

Impression Management and Organizational Performance in the Fast Food and Restaurant Sector in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined impression management practices in work organization and their link with organizational performance in the fast food sector. Impression management construct was examined with its adapted dimensions and it was also the case with organizational performance. The structured survey instrument was used to generate data from the sampled managers. The analysis of data shows a positive but moderate link between impression management and performance of firms measured by market size and profitability. It was also found that up to 34.5% of variability in performance is predicted by impression management practices and information balancing and imaging are two components of impression management with highest weights = 0.442 and = 0.318 respectively on the performance of firms in the sector. It was concluded that impression management practices are considered strategic actions that influence performance of organization in terms of market share and profitability therefore it is recommended that operators in the sector should ensure information balancing and positioning as a means of ensuring continued customer patronage through impression created.

Keywords: Impression, Management, Information balancing, Information sifting, Imaging, Information mopping.

INTRODUCTION

Much of reassuring scholarly efforts have been shown in relation to performance of organizations (Link & Wang, 2006; Kukar-Kinney, Walter & Mackenzie, 2007, Kukar-Kinney, Ridgway & Monroe, 2012).. The robust nature of the attention on performance can be explained when viewed against the back drop of both employees and organizational owners who invest their energies and other resources of high value with a view to expecting premium returns as benefits. Achieving the performance goal of organizations according to Banjo (2008) require valued actions and activities which are strategically directed and coordinated. These actions and activities are also contextualized considering the varying characteristics of the different environment in which business operates. Batz and Ellison (2012) had argued that while views on performance are properly canvassed, contributors are required to channel much of the effort at performance stimulating strategies and processes. It is believed that this will help to channel resources appropriately and achieve the desired goals and ensure sustainability. In line with this thinking, there is huge evidence in literature Gilley et al, (2009); Demison (2007); Omar et al (2008); Jaros (2010) that has considered employee competencies, technology and finance as key to the performance goal. Although this perspective does not necessarily relegate other thoughts, attention is needed in terms of strategic organization

driven behaviours that are considered deliberate macro actions for optimal performance. The need for such macro driven actions is heightened due to increased level of competitiveness which has also arisen from prompt desire to expand and grow the economy. As earlier noted, deploying strategies for achieving goals is key and one of such strategic attempt according to Bwalya and Kay (2010) is that firms ensures favourable impression among their employees, competitors, customers and other publics with a view to creating a positive psycho-emotive attitude that garners commitment from employees, improve patronage from customers and affective cooperation from stakeholders. This simply means that managing impression by organizations could be termed as value adding and focused at maximizing organizational potentials for achieving performance goals. This study attempts at examining the empirical link between impression management and performance of organizations in the fast food and restaurant sub sector of the Nigerian economy. The sector undoubtedly is evolving fast with accompanying market challenges. The market size though expansive can only be acquired through strategic actions that are targeted at goals. The construct has been operationalized based on extant literature (Kramberg, 2008; Philemon, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Johnson, 2010; Jero, 2010) in order to show the relationship between impression management and performance using contextualized measures.

JUSTIFICATION

There are concerted efforts at the micro and macro levels of society aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations. On the side of government, economic policies are redesigned to fast track development in the various sub-sectors, of which, the fast food sector is one. As noted elsewhere, the attainment of these goals can only be realized through a holistic attention that captures all the components which includes behavior of workplace actors. In other words a deliberate examination and analysis of behaviour will create for better understanding of how they are likely to influence goals. This research outcome expectedly will provide industry operators with requisite knowledge on behavioural dynamics that are likely to stimulate desired outcomes. We are also aware of the emerging nature of the fast food and restaurant sector in which this study is carried out. The marketing challenges that relates to acquiring and sustaining market share as a performance measure are outstanding therefore need to be understood for strategic advantage.

