, increased competition, economic downturn, brands proliferation, media transformation, and greater accountability (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007; Saxena, 2012; Petkova et al, 2008).
Moreover, SMEs lack of the financial resources and "share of voice" to share much of an impact in their attempt to brand (Wong and Merrilees, 2005). The growth of private labels, more complex brand families and portfolios, difficulty in differentiating, operating in mature markets, decreasing brand loyalty in many categories and increasing trade powers are some of the major constraints confronting SMEs hence, suggesting a limited role of branding for them (Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Keller, 2013).

According to Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1989), small businesses regardless to their geographical locations, have similar perspectives to their larger counterparts, and a study oneight (8) Australian firms revealed that SMEs have a narrow interpretations of what branding entails (Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989). The extant literature argued that branding is meant for large corporations because of their access to plenty resources (Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989).

The perceptions of branding are limited to advertising, the brand name and the logo and advertising activities are seen as important to branding but not regarded critical in SMEs (Keller,2003). This is attributed to increasing advertising expenditures, cost of new product introduction and support, short-term performance orientation, increasing job turnover and pronounced economic cycles as challenges facing brand-builders as far as branding is concerned (Keller,2013; Abimbola, 2001; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Krake, 2005).

For Peterson (1989), most of the small businesses adopt a production orientation and are usually focusing on sales. Literature also report that SMEs challenges are related in several occasions to the bad image of their products in the international market and insufficient foreign demand (Cardoso, 1980; Gereffi, 1992). The internal barriers such as informational, functional and marketing are critical behind a successful operation of SMEs globally (Leonidou, 2004).

2.7. The Importance of Brand-Building

The results of brand-building yielded positive dividends from long-run brand strategy and are usually far exceeded the costs of achieving the brand, with special emphasis on financial, strategic and managerial aspects of marketing (Shocker and Weitz, 1998; Krake, 2005).Essentially, companies with strong brands usually enjoy a number of advantages over those

withweak ones (Kohle and Stephens, 1997; Randall, 1997). Moreover, the promises that a brand makes are usually seen as a function of a brand (Blackett, 2004) and the brand name is always worth more than the sum total value of the firm itself.

Brand-building serves as a strategic reference point and supports business development by realizing an alignment between the strengths of the firm and its external environment (Wong and Merrilees, 2007). The firm involves is being offered some kind of legal protection, retains its intellectual property rights and the owner obtains legal title to the brand, and hence, the firmearns and sustains extra profits from its brands and create greater superior value for shareholders (Kotler, 2013; Keller, 2008). For Murphy, (1992), brand-building "leads to the development and maintenance of a set of product attributes, values, which are coherent, appropriate, distinctive, protectable and appealing to customers". It therefore makes customers committed to one's business, once they can clearly differentiate one's products from the competition (Junneje andJunneja, 2008).

Literature in branding indicates that strong brands can generate loyal customers, improve inrevenue generation in the long –run, permit higher price premiums and increase market share of the firm (Court, Narasimban, Gordon, Elzinga, 2002; Keller, 2003; Simmons et al, 2010).Adding to that, a successful brand has been reputed to differentiate a company or product from the competition as well as gaining the needed reputation and attention of the target market (Keller, 2003). Extant literature shows that brand-building is not only important or beneficial to organization but to customers as well. Thus, customers are able to identify the source of a producer or maker, gain confidence from them while allowing consumers to reduce searching costs for products and the risks involved to the barest minimum (Abimbola and Kocak, 2007;Keller, 2008; Kotler, 2012). Branding also facilitate product-line extensions; the identification of products, services and businesses and differentiate them from the competition (Aderson andNarus, 2004).

3. The Methodology

3.1. Sampling Method

For a qualitative research, it is much more focused on samples which improve understanding rather than representativeness (Boateng, 2014). The study focuses on SMEs in the NTEs because as compare to large firms they tend to face different challenges regarding branding (Krake,(2005). In addition, most of the NTEs are made up of the SMEs in Ghana and are increasing significantly in the manufacturing sector in Ghana especially in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Moreover, these SMEs/NTEs have the capacity to grow and play a dominant role in increasing exports in the economy. The study therefore focus on the SMEs as firms operating or manufacturing products known as Non-Traditional Exports (NTEs) which are export to other countries. The study is limited to only Upper East Region because the region is noted of a high number of NTEs in Ghana. This research used a non-probability sampling approach in which the probability of selecting a particular member or respondent is unknown. The study adopted a nonrandom sampling approach and a small sample size of six in order to capture qualitative data for the study. Because of this, the researcher was able to provide detailed information on how respondents or participants of the study as well as the detailed descriptions of the participants, sample size and other relevant features in terms of the study.

