

The Effects of Product Innovation on Corporate Image (A Case Study of Duraplast Ghana Limited)

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Abstract: The study examined the effects of product innovation on corporate image a case study of Duraplast Ghana Limited. The study sought to explore answers to the research objectives which were on: to determine the aspects of product innovation which Duraplast applies, to assess how product innovation influences buyer behavior, finally, to examine how product innovation helps in forming perception about organization. The study used questionnaires as the main data collection tool to solicit information from the respondents. Primary and Secondary sources were both used for facts gathering. The study revealed that, the company is very innovative in quality products, and applies brand extension as the main aspect of product innovation. However, it lacks intensive advertisement. Based on the research findings, some relevant recommendations were made and finally conclusion.

Keywords: Product Innovation, Corporate Image, Duraplast Ghana Limited.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term corporate image although perceived as a contemporary phenomenon in marketing has long received much attention by marketers for some time now. In Ghana for instance, companies have begun to pay much attention to building a good corporate image because they have understood that a company with a good image has the ability to attract and retain customers, shareholders and competent employees. Many employees in such company are committed to the company and its values which is an easy way to retain competent employees to achieve organizational success. According to Balmer (2001), corporate image is perceptions, (mental) pictures or impressions of an organization that resides in the public's mind. Moreover, Smith and Taylor (2002, p.616) are of the view that corporate image is "about everything a company does (does not) do". Every organization has a corporate image in the society irrespective of whether they have consciously sought to develop one.

Organizational theorists and managers alike have long shown more of an interest in the significant role of innovation in organizations, primarily because of the crucial role innovation plays in securing sustained competitive advantage Porter (1980) (as cited in Cooper, 1998). Being innovative is seen as a necessary strategy for modern day business and lack of product innovation could affect the organization's customer satisfaction which will ultimately impact adversely on profit (Akindipe, 2007). Hence, most companies are now using product and service innovation as a vital tool to attract and retain customers, project their image and differentiate themselves among their competitors.

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM:

Just as firms compete for customers, they also strive for good corporate image across their relevant constituent groups. To many firms, a reputation as an innovative company is something that is both prized and actively sought after (Henard and Dacin, 2010). According to Akindipe (2007), empirical studies over the years have shown that application of product

innovation as marketing strategy is essential to the survival and positive image of a firm. However, in the Ghanaian context, there is limited literature on how organizations project their corporate image through product innovation. Following this line of reasoning, this study investigates into how Duraplast Ghana Limited had built its corporate image through product innovation within the plastic manufacturing industry in Ghana.

1.3 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Objectives of this study are;

1. To determine the aspects of product innovation which Duraplast applies
2. To determine how product innovation helps in forming perception about organization
3. To assess how product innovation influences buyer behavior.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Which aspects of products innovation does Duraplast Ghana apply?
2. How does product innovation helps in forming perception about organization?
3. How does product innovation influence buyer behavior?

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATION:

The scope of the study does not only consider how product innovation helps in building a good corporate image but how product innovation helps in forming perception in the minds of customers about organization. Time constrain was a major factor that hampered a thorough exploration of all relevant sources of information. Moreover, it was not easy to locate all the direct customers of Duraplast hence, both direct and indirect customers participated.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

- This research will ultimately serve as a reference to any future research in this area of study.
- Moreover, the findings and recommendations of this research will serve as a credible working document for the organization of the study which will enable them to improve upon their corporate image.

2. LITERATURE RIVIEW

This chapter reviews various literature on the subject under study. Moreover, some relevant terminologies of the study were reviewed.

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF PRODUCT INNOVATION:

INNOVATION:

Innovation is a central concept in business life today and they are meaningful and relevant to businesses only when they are adopted by consumers (Hetet et al, 2012). In order to be competitive, companies need to innovate, Pauwels et al, (2004) (as cited by Hetet et al, 2012). As a result, the word “innovation” could be said to be the most popular vocabulary among many managers these days.

