

Branding Awareness and Challenges in Agribusiness: An Exploratory Analysis Among Agricultural Education Students in University of Nigeria Nsukka

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Abstract

As competition increases in Agribusiness sector, strong branding has become crucial for success in every agriprenuer's business. However, many small-scale agripreneurs remain unaware of the importance and benefits of business branding, thereby limiting their business growth. Agricultural education students in Nigeria – the future of agribusiness – are expected to develop branding competence. Unfortunately, they may still face the same branding challenges as current small-scale agribusiness owners.

Adopting a descriptive survey approach, this study explores branding awareness, perception, and challenges among Agricultural education students at University of Nigeria Nsukka. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to over 40 students via physical form distribution. The study employed descriptive statistics to analyze branding awareness levels and thematic analysis to categorize common branding challenges faced by students.

Preliminary findings indicate that while students recognize the importance of branding, their practical knowledge is limited, and they face challenges such as limited financial resources, difficulty leveraging financial resources, lack of branding education, difficulty leveraging digital branding tools and techniques, and limited access to branding mentorship.

This study highlights the need to integrate branding education into Agricultural Education programs, organize practical branding workshops, provide open access to resources, tools, and techniques, and strategic mentorship programs between students and agribusiness professionals to enhance branding knowledge, skills, and experience.

By implementing these strategies, future agribusiness professionals will be better equipped to create strong brands and successfully position their businesses for visibility, growth, and profitability in Nigeria's agribusiness sector and beyond.

Keywords

Branding Awareness, Agricultural Education, Agribusiness Challenges, Agricultural Entrepreneurship, Agriprenuer Training

Introduction

Statement of Problem

While there are many people who are now agripreneurs in Nigeria, only a handful are visible, recognized, and patronized by

a large market. Strong branding enhances market visibility, attracts customers, and increases profitability, yet it is often overlooked in small-scale agribusinesses.

Branding awareness among agripreneurs is limited, and this gap may also exist among Agricultural Education students, who represent the future of agribusiness in Nigeria. Given the branding gaps among current agripreneurs, it is essential to assess whether future agri-professionals – today's Agricultural Education students – are being adequately prepared. These students may have little to no exposure to branding principles, techniques, and strategies, and even those who recognize its importance may still face challenges such as lack of adequate branding education, financial constraints, and difficulty leveraging digital branding tools.

However, as students of Agricultural Education in Vocational and Technical Education, there is a likelihood that they are being introduced to the business side of agriculture, which may include branding. But how much branding knowledge do they actually have? If some students already own agribusinesses, are they applying branding strategies, and to what extent? What challenges do they encounter in understanding or applying branding concepts, whether or not they have businesses?

This study seeks to explore the level of branding awareness among Agricultural Education students in UNN, investigate their branding practices (if any), and examine the branding challenges they encounter, and thereafter identify possible solutions to improve their branding capabilities.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Branding is not just the face of a business; it is the voice, the values, and the vision woven into every touch-point that earns trust and drives transformation. This research focuses on understanding how branding awareness impacts the perception of agribusiness and identifying the key challenges in branding that Agricultural Education students, who are the future of Agriculture sector, face. This study is grounded in the belief that strong branding is vital to the success of agribusiness ventures. Branding is the art of creating in the minds of consumers, a unique identity for a business, product, or service. Branding is how your business introduces itself without speaking – it's the feeling people experience whenever your product or service comes up. Branding is not just about having a logo for a product or service. It is a combination of every detail a business uses to create a desired perception and awareness in the consumer's mind – logo, business name, colours, tagline, customer experience, and reputation.

Agribusiness generally refers to businesses that are involved in the production, processing, distribution, and retail of agricultural products and services. It is the organized commercial system of integrating farming and business strategies to produce, process, and market agricultural products for profit and sustainability. Agribusiness is a part of the general program that is expected to be taught students in higher institutions of learning, particularly to students in Agricultural Education, as this would help them become more aware of what branding is, how branding works, and even how to apply branding to their agribusinesses now or in future.

Branding awareness is the extent to which students understand the concept of branding, its elements, and its role in agribusiness. This awareness includes both theoretical and practical

knowledge, such as familiarity with brand identity, strategy, and digital branding tools. In Agricultural sector, it is the level of understanding and recognition that individuals or groups have of specific agribusinesses, which includes their products, services, and overall identity. Branding perception, on the other hand, covers a student's attitude, beliefs, and value judgments regarding branding as a strategic tool for business success, and examines how students see branding – as essential, optional, expensive, or complex. Students' branding awareness and perception are faced with challenges that prevent them from getting the best in branding.

Branding challenges are the barriers faced by students in acquiring branding knowledge or applying branding knowledge in real-life situations. These challenges could be financial constraints, poor digital literacy, limited access to training, or lack of mentorship. Branding challenges in agribusiness are the obstacles that hinder the creation, development, implementation