For the purpose of this study, a purposive sampling technique is selected to sample the respondents. The purposive sample is seen as an appropriate sampling technique because, it is often used in exploratory research, for selecting particular cases peculiar to the phenomenon under study; for an in-depth investigation and/ or for selecting participants who are often difficult to reach (Zikmund, 2003; Neuman, 2011). This helped the researcher obtained information that is peculiar to SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Ghana. Therefore, for a firm to be selected the firm must be registered with the Registered-General Department, AGI, NBSSI or GEPA; this isbecause these institutions are the main institutional bodies governing and regulating SMEs/NTEs activities in Ghana. Lastly, the firm must have been in operations for 5 years or more and highly accomplishment in the industry. Also, the firm is selected based on its contributions in terms of revenue to their respective district assemblies.

3.2. Sampling Size

For this study, a sampling size of six firms was used. This sample size of six was selected out ofthe sample frame (NTEs in the manufacturing sector) in Ghana with each firm being a representative firm of all the three major sub-sectors of Agricultural exports, Handicrafts and Processed or Semi-Processed of the NTE sector at large. The Gratis Foundation manufactures agricultural equipment and food processing machines, representing Agricultural -sub-sector; theBolgatanga craft village which produces carves, smocks, garments, leather products; the Sirigu Pottery and Art which is into clay products and painting and decoration; and Enusah's basket sex porting firm represent the Handicrafts sub-sector while Yabco Focus Company, the manufacturer of food and beverages and the Ojoba women Shea butter cooperatives, the processors of Shea butter represent the processed or semi-processed sub-sector. The firms were chosen because of their popularity and significant contributions to the export sector in Ghana. Their selection was also warranted and based on the award/prize won by them for their contributions to national development and entrepreneurial growth in Ghana. The sample size of six firms is selected to represent all other NTEs in the manufacturing sector. This number is selected based on contextual richness that transcends the sector and process of branding complexities (Yin, 1994; Abimola and Kocak, 2007). Every firm selected represent a sector each of Agricultural, Processed and Semi-Processed, and Handicrafts comprising of art and gallery, creative

and craftsmanship, food and beverages, extractive, garment and horticultural businesses of Non-traditional Exports (NTEs) in the manufacturing sector in Ghana. One respondent each is interviewed in all the six firms. This is because the researcher is targeting the people at the top management level, who make decisions at the corporate level and could provide information about the challenges of branding confronting their respective firms.

3.3. Fieldwork

Personal interviews with six (6) top-personnel of SMEs in the NTEs were conducted to gain an insight and in-depth knowledge for the study. Averagely, the interviews lasted 1 hour thirty minutes each. These interviews aided the understanding of key constructs of the phenomenon under investigation in the context of NTEs. The study population was defined as comprising SME firms in the NTEs sector which met a range of the following criteria: the firm must be in operation for five years or more; the firm must register with the registrar-General Department; Association of Ghana Industries (AGI); the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI)or the Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA); the size of the firm must be conformed to the definition of SMEs in Ghana thus in terms of the number of employees and physical assets including working capital; and the firm must operate in the manufacturing or industrial sector in Ghana. The respondents were selected to include those who make strategic decisions including branding in their respective firms such as CEOs; general managers; marketing directors/managers; and presidents. Interestingly, my exploratory interviews revealed that management of SMEs do not have deep understanding of branding as a concept and that the acknowledgement of a number of possible challenges of branding they faced was highly evident.

4. Data Collection

A first set of questions couple with a cover or introductory letter was sent to a key informant in each of the six (6) cases. The respondents were adequately assured of the confidentiality of information they would provide in the process of the interviews. Also, Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the top-management of the six selected firms. In order to enhance validity of those interviews, the respondents were earlier on informed before the interviews dates. During the interviews, notes were taken. The case study interviews were also recorded on tape, edited, transcribed by the researcher and some transcriptions were crosschecked by a few participants. The notes were compared with the recorded interviews for any discrepancies. The questions were earlier on tested on a sample population selected to ensure that the questions were appropriate for the current study.

An interview technique is considered as the main source of data collection for the study. This isin line with (Yin, 2003) guidelines of a case study research for allowing the respondents sometime to express themselves, for an in-depth, deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, a semi-structured interview style was adopted because it provided more insights into the research topic enabling the researcher to gather answers to the specific interview questions on one hand and some additional information from the respondents that could be relevant and use the write-up at the later stage, on the other hand. Semi-structured interview style was also useful when comparing it with the structured interview style in this regard because it allows the researcher to ask both probing and leading questions, which are closed in nature, when the need arises (the structured and unstructured interviews). For the sake of confidentiality, cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 were used for the sampled firms instead of the names of the firms in question.

4.1. Ethical Issue

In order to comply with the ethical standard of this research, the following moral, social code of conduct or behavior were met in order not to make the conduct of this research unethical; By explaining the meaning of the research to the respondents at the initial stage before the commencement of the interview; asking for the approval or acceptance from the respondents during the process of the interview; assuring the respondents of the utmost confidentiality of any information provided by them.

However as far as this research is concerned no respondent or interviewee had in one way or another been forced, frightened or intimidated to respond to the questions. Therefore, those who did, do so willingly and voluntarily. The table below examines the profile of the selected cases for the study.