According to Gordon (1999), innovation covers all that goes on from the beginning of an idea, to an invention, through to the marketing of new product and the use of a new process. Innovation begins with an idea and ends with widespread use of new products as well as widespread new process diffusion. Innovation, in fact, continues until the new product or process has been completely introduced into the economy, along with any modifications and improvements. There is a connection between the two terms creativity and innovation, in other words they are two faces to one coin. While creativity means the creation of new ideas which does not exist before in order to solve problems (Reguia 2014), innovation according to Innovation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry U.K (2004) is the successful exploitation of new ideas. Hence innovation can only come into reality after creativity.

2.2 PRODUCT INNOVATION:

Product innovation has become a crucial strategic approach for managers in creating sustainable competitive edge in the turbulent and highly competitive business environment. As such, product innovation affords companies the opportunity to continue to exist and fight competitors successfully. A company that fails to innovate its products may be edged out of the market by its competitors. This can be due to customers' ever-changing needs.

Kotler (2003) argues that, under contemporary condition of competition, it is risky for a company to rely only on its existing products customers want and expect a stream of new and improve products. Competition will do its best to meet this desire. A company's programme that encourage searching for new product is necessary. Product innovation reflects change in the end product or service offered by an organization to its customers (Utterback, 1994). Product innovation therefore means different products to different people. Product innovation has become an essential strategic approach for creating competitive advantages in the dynamic, highly competitive global business environment (Nadar, 2013). However, new product or process of innovation always require bold leadership drive. Product innovation encapsulates all the essential efforts put into a product from conception to development and commercialization to satisfy the needs and expectations of customers and all stakeholders (Nadar, 2013).

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (NPD) :

Fundamentally, businesses exists to satisfy its customers while making profit to maximize shareholders value. A business can only achieve these objectives through its products and services. Hence, new products and service development is a critical success factor of every organization (Etzel, Walker and Stanton 2001). A new product is a product that is exceptional from other existing products with regards to its utility and benefits. According to Kotler et al (1999, p.604), new product development is the "development of original products, product improvements, product modifications and new brands through the firm's own research and development efforts".

According to Kotler and Keller (2009, p. 612), "new product development requires senior management to define business domains, product categories, and specific criteria". Bearden, Ingram and LaForge (2004, p. 214) indicates that "new product development should be market driven and customer focused, aimed at developing superior products that offer consumers unique benefits and exceptional value". Burnett (1999), explains that for every product, regardless of where it is in its life cycle, certain strategic decisions must be made. These decisions include specifying product features and package design, branding, and establishing support services.

2.4 THE CONCEPT OF CORPORATE IMAGE:

The challenge today is to create a strong and distinctive image (Kohli and Thakor 1997). However, image is a procedure by which ideas, feelings, and previous experiences with an organization are stored in memory and transformed into meaning base on stored categories (MacInnis and Price 1987). Balmer (2001), views corporate image as perceptions, (mental) pictures or impressions of an organization that resides in the public's mind.

Smith and Taylor (2002, p.615) also reasoned that "corporate image is perception". This reflects people's view of an organization which is created by all the senses experienced through product usage, customer service, the commercial environment and corporate communications. Hence, corporate image is the result of a process.

2.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT INNOVATION AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR:

Stanton (1998) (as cited in Akindipe, 2007 pg. 25) argued that "if market satisfaction in terms of quality does exist to some extent, it follows that consumers may be more critical in their appraisal of new products. While the consumer is being selective, the market is being delayed with products that are imitations or that offer only marginal competitive advantages. This situation may be leading to "product digestion". This cure is to develop really new products-to innovate and not just imitate". Product innovation could make an organization's obsolete product become entirely new to its customer and satisfy their needs than before. Consumer react to new products in various ways depending on the type of product innovation that was carried out on the product and the marketing methodology, the reaction actually end up creating a positive or negative image about a company's new products (Nadar, 2013). Subsequently, the performance of the new product will determine the consequent reaction of the consumers.