OBJECTIVES

This study is generally aimed at explaining the link between impression management and its components and performance of organization. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which information sifting, imaging, information balancing, and information mopping dimensions of impression management relates with performance in the fast food service sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Impression Management

The theory of impression management either at micro or macro levels of work has been vastly discussed (Misah, 2000; Robo, 2000; Carthy, 2007; Barclary, 2011; Gabon, 2011). An interesting aspect of the discourse so far is the variegated conceptualization that often times place limitation on its acceptance on the one hand describing it as dysfunctionally manipulative at the expense of one of the parties and on the hand viewed as functional since it is goal directed. In other words, it meander's the initiators towards achieving some intended goals. Balda & Kellyn (2008) position on impression management however gave a concise understanding as they descriptively capture the character of the concept in capsule. Impression management according to the author, is a strategic maneuver, for a competitively tensed environment; the initiator has one intention; I must be appreciated and patronized'. The

realization of work place objectives requires creating impressions that are deemed to be favourable and attractive. Philemon (2005) is of the view that it is a behaviour channeling practice with a view to channeling interest in a manner favourable to impressionist Hoyer, and Jay (2009) have considered impression in the light of Yamarino and Danserau (2008) strategy description. Importantly, they argue that it is a strategy that has the marketing function in focus when chosen at the macro level of the firm to attract and sustain desired market share. In operationalizing strategy conceptualization, they held strongly to actions that create and emphasize the product within the mental domain of customers for favourable patronage. While this view holds; impression management at the level of managers, is deployed by managers as conciliatory measure for managing the inherent diversity of interest of employees and other stakeholders alike. Infact, Watts and Zimmerman (2000) observed that in accounting reporting, managers apply impression management skills to attract owner's interest and conceal dwindling performance symptom. It helps to evade negative impressions that, will affect the concrete or psychological fit of the owners. Kumar & Shar (2004) in his discourse on organizational politics noted that managers place positive information in prominent location and will repeatedly do so to reinforce what the positive information attempts to achieve. The study outcome highlights the existing position of Brenan. Impression management has remained a managerial strategy to ensure optimal productivity while at same time ensure commitment to goals. Schwartz (2005) however argued that impression management practice as a dimension of organizational performance is quite misleading on the long-run in some instances. This he believes is the case in an environment that is highly unpredictable for managers and information is easily assessed to defray the asymmetries which were earlier noted.

Essentially, Lin & Wang (2006) viewed impression management as a multi-dimensional construct and further argue that the multi-dimension varies across context which showcases its presence in social psychology and organizational behaviour discourse and stretched into strategy domain. The dimensions according to Lin & Wang (2006) which were also amplified and validated in Kim & Seock (2009) include information sifting, information balancing and information mopping. Johnson (2010) also discussed impression management as imaging and viewed it as a concrete expression of the construct. This study has considered these multi-dimensions presented and constitute the conceptual premise for it.

Information Sifting and Organisational Performance

Information sifting according to Prackard (2009) presents impression management as an attempt to check and critique available information by managers and make available to target to intended audience or stakeholders that which can be favourably assimilated. It provides the right amount of information that is satisfying to customers, employees and directors (owners) of the organization. Robo (2000) viewed it as classified approach to information management that helps organizations and institutions to make available positive information that are likely to attract interest and patronage. Conversely, Beranaye (2010) argue that information sifting practices that creates positive impression has been used in accounting practices thereby showcasing unethical attitude that is misleading. He further noted that its long run outcome undermine the short term positive outcomes. This suggests caution in its applicability as an aspect of impression management that is likely to assist in garnering desired goals. Therefore it is hypothesized thus:

Ho1: Information sifting does not significantly relate with organizational performance.

Imaging and Organisational Performance

Impression management as conceptualized is an attempt at setting favourable images within the mental domain of the targeted persons which is expected to generate in turn a behaviour that meets the expectation of managers or other impressionist as the case may be (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). In Johnson (2010) view, it is imaging that is at the core of the impressionist thinking. Attracting customer in competitive markets in his thinking require images that are capable of enlisting and sustaining customer attraction to the organization. Imaging set the ground for strategic advantage through its capacity to examine customer groups and functions for attraction and necessarily create reassuring and reliable impression about the organization. The argument here presents imaging as a component of impression management that has the capacity to channel intending customers or other external stakeholders to show interest and sustain commitment to a brand. Again Anyanwu (2005) had reiterated that contemporary marketing practice of emerging market participants are likely anchored on imaging which according to him is the ultimate objective of the physical evidence that is best represented by the level of concern for aesthetics in offices and operational facilities. Image impression is thus created with a defined objective of attracting patronage. Lawson (2010) is of the view that often times, imaging is an ironical representation that is targeted at misrepresentation of the real content or the product features. In otherwords, imaging can be contextually misleading thereby resulting to longterm non-realization of marketing objectives and overall goals. This position likely creates a conceptual redirection on the gains of imaging as an aspect of impression management therefore we hypothesized thus:

Ho2: Imaging does not significantly relate with organizational performance

Information Balancing and Organisational Performance

Sandin (2011), Jao (2011), Bartz and Ellison (2012) have all noted that firms within a volatile competitive environment are often enmeshed in information acquisition and management challenge. In order to gain competitive advantage, the thrust of their impression management strategy is in their capacity to undertake information balancing. In their view, information balancing will require that they are consistent in providing their target customers and stakeholders the necessary information that prompts quality and rational patronage decisions. It is a strategic recipe that promptly make available desired information as information is unevenly reeled out by competitors especially where there are turbulent and rivalry marketing practices and unethical marketing behaviour among rivalry firms. Information balancing according to Gheli (2010) ensures that the asymmetries in information resulting from the many attempts at strategic and competitive advantage of firms through rivalry practices are reoriented through balancing with a view to attracting markets. All the same while information balancing is believed to be concretely reassuring and formative in approach, Barclay (2011) argues that information balancing can be seen to be conceptually speculative rather than definite as an impression management component. They believe balancing may be seemingly impracticable as competitors strategically improve on the volume of information they require to get their targets interested in their firms. But this is however contestable as the concept of rationalization points to the ability of such targets to rationalize and assimilate the aspects of information that best serve their interest and perhaps patronage. The ambidexterity that is associated with impression management practices is emphasized in this conceptualization therefore its implication on achieving desired organizational goals in terms of performance is necessarily determined and we hypothesize thus:

Ho3: Information balancing does not significantly relate with organizational performance

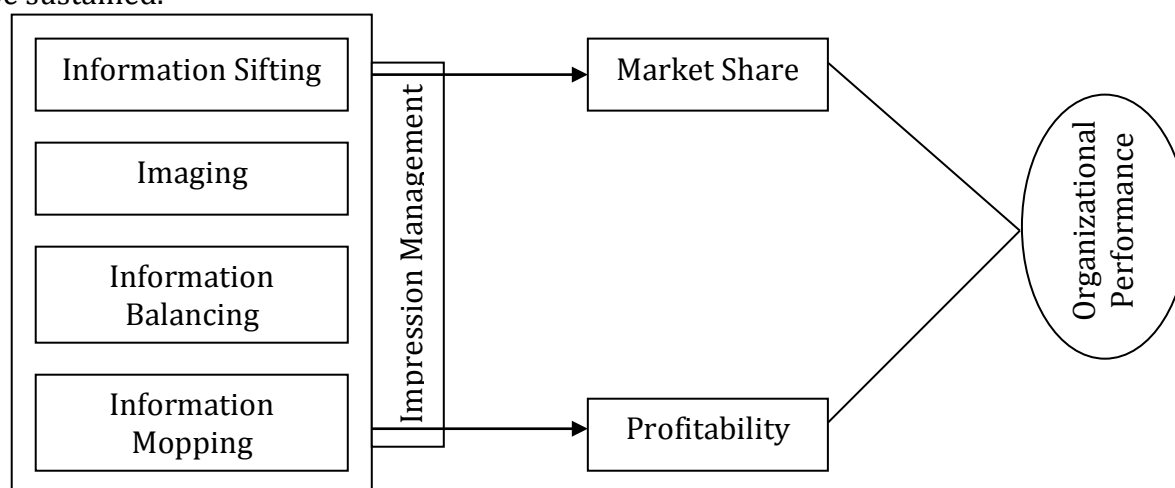
Information Mopping and Organizational Performance