Entity	Brief Profile
Case 1	The Village, which serves as a Regional Craft Village, was acquired in 1988 and aimed at bringing together craftsmen in the region to weave and promote the craft industry through sales. The Craft Village has five hundred (500) members/entrepreneurs manufacture products such as: baskets, smocks, leather items (bags, sandals, belts and many more), beads and wood caves. They serve both domestic and international markets.
Case 2	Sirigu Pottery and Art firm can be located in the Eastern part of the Kasena-Nankana district of the Upper East Region in Ghana. It was established in 1996 mainly for pottery business and now it is into wall decoration as well. The village is well known for its traditional architecture, pottery and wall designing.
Case 3	The Gratis Foundation is a leader in the designing, manufacturing, training and selling of precision agro food processing and sanitation equipment, including palm oil processing, fruit juice extractors, palm oil extractors, cassava graters, feed mixers, grinding mills, cattle and donkey ploughs and many other food processing machines. It was established in 2000.
Case 4)	The Ojoba Women's Shea Butter Co-operative is made up of 400 rural women. The firm was established in 1999 by an NGO, the World Vision International, as a domestic shea butter processing firm and later started exporting shea butter in 2003 until now.
Case 5	The firm deals mainly with the international markets in USA, China, Japan Portland, London and other African countries, where he exports baskets and hats woven from straws in Ghana. He has several manufacturing centers in Bolgatanga and Accra, where he gives orders for his baskets and hats to be woven and also buys some from the open market to supplement the woven stock. The head office of the business can be located at the Art centre in Accra.
Case 6	Yabco Focus Company was established in April, 2007 as a private enterprise to produce natural fruit juices. The Star Fresh Natural Juices (Yabco products) are being processed from the fruits of a baobab tree. A baobab tree is a tree which fruits are ready in the long dry season in the Northern regions of Ghana.

Table 1: Summary of Entities under Study
Source: Author's Own Construct

A conceptual framework was developed by the researcher from literature (see figure 1. below) so as   to pre-empt the outcome of the study and adequately set the theoretical bases for the rest of the research to follow. The following propositions underpinned the research:

4.2. A Conceptual Framework
- The NTEs understanding of brand-building concept and strategy
- The NTEs adoption and usage of brand elements
- The mitigating branding challenges confronted by the NTEs
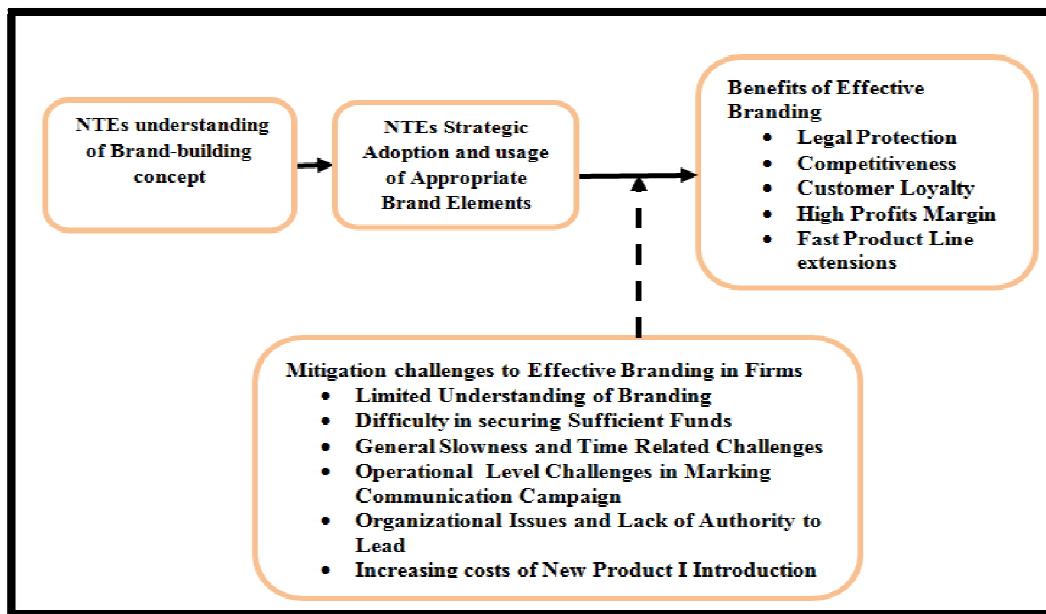- The benefits accrued to branding when practice successfully

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Developed by the Researcher from Literature

For this study, a conceptual framework was developed based on three (3) constructs namely: the NTEs' brand-building concept; the usage or application of brand elements by these NTEs; and the possible branding challenges confronting brand builders in these NTEs. The selection of these constructs was based on the suggestions in literature that these three (3) constructs among others are paramount to organizations' adoption and repetition of branding as marketing management concept. Abimbola (2001) is of the view that before an organization can undertake branding it must understand the meaning of branding in the first place and also has an insight of what brand elements entails while Moilanen (2015) and Keller (2008) admitted that an organization's undertaking branding is bound to face a number of possible challenges coming from a dynamic marketing environment and the organization's own actions and inactions in its decision-making and management process. Moilanen (2015) is of the view that limited understanding of branding as a marketing concept; difficulty in securing sufficient funds; general slowness and time related challenges; operational-level challenges in marketing communication campaign; and organizational issues and lack of authority to lead are some of the possible challenges confronting organizational brand-builders while Keller (2008) posit that the increasing costs of new product introductions is a challenge affecting affective branding in organizations. The researcher therefore wants to see whether these branding challenges from literature also affect SMEs in their attempt to build their brands.

5. Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

5.1. Data Analysis

Respondents for the study have been profiled according to the type of industry, number of employees, number of years in business, type of business and the position of respondents. In all, Six (6) firms were used in the analysis.
The table 2 below shows the demographic profile of respondents in their respective firms. It contains the type of business; the number of employees of each firm; the number of years of operations and the position/rank of the respondents of the selected firms

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Type of business	Craftsmanship	Art and gallery	Agricultural produce and equipment	Shea butter extraction	Baskets and handicraft	Food and beverages
No. of years in operation	18	11	15	16	10	09
No. of employees	20	14	09	40	10	36
Position of respondent	President	Director	Regional manager	President	CEO	CEO
Sex	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male

Table 2: The Profile of the Sample Firms
Source: Field Data Collected, 2017

With respect to the number of employees case 4 has the highest number of 40 followed by case 6 and case 1 with 36 and 20 employees respectively. Case 2 and case 5 followed with 14 and 10 employees respectively while case 3 had the least number of employees of 9. For the number of years of operation in business, the case 1 is the oldest among them with 18 years of operation in business followed by case 4 with 16 years of existence. Case 3 was next in line with 15 years' experience followed by case 2 and case 5 with 11 and 10 years respectively. Case 6 remains the youngest firm with 9 years old in operations.

The profile of respondents in the study consists of top-management personnel of the NTEs sector. From the researcher's view point, the respondents comprises people who occupy senior management positions, responsible for making decisions at the corporate and marketing levels of their respective firms. They include: general managers, executive directors, presidents, and chief executive officers. These key respondents have an in-depth knowledge in their various field based on their numerous experience and number of years of service in their respective firms. The regional manager, Gratis Foundation made an important remark that *"I have been working as a manager in Gratis since 2000 and have been working hard to improve business performance of Gratis Foundation"* the key respondents have worked in their firms for not less than ten years.

5.2. Brand-Building in SMEs

The brand-building or management is something that rarely exists in SMEs in the NTEs sector. Krake (2005) found that brand-building is not given the needed attention in SMEs for a strong brand image to be constructed. The responsibility for brand-building and/or management lies at the top-management level, where the owners/managers pay little attention to brand-building. Also, SMEs do not co-brand, where selling is somewhat paramount and dominating. Krake(2005) also identified the factors influencing the role of brand-building and/or management in SMEs as the influence of the entrepreneur; the influence of the company structures; and the influence of the market place while the factors affecting the marketing communication message were also identified as creativity; budget size; desire results; brand recognition and turnover. However, Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Abimbola, 2001 and Abimbola and Kocak, 2007) revealed that SMEs have narrow interpretation and understanding of brand-building and/or management and also viewed brand-building as something that is limited to advertising , brand name and/orlogo. Krake (2005) discovered that SMEs lack the understanding of brand-building as a management concept resulting in low level of competition in the international markets. It was also found in the studies of Keller, (2003) Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, (1989) that it is necessary for SMEs to understand the fundamentals of brand-building and its adoption as a managerial function. Abimbola (2001) found that the SMEs do not really understand the meaning of brand building as an organizational concept and hence cannot practice branding effectively. Apart from that, Oviatt and McDougall (1994) and Keller (2003) saw that SMEs pay less or no attention to brand-building as their daily activities and branding decisions or policies rest with the owner or manager as a key person for its adoption and implementation (Abimbola, 2001). Abimbola(2001) discovered that the understanding of the meaning of brand-building and the recognition of the crucial role it plays in marketing management and each stage of Keller's strategic brand building process is the first step of the SMEs readiness to adopting the concept of branding whileKeller (2013) provided the guidelines for building a strong brand by firms such as concentrating on building one or two brands; focusing on a creatively developed marketing program on one or two brand associations to serve as a source of brand equity. The findings related to SMEs brand building are contained in the table 3 below.

Author (s)	Main findings related to branding in SMEs
Krake (2005)	Brand-building and management is not given the necessary or needed attention for a strong brand image to be constructed. The responsibility for brand-building or management in all cases rest at the top-management level. Co-branding receives very little attention in SMEs. Selling is important in SMEs; factors affecting the role of brand-building and management: - Influence of the entrepreneur; - Influence of the company structures; - Influence of the market. Factors affecting marketing and message communication: - Creativity and budget size Desire results: Brand recognition and turnover.
Mowle and Merrilees (2005)	Identify common characteristics of branding SMEs wineries and in addition to them, product and marketing-driven branding characteristics. Common branding characteristics of SMEs wineries include producing a premium product; conveying an image of quality wines; using a name symbol to represent the winery; forming business relationships and networks and participating in regional events, festivals and shows; and providing friendly service at the point of contact.