In addition, the success or failure of product innovation depends largely on the reaction of the consumers which of course could be influenced by some of the activities the manufacturers of the product. It is obvious that not all new products quickly become a success. Consumers tend to react positively or otherwise to a product with the price being exorbitant, they will look for other brands with better price. In addition a product of high quality will automatically influence consumers purchasing behavior and this which will create a positive image about a company and its product. Hence, a company which is highly innovative in quality products and services will reap the benefits of positive image (good brand), while a company with poor innovation record and badly produced product will scare the consumers away, this argument is supported by Rainey (2006). The purpose of organization image is essentially to satisfy customers (Cleary 1981). This image will influence the perceived worth of the product and will increase the brand's value to both internal and external customers leading to the formation of good corporate image in the minds of customers. This image will influence the perceived worth of the product and will automatically increase the brand's value to the customer, leading to brand loyalty (The Economist, 1988).

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the methodology used in the study. It discusses the various processes and procedures the researcher employed in gathering data for the research. Attention was given to population, sample size as well as sampling technique used.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN:

According to Trochim (2002), a research design provides the glue that holds the research project together. The researcher adopted descriptive methodological approach to achieve the overall purpose of the study. The descriptive research was used as it provides a picture of a phenomenon as it naturally happens (Burns and Grove, 2003). This design was well thought-out as suitable in this work since it gives a picture of how product innovation impact on the corporate image of Duraplast Ghana Limited.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE:

According to Kish (1965), population refers to the target population or group of individuals of interest for study. The target population consisted of customers (both individuals and organizational) of Duraplast Ghana Limited within Accra Metropolis in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. A sample is a subset or fraction of a population selected to participate in a research project (Polit and Hungler, 1999). For the purpose of this study, a sample size of one hundred (100) was used.

3.3 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES:

According to Zickmund (2003), sampling involves any procedure that uses a small number of items or a part of the population to make a conclusion regarding the whole population. For the purpose of this study, simple random sampling technique was used. Simple random sampling allowed each member of the population the equal chance of being selected (Latham, 2007).

3.4 TYPES OF DATA:

Both the primary and secondary data were used for the study.

3.4.1 Secondary Data:

According to Corti and Bishop (2005), secondary data is data collected by someone other than the user. The researcher consulted printed materials including journals, articles and websites sources to provide some existing information relevant to the study. These information formed the literature review of the study.

3.4.2 Primary Data:

According to Gray (2004), primary data is data observed or collected directly from first-hand experience. In this regard, questionnaires were used as the main source of obtaining primary data.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS:

A self-administered questionnaires formed the main data collection tool for the study. The questionnaire was developed using both open and closed ended questions. The researcher was fortunate to have all the administered questionnaires returned though delayed. It represented 100% return rate.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS:

The data obtained through the administered questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computing software. This enhanced proper interpretation of the data gathered from the field of study.

3.7 COMPANY’S PROFILE:

DURAPLAST Limited is a member of Hitti group started operations in November 1969 with the production of unplasticized polyvinyl chloride (uPVC) pipes of various sizes. The company has for many years been the main supplier of world-class high-quality, unplasticised Polyvinyl Chloride (uPVC) and HDPE pipes and fittings for Ghana's water and electrical engineering markets. Duraplast pipes are rigorously tested in laboratory and certified by the Ghana standards Board and meet rigid British and Metric Standards (Duraplast Ghana, 2016).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the responses and other information gathered from the field through administration of questionnaires. Interpretation and data analysis were done through the use of frequency tables and percentages to make the presentation easy to comprehend.

Table 4.1 Gender of respondents

Gender		Frequency	Percent
	Male	50	50.0
	Female	50	50.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.1 above shows that fifty (50) respondents representing 50% were males whilst fifty (50) respondents that is 50% were also females. This shows that there was gender balance.