The literature on information mopping so far typifies lucidly the concreteness of the concept of impression management in challenging desired outcome through the initiators overt actions. Egede (2007); Demuson (2007); Maria et al (2010) holds strongly that information mopping by impression managing organization does not necessarily defray the volume of information that guides ready market decisions, rather it provides targeted information for prompt market decision while at same time helping to protect the cooperate integrity and image that is needed for continued patronage. For instance, Jero (2010) argued that when firm mop-up opposing information about a product, there is likelihood of getting perspective customers attracted to the product. Ganere (2009) observed that information mopping portent the tendency of misleading decision information makers while at same time encouraging acceptance as those that accept full short of other vital elements of the information needed for quality decision. Baranaye & Agoma (2011) argued that information mopping practice objectively conducted by managers to surreptitiously create a market that also require consistency in information balancing. Information at this point according to the authors is scarcely provided to the targeted audience and this makes it increasingly difficult to be swaged from the product. Impression management as suggested here is conceptually entangled with the objective of providing a short-term lee-way for market positioning of firm and may likely require attendant strategies for sustainability. Infact Billoway (2010) had a contrary position in relation to its capacity to acquire and sustain markets. His thinking is prelimited on the landlocked information flow behaviour that characterized a particular industry and communication infrastructure that determines velocity of information flow. Importantly this views as expressed reminisce a dysfunctional perspective in relation to the impression management construct that deliberately and perceptibly sharpen and channel behaviour toward improved markets and profitability therefore it is hypothesized thus:

H04: Information Mopping does not relate significantly with organizational performance.

Proposed Model

Fig 1 represents the hypothesized model linking impression management component of organizational politics and organizational performance. The proposed model re-examined extant research and theory through a renewed thinking on organizational politics hitherto seen as dysfunctional behavior that has shown consistent negative association with work place outcomes (Misah, 2000; Balson et al, 2007; Cathy, 2007; Jenson & Lemila, 2010). Performance here has been viewed as a set of outcomes desired by the firm which when attained also need to be sustained.



Conceptual model of the. Relationship between Impression Management and Organisational Performance

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a positivist philosophical approach. In view of this it has applied a quantitative method of dealing with the variables examined in the study which constitutes the basis for theory building. The questionnaire has been strongly recommended as a survey instrument that generates data for analysis (Yin, 1994, Creswell, 2006). Using a survey instrument titled Impression Management Perspectives and Organisational Performance (IMPORP), data were obtained from 28 managers within the sector. The survey instrument was electronically mailed having identified the sampled managers. They were allowed two weeks to respond and perhaps ask questions to seek clarifications where necessary (Basil, 2008).

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection exercise for this study was seemingly problematic as operators in the sector were initially not cooperative since some of them believed that the issues raised in the study may likely affect their customer mobilization rate. However, with consistent visit and reassurance on ethical conduct and appeal we got them to participate interestingly in the study. The attempts of data generation for the mentioned reason lasted for 2 months. When we eventually got their consent to participate, they were given 2 weeks to respond to our mailed instrument.

MEASUREMENT

Gabon et al (2011) has criticized and expanded on the theoretical and conceptual basis of Pracad (2009) work on impression management. If the authors work provides the multi-dimension on the construct and had used a 32 item scale in the measuring impression management. Their measurement however validates the 26 item scale of Prackard (2009) which was earlier used on the construct.

In other to ensure appropriate measurement, we have adapted the comprehensive Gabon et al (2011) 32 item scale. All of these were previewed on 5 points Likert's scale of Strongly Agree \pm 5 to Strongly Disagree = 1.

RESULTS

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Impression Management and Organisational Performance

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Information Sifting	1.00	.25**	.46**	.23**	.36**	.64**	.23**
Imaging	.25*	1.00	.33**	.48**	.28**	.35*	.41**
Information Balancing	.46**	.33*	1.00	.26**	.51**	.30**	.62**
Information Mopping	.23**	.48**	.26**	1.00	.21**	.20**	.28**
Market Share	.36**	.28**	.51*	.21**	1.00	.37**	.21**
Profitability	.64**	.35*	.30**	.20**	.37**	1.00	.62*

**** Correlation is significant @ 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

*** Correlation is significant @ 0.05 level (2-tailed)**

The Pearson Correlation outcome on the dimension of impression management and organizational performance examined are positive and significant except in the case of information mopping and profitability which is negation but also significant at < 0.01 . This gives support to the stated hypotheses Hoi, Ho2, and Ho3. In the case of H04, the relationship between the dimension and the performance measure of profitability was inverse but significant.