Wong and Merrilees (2005); Abimbola (2001); Abimbola and Kocak 92007); Krake (2005); Keller (2003); Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1989) Oviatt and McDougall (1994)	SMEs have shallow or narrow interpretation of the meaning of brand-building and management; SMEs view on branding are limited to advertising and the brand name and/or logo. SMEs lack the understanding of branding concept. Lack of understanding of branding as a concept resulted in low level of competition in the international markets. The understanding of brand-building is important to SMEs for the adoption of branding concept. NTEs do not really understand the meaning of brand-building as an organizational concept and hence, cannot practice branding. SMEs pay little or no attention to brand-building as their daily activities; branding decisions or policies lies with the owner/director as a key person for its adoption and implementation. The understanding of the meaning of brand-building and the recognition of the crucial role it plays in marketing management of their firms and each stage of the strategic brand-building process proposed by Keller is the first step of the SMEs readiness to adoption of branding. Guidelines for building a strong brand by SMEs: concentrate on building one or two strong brands; focus a creatively developed marketing program on one or two important brand associations to serve as the source of brand equity. Use a well integrated mix of brand awareness and brand image; design a "push" campaign that aims at building a brand and a creative "pull" campaign that will attract attention; broaden the brand with many secondary associations as possible.

Table 3: Findings Related To SMEs Brand-Building

5.3. The Adoption and Usage of Brand Elements in SMEs

Abimbola (2001); Keller (2013) and Krake (2005) found that SMEs often used one or two brand elements and/or one or two brand names. This really leads to the reduction of the SMEs opportunities to gaining people's attention and therefore their businesses at large. Keller (2013) revealed that brand names must be easy to spell and simple to pronounce, arguing that brand names are the elements that cannot be easily changed by marketers over time like the other elements such as logos and symbols. Abimbola (2001) advised SMEs to stick to only one brand element at a time so as to consistency since they have limited resources as compared to their large counterparts while Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1989) and Krake (2005) also found that most of the SMEs have their names usually not the same as their brand names and it is very difficult to gain people's attention and support hence losing business opportunities. Keller (2013) provided guidelines for using and adopting brand elements which include using a well integrated mix of brand elements that support both brand awareness and brand image; designing a "push" campaign that aims at building a brand and creative "push" campaign that will attract attention; and to broaden the brand with many secondary associations as possible. The findings related to the adoption and usage of brand elements in SMEs are presented in the table 4 below.

Author (s)	Main findings related to the usage of brand elements in SMEs
Abimbola (2001); keller (2013); Krake (2005); Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1989)	SMEs often used one or two brand elements; used one or two brand names. This leads to reduction of their chances to gaining people's attention and hence their businesses. Brand names must be easy to spell and simple to pronounce. Brand names are the only elements that marketers cannot change easily over time like logos and symbols. SMEs should stick to only one brand element at a time to create consistency since they have limited resources. SMEs used at least one or two brand elements; most SMEs have their names usually the same as their brand names. It is difficult to gain people's attention and support therefore loosing opportunities to their businesses.

Table 4: Findings Related to the Usage and Adoption of Brand Elements in SMEs

5.4. The Challenges of Brand-Building in SMEs

On the issue of challenges confronting SMEs Abimbola (2001); Rode and Vallaster (2005);Wong and Merrilees (2005); and Parrot et al (2008) found that the challenges of brand-building confronting SMEs centers around time and money; limited resources; increase competition; economic downturn; brand proliferation; media transformation; and greater accountability. Wong and Merrilees (2005) also found that lack of financial resources and "share of voice" to share much of an impact in their attempt to brand; difficulty in differentiating; the availability of more complex brand families and portfolios; the growth of private labels; decreasing brand loyalty in many product categories; operating in a mature market and increasing trade powers while Keller

(2003) argued that increasing advertising expenditures; cost of new product introduction and support; short-term performance orientation; increasing job turnover and a pronounced economic cycle were some of the challenges facing brand builders. Peterson (1989) also found that the bad image of products in the foreign markets; insufficient foreign demand and internal barrierslike informational, functional and marketing do hinder the potential of brand-builders. Again, the challenges of brand-building facing brand builders as reported in literature are tabulated in the table 5 below:

Author (s)	Main findings related to SMEs branding challenges
Abimbola (2001); Rode and Vallaster (2005); Wong and Merrilees (2005); Keller (2013); Parrot et al (2010)	Challenges of brand-building in SMEs centers around time and money; limited resources ; increased competition; economic downturn; brand proliferation; media transformation and greater accountability. Lack of financial resources and share of voice; difficulty in differentiating; more complex brand families and portfolios; the growth of private labels; decreasing brand loyalty in many categories; operating in mature markets and increasing trade powers. Increasing advertising expenditures; cost of new product introduction and support; short-term performance orientation; increasing job turnover and pronounced economic cycles. Bad image of products in international markets; insufficient foreign demand and internal barriers such as informational, functional and marketing.