Table 4.2 Respondents duration of Duraplast products usage

	Number of years	Frequency	Percent
	Less than a year	11	11.0
	Less than two years	15	15.0
	Two years and above	74	74.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016.

According to table 4.2, ten (10) respondents that is 10% have used Duraplast products for less than a year, fifteen (15) respondents that is 15% have used the products for less than two years whilst seventy-five (75) respondents representing 75% have used their products for two years and above. This shows that, majority of the respondents have been using Duraplast products for more than two years.

Table 4.3 How respondents got to know Duraplast Brand

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Word of mouth	38	38.0
	Mass media	20	20.0
	Distribution outlets	42	42.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.3 above shows how respondents got to know Duraplast brand. Thirty-eight (38) respondents which represent 38% was through word of mouth, twenty (20) respondents that is 20% indicated their awareness through mass media, whereas

the remaining forty-two (42) respondents representing 42% was through Duraplast distributors. This implies that majority of the respondents got to know Duraplast brand through their distributors. Those who knew the brand through mass media are few. By implication, the company lack mass media advertisement.

Table 4.4 Aspects of innovation which influence consumer preference

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Product innovation	15	15.0
	Rebranding	35	35.0
	Brand extension	50	50.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.4 above indicates that, fifteen (15) respondents representing 15% held the view that rebranding is what makes them prefer Duraplast brand to other brands. Fifty (50) respondents that is 50% responded that brand extension influenced their preference for Duraplast brand to other brands, while thirty-five (35) respondents representing 35% indicated that product reformation is the aspect of product innovation which makes them prefer Duraplast brand to other brands. This implies that Duraplast applies various methods of product innovation of which brand extension is the major one.

Table 4.5 Feature of Duraplast product respondents like most

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Satisfactory	20	20.0
	High quality	60	60.0
	Brand name	15	15.0
	Availability	5	5.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.5 above shows that, twenty (20) out of hundred (100) respondents representing 20% chose satisfactory as the feature of Duraplast product they like most, sixty (60) respondents that is 60% chose high quality, fifteen (15) respondent that is 15% chose brand name and five(5) respondents that is 5% chose availability as the feature they like most. This implies that majority of the respondents see Duraplast brand to be of a higher quality than competitors.

Table 4.6 Respondents perception about Duraplast brand

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Innovative in quality products	20	20.0
	Prestige	5	5.0
	Value for money	60	60.0
	Availability	15	15.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.6 above, shows response to perception about the Duraplast brand, twenty (20) respondents that is 20% perceived the brand as innovative in quality products, five (5) respondents that is 5% indicated prestige as their perception, sixty (60) respondents that is 60% see the brand as value for money and fifteen (15) respondents that is 15% chose availability as a reflection of their perception about Duraplast brand. By implication, majority of the respondents reasoned to have value for what they pay for whiles, minority also attach prestige to the Duraplast brand.

Table 4.7 Respondents knowledge about new product of Duraplast

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Water tank	85	85.0
	Dura flex	15	15.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.7 above elaborates respondents' knowledge of new products of Duraplast. Eighty-five (85) respondents which represents 85% indicated water tank and fifteen (15) respondents representing 15% indicated duraflex. None of the respondents ticked pallet or duraboat. This suggests that the company does not intensify advertisement in creating awareness of its new and existing products.

Table 4.8 How likely customers will recommend Duraplast to others

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Strongly recommend	75	75.0
	Recommend	21	21.0
	Would not recommend	4	4.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

From table 4.8 above, seventy-five (75) respondents that is 75% responded they would strongly recommend, twenty (21) respondents that is 21% responded would recommend, while only four(4) respondents would not recommend Duraplast to others. This means that majority of the respondents will strongly recommend the brand to others which will benefit the company in terms of gaining higher market share.