Ys =

Where

Ys = Organizational Performance

= Constant (coefficient of intercept)

X1 = Information Sifting

X2 = Imaging

X3 = Information Balancing

X4 = Information Mopping

- - - = Regression Coefficient

Table 2(a): Coefficient from Regression Analysis of the Studied Variables Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	AdjR ²	Std Error Est	F. Charge	Sig
1	.588	.345	.334	.7562	46.254	.000

Table 2(b) Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		Sig	V/F
		Beta	Std Error	Beta	T		
1	(Constant)	1.489	509		2.942	.004	
	Ins	.401	.081	.008	-.090	.926	1.637
	InB	.208	.106	.363	4.790	.000	3.266
	Im	-.008	.094	.266	2.454	.015	2.313
	InM	.007	.085	.016	.080	.00	1.833

Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

In order to predict the goodness of fit of the regression model, the multiple correlation coefficient (R) Coefficient of determination (R²) and F-ratio were examined. First the F value of 46.254 (P=0.00) is significant which mean that the results of the regression did not occur by chance which also implies goodness of fit in predicting the variance of organizational performance in relation to the examined components of impression management. The R value of .588 shows a strong positive relationship between impression management and organizational performance. Further, the R² value of 0.345 suggests that 34.5% of the variation in performance is explained by impression management. In the regression, the beta coefficients explained the relative importance of the four components of impression management in contributing to the variance of performance. Amongst the four components, information balancing with $\beta = 0.363$, $t = 4.790$ has the heaviest weight on the criterion variable (performance) and thus is followed by imaging with $\beta = 0.266$; $t = 2.454$.

DISCUSSION

The discourse on impression management has been re-oriented towards finding out its functionality in work organizations with a view to establishing its strategic capacity to enhancing overall performance of organizations. The results of the study have given support to the hitherto conceptual disposition of Kramerberg (2008) that impression management is a deliberate and well coordinated manager's attempt aimed at gaining strategic advantage in the market place. It is found from the study outcome that information sifting holds strong potentials of channeling customer attention to products and in turn ensure increase in market share. Houper (2009) argues that the ultimate goal of managing impression is to attract favourable outcome for the impressionist and it accounts for the tendency to balance information that creates a favourable disposition as expected or targeted. This was the case in

the study through the balancing and imaging practices. The architectural configuration of the physical infrastructure of the fast food operators are characteristically laced with much aesthetics focus which attracts customers. The concrete image of the operators is first captured by customers. Adiele (2000) has emphasized the empirical implications of physical evidence and its relationship with marketing performance. Marinyo & Gbanisola (2000) have also found a relationship between impression management and managerial functionality measured by capacity to optimize productivity from within. This study findings does not show an empirical shift. However, the findings robbed off the common thinking in the works of Habib et al (2004), Dezie and Olalekan (2009) that impression management as a component of work place politics can only be practically functional when aimed at stimulating and sustaining behavioural outcomes that meets desired goals. Vincent (2011) contrastingly argued that the positive outcome of their study notwithstanding, the macro level gains associated with impression management and performance are essentially short-term and cannot be sustained, while this position requires an empirical assertion, our study result has empirically discountenanced the garb of dysfunctionality that has hitherto come with impression management.

CONCLUSION/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Firms in the highly competitive environment according to Villan (2006) strategically create perceptible impression about wide range of their business activities. The object of such action is to strategically position the firms to gain competitive advantage. In this study, we empirically examined impression management and organizational performance through their dimensions and measures drawn from extant literature on the constructs from the data generated and analysed hypothesis, impression management undoubtedly attracts favourable outcomes in terms of the marketing function and profitability. Essentially, it is noted that whenever impressions are managed by the studied firms in terms of information dynamics and imaging, their targets customers are attracted to have favourable disposition to create impressions hence the patronage level attained. Instructively, impression management reflects a behavioural composition that is aimed at channeling organizational effort at improving level of performance. The findings of the study hold strong implications for operators in the sector. Impression management as a strategic action itself targeted at attracting favourable commitment from targets requires that it should be managed in line with information management practices since information dynamics is the thrust for its practice. The volume of information let out to targeted persons should sufficiently defray the individual belief as earlier composed cognitively.

Suggested for Further Studies

The study findings are ordinarily not exhaustive and absolute as they are contextualized. Therefore, further works are needed on impression management in the banking sector and other financial institution considering the unique nature of their services which are rendered under stringent apex bank control and legislations. It is also necessary to examine the moderating effect of some socio-cultural factors of the environment on the influence of impression management on performance.

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