Table 5: Findings Related To the Challenges of Brand-Building in SMEs

5.5. Empirical Findings

5.5.1. Brand-Building and Its Challenges of the SMEs in the NTEs Sector

In the empirical analysis, the aim of the study is to look at the management of SMEs understanding of brand-building as an organizational concept. Three larger themes emerged from my empirical material:

- SMEs understanding of brand-building as a concept
- The adoption and usage of brand elements in SMEs
- The mitigating challenges of brand-building in SMEs

The empirical findings related to these themes are first discussed in more detail and then presented in a summary framework Table VI. In the following I explain in more detail the findings related to these themes. Some selected quotations from the interviews are shown for the purpose of illustration.

5.6. What is the NTEs Understanding of Brand-Building Practices as a Concept?

The study found that the SMEs have little or shallow understanding of brand-building. It was not uncommon to see the owner/manager struggling to define a brand and probably differentiate it from brand-building. From my investigation, it was evident that the management of SMEs does not really understand the meaning of brand-building as an organizational concept and hence have a limited interpretation of brand-building. If the entrepreneurs or the top-management of the SMEs who are suppose to embrace branding do not know much about it how much more their employees.

- Respondent:"A brand is a style of basket woven and sold to customers such as V-shape, oval shape and round shape. So these are the brands that we have already shown to our customers and users and they identified them while branding is the act of making the product identified by the customers".

From the interviews, it was discovered that though the management of the SMEs possesses some knowledge of what a brand and branding are all about, it does not actually know what it takes to brand and how important it is to the firm. Some of the SMEs do admit that they do not really know what a brand is let alone practicing branding.
Respondent:"My brother, I do not actually know what a brand is let alone to differentiate it from branding. I must admit I am a lay man in the field and that is why I always contract out people to assist me. For the meaning of a brand and branding I cannot give you an answer".

5.7. What Is the Brand Elements Adopted Or Used by These NTEs in Ghana?

After interviewing all the six cases it was revealed that the brand elements used by the NTEs consist of brand name, logo, symbol, package/design, jingle and color. The study found that NTEs Ghana used at least two brand elements and at most three brand elements. The dominant elements are the brand name, logo, symbol and package. Only two NTEs used color and one of them used a jingle. When the respondents were asked about the brand elements they used, these are some of their responses:

- Respondent:"The brand name, color, logo, package and symbol are the brand elements we used.

  These are the main elements that we used to differentiate our products from the competition andfor our customers to identify them in the midst of other brands"

Brand elements are the keys to creating a brand and are those trade mark able devices that serve to identify and differentiate a brand. The study however, revealed that SMEs/NTEs do not use donly one brand element but rather multiple ones. All the six cases interviewed used brand name as their brand element but they do not follow the criteria for selecting the names such asmemorability, meaningfulness, likability, transferability, adaptability and of course protect ability proposed by Kelvin Lane Keller in his strategic brand management book. The study found one of the cases interviewed using the name of their customer from the UK called Ojoba as their brand name. This white man then took advantage of that to exploit them by not allowing any other person to import shea butter from the firm apart from him and also being the dictator of price of their products. That is he (their customer, Ojoba) determines the price to pay for and not the exporters.

  - Respondent: "The name Ojoba who is our customer from abroad is our brand name and the symbol of a shea nut tree (designed as a logo) are our main elements of branding. These elements are known to our customers everywhere and are used to differentiate our shea butter from others. For branding we did not do it ourselves because we do not know how to go by it. It was our customer from the UK called Ojoba who used his own name to register in Accra as our brand name. Ojoba is our customer living in UK. He had done it on our behalf because we do not understand how branding is being done. We want to change the name but we do not know whether the white man will agree with us or not".

5.8. What Are the Possible Challenges Or Difficulties of Brand-Building in These NTEs In Ghana?

In addressing this question, a number of nine (9) challenges were identified after the study. Five (5) of them were proposed in literature while the other four (4) emerged from the study. The challenges of branding identified in the study include: limited understanding of branding; difficulty in securing sufficient funds; general slowness and time related challenges; operational level challenges in marketing communication campaigns; and the increasing costs of new product introductions. The rest of the three (4) challenges emerged during the interviews were lack of technical expertise among SMEs/NTEs; difficulty in obtaining a patent right and/or having a trademark registered; the proliferation of brands in the market place and the pronounce economic crises.

5.9. Limited Understanding of Branding

For this very challenge, five out of the six SMEs/NTEs interviewed, have discussed that their inadequate knowledge in branding is a major challenge affecting their businesses. They explained that sometimes they have the materials and resources for branding but how to goby it is their main challenge. It was found that their inadequate knowledge of branding is affecting their branding potential seriously.