Table 4.9 Respondents level of satisfaction

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Highly satisfied	70	70.0
	Satisfied	25	25.0
	Dissatisfied	5	5.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016

Table 4.9 above depicts seventy (70) respondents that is 70% responded that they are highly satisfied with the products of Duraplast, whiles twenty-five respondents (25) representing 25% are satisfied and only five(5) respondents representing 5% are dissatisfied. This implies that majority of the respondents are highly satisfied with the Duraplast brand hence, the company must continue to improve on its products to sustain their customer satisfaction level.

Table 4.10 Challenges respondents encounter with Duraplast products

	response	Frequency	Percent
	Not always available in the market	10	10.0
	High price	90	90.0
	Total	100	100.0

Source: Field data, 2016.

Table 4.10 above shows response to challenges with Duraplast products, ten (10) respondents representing 10% indicated that the products are not always in the market whilst ninety (90) respondents that is 90% see price as a challenge. This

suggests that most of the respondents have challenge with the prices of Duraplast products and if competitors should offer quality products with a comparatively low price customers are likely to switch from the Duraplast brand to other brands.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter focused on the summary of data analysis, findings and conclusion. It also puts forward recommendations which will help management of Duraplast Limited in building upon their corporate image as well as attracting more customers into the company.

5.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS:

The study revealed that 50% of customer respondents are of the view that brand extension influenced their preference for Duraplast Ghana brand to other brands. This agrees with the marketing manager's response that the company uses brand extension more as compared to other aspects of product innovation.

The study assessed the rate at which respondents were aware of new products of Duraplast, however, it was observed that 85% which represent majority of the respondents indicated water tank while 15% indicated duraflex. None of the respondents ticked pallet or duraboat. This suggests that Duraplast lacks certain marketing strategies in creating awareness of all its existing and new products to customers.

An assessment of customers' perception about Duraplast revealed that 70% of respondents see the brand as value for money and this agrees with the reason why seventy-five (75) respondents that is 75% of respondent are of the view that they will strongly recommend the Duraplast brand. This shows Duraplast produces high quality products.

Finally, 60% of respondents are of the view that Duraplast products are of high quality. This automatically answer the reason why 90% see price as a challenge because high quality products are not of lower price.

5.2 CONCLUSION:

Findings of this study however reveals that ,the rationale behind product innovation is not limited to forming a positive image in the minds of customers about a particular brand, but, it helps in satisfying ever-changing taste and preferences of customers. Thus, giving the company sustained competitive edge in terms of higher market share, customer retention which will ultimately impact positively on the profit margin of an organization. This leads to conclude that, there is no luxury arguing the fact that product innovation engenders a positive image about an organization. However, products innovation as a marketing initiative may fail if the products are poorly marketed to targeted customers. It is therefore imperative for Duraplast Limited to adopt relevant marketing strategies to enhance consumer awareness of its new and existing products.

5.3 RECOMMENDATION:

- Currently, customers are not aware of the various brand elements of Duraplast, hence, the company must intensify its marketing efforts in creating brand awareness among customers especially through the mass media. This will enable the company to attract new customers which will inevitably impact positively on market share and profit.
- Based on the response of the marketing manager of Duraplast, the company is currently facing competition from competitors. Therefore, the company must consider rebranding strategy. This will refresh and strengthen the brand and has the propensity of changing customers' purchasing behaviour positively, which will inevitably mitigate competitors' activities.
- A strong reputation in environmental and social responsibility help companies to build and enhance the image of their brand Jobber (2007). Therefore, it is highly recommended that the company must embark upon Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities in order to build the Duraplast brand among competitors.
- Customers' complaints is a gift (Barlow and Moller, 2008), moreover, "customers are not usually slow to say what they think about an organization and its products or services if there is a problem" (ABE 2011, p. 131). Therefore, it is recommended that the company must take proactive measures to obtain feedback from their customers which will enable the company to identify, meet and exceed the needs of their customers.

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