  - Respondent:"you know we are lay people on the ground. Our knowledge in branding is very small and this is affecting our branding practices. Unless we get people like you to help us we would not be able do any effective branding".

5.10. Difficulty in Securing Sufficient Funds

All the six NTEs interviewed, have actually discussed this particular challenge as their main challenge of branding. They explained that their inability to brand is as a result of in sufficient funding.

The study found that it is difficult for them to secure funds for improvement of their businesses. This was attributed to the problem of the current economic crises, with high interest rates, which makes the cost of borrowing high and unaffordable. They also explained that the public institutions remain reluctant to grant them financial assistance and likewise the private sector, therefore, limiting their budget. It was evident that SMEs have limited budget as compared to large companies which will surely restrict their marketing creativity level. As a result, to build a strong brand will cost a lot of money to SMEs since the budget is the limiting factor to a varying degree, especially advertising.

  - Respondent:"you know branding goes with a cost. Apart from registering the brand element, you need money for advertising. If you do not advertise your brands nobody will be aware of them, let alone to like them. That is why we depend on trade shows and exhibitions to show case our products and create awareness rather than advertising. We really find it difficult to get money for branding purposes".

5.11. The General Slowness and Time Related Challenges

The three firms which discussed this challenge as a challenge of branding confronting them agreed that funding that they normally get from public institutions comes to them at the wrong time. They said this does not help them to buy materials at peak times and also advertise their brands to position them in consumers' minds. This is consistent with Moilanen (2015). Who is of the view that funding related decisions made in public sector are usually delayed due to large number of stakeholders during the time for internal communication and decision-making and can generally slow down several phases of brand building process.

- Respondent: "The money we normally get in terms of support from the government does not usually come on time. You know government's institutions and their problem of bureaucracy; this person has to write; another person has to sign before it is finally released. It is because of that slowness in responding to our needs, we find it very difficult to buy certain things at peak times including advertising. We do sometimes get support from the government and other NGOs but it does not normally come at the right time. You know borrowing is an institutional kind of thing. It is something that you depend on other institutions to help you. For instance, partnering right; you have to go to this place; you have to write to this organization and if they do not respond to you on time including the granting of credit facility, it can affect your branding practices".

5.12. Operational-Level Challenges in Marketing Communication Campaign

From the discussions, the SMEs/NTEs discussed that their employees in the production centers are deliberately refusing to use their organizations' name plates and colors on their products during manufacturing. This makes it difficult for them to create awareness and for their customers to identify those products as their products. They agreed that they do not have money to advertise rather they rely on the word of mouth and the brand element to deliver their marketing communication message.

- Respondent: "The main challenge is that the people in the production centers are often refuse to use the name plate on the product. Before you realize it, the product is gone out of the production room without a name plate or identity".

5.11. Increasing Costs of New Product Introduction

The study found that the NTEs do not really brand because of the increasing costs of creating a new product. They were of the view that the cost of doing everything in Ghana is increased and hence the cost of introducing a new product on to the market has also increased tremendously. The current economic difficulties do not augur well for businesses to flourish and hence cannot make any effective branding.

- Respondent:"There is an increased cost of doing everything you want to do in Ghana and for that matter the cost of introducing a new product is not easy because everything you will need in your business including branding practices is also increased".

5.12. Lack of Technical Expertise among NTEs

The study also found that the NTEs lack the personnel with the technical know-how in their firms to enable them do effective branding and this is seriously hampering their branding potential. It was discovered from the discussions that they (SMEs) sometimes have the money but the experts are not there to do the branding and hence, their inability to brand their products.

- Respondent:"lack of technical expertise is one of our key challenges affecting our ability to brand since none of our staff possess such knowledge in branding to assist us. Since we do not have the people with branding knowledge amongst us, we are compelled to get someone outside to help us brand our products".

5.13. Difficulty of Obtaining a Patent/ Copyright and /Or Having the Trademark Registered

The study found that getting a copyright or having a trademark registered is very difficult to come by these NTEs in Ghana. All the six cases interviewed explained that this serves as a discouragement to them particularly those of them who are creative and innovative enough to come out with something new. They respondents lamented that even the registration of trademark or brand name with the Registrar-General Department is very cumbersome and expensive in nature.

- Respondent:"the main challenge in brand-building facing my firm is getting a patent or copyright. Inventing without a patent right or copyright means that your ideas can be copied by someone and this could serve as a discouragement to us".

5.14. The Proliferation of Brands in the Market Place

The study found that the market is saturated with firms producing the exact, same thing. This alone always affects the selection of brand elements since firms resort to imitations rather than innovations or coming out with something new.

- Respondent:"the greater number of brands in the market makes it difficult for us to get a brand name or symbol for our products. It looks like the name or symbol you are going to use is already captured or used by someone else. We have so many competitors in the market and whatever we are going to do in terms of branding is already been done

by our competitors. That is our main challenge. I do not know. Is it because we are a lay person that is why this is very difficult for us to do or what?"

5.15. The Pronounced Economic Crisis

The study also found that pronounced economic difficulties do not augur well for businesses to flourish. The macro economic instability makes it tough for SMEs to cope with the large corporations in the market place, where branding is one of the critical element that they cannot ignore.

Respondent: "the times of economic crisis such as high interest rates, exchange rates and inflation do affect our business performances including branding. This affects the buying of materials for production and also the promotion of our business since the cost of doing business is high during this season. The government is committed to ensuring that prudent measures are put in place to create an enabling business environment for businesses to flourish".

SMEs understanding of brand-building concept	• Brand-building has a low patronage in SMEs. • Branding rarely exist in SMEs. • The management of SMEs understanding of brand-building is limited.
The number of brand elements used by SMEs in the NTEs	• The SMEs use more than one brand element. • The brand elements used by SMEs are brand name, logo, symbol, package/design, jingle and a term. • The dominant brand elements in SMEs are the brand name, logo and symbol.
The possible challenges of brand-building in SMEs in the NTEs	• Limited understanding of branding • Difficulty in securing sufficient funds • General slowness and time related challenges • The operational level challenges in marketing communication campaigns • The increasing costs of new product introduction • Lack of technical expertise among SMEs • Difficulty of obtaining a patent or copyright and/or having a trademark registered • The proliferation of brands in the market place • The pronounced economic crisis

Table 6: A Summarizing Framework of the Special Characteristics of
Brand Building and Its Challenges in SMEs Investigated

6. Discussions of Findings

6.1. The Brand-Building Concept/Knowledge in NTEs

As reported in the literature, the SMEs/NTEs brand-building is a shallow one for they do not really understand the meaning or rationale behind branding. The study confirmed this assertion since the NTEs seemed to have little interpretation of brand-building. Some of the NTEs could not easily define a brand let alone differentiating it from branding. Though, they have the idea regarding branding, they do not have an in-depth knowledge of brand-building that will enable them do effective branding. It was evident from the discussions that branding is rarely done in NTEs in Ghana considering their level of knowledge possessed in the subject.

6.2. The Brand Elements Used by the NTEs in Ghana

The literature reports that the SMEs are using more than one brand element and that most of the SMEs have their names different from their brand names. The study confirmed this since each firm uses at least two brand elements and at most three. Some of them even have two brand names. That is different names for their firms and products. Predominantly, brand name, logo, symbol or term, package/design and a jingle were identified as brand elements used by the SMEs in Ghana. Only two out the six cases used color while one firm uses a jingle as one of its brand elements. All the six firms used brand name and four of them used a logo.

6.3. The Possible Challenges of Brand-Building Confronting SMEs Brand-Builders

From the literature review and the conceptual framework, six (6) main challenges of brand building were presented. These include: limited understanding of brand-building; difficulty in securing sufficient funds; the general slowness and time related challenges; operational-level challenges in marketing communication campaigns; organizational issues and lack of authority to lead; and the increasing costs of new product introductions. All these were confirmed after the study except the organizational issues and lack of authority to lead; which was a challenge that these NTEs were not even aware of.

However, four new challenges were emerged out of the interviews. These include: lack of technical expertise among NTEs; difficulty in obtaining a patent right and/or having a trademark registered; the proliferation of brands in the market place and the pronounced economic crisis. Lack of technical know-how is affecting the SMEs ability to brand since they all agreed that they do not have the requisite human resource personnel who can bring their skills to bear on the activities of their firms as far as branding and marketing of products are concerned. The NTEs also find it very difficult to have their trademark registered or obtain a patent right anytime they invent or come out with a new idea for a product. Also the registration of their businesses with the Registrar-General Department (RGD) is also cumbersome and expensive. There is also the proliferation of brands in the market place and this is seriously affecting the NTEs ability to select appropriate brand element such as brand name, logo or symbol for their firms and products. Lastly, the pronounced economic crisis is yet another one which also affects SMEs in their attempt brand.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to augment the body of knowledge of brand-building and its possible challenges confronting brand-builders of SMEs in the NTEs sector in Ghana with an empirical study. The methodology used was a case study. This study contributes to the existing literature by identifying the SMEs understanding of brand-building in the NTEs and the special characteristics identified relate to the knowledge possess in brand-building; the number of brand elements used and the possible challenges of brand-building faced by NTEs.

8. Limitations and Future Studies

The impression of these findings and their implication should be tempered by an acknowledgement of some study limitations. First, the research is conducted within a particular national context of Ghana. In order to evaluate the generalization of the study conclusion, it is imperative that marketing scholars beyond the borders of Ghana conduct replication studies in other contexts.

Also the findings of the study is limited to only NTEs in the manufacturing sector in Ghana and may not be necessarily projected on to NTEs in other sectors such as services in Ghana and hence the sample size is relatively small. Similarly, extensions of this work to different sectors other than manufacturing and employing large sample can also enhance the validity of this study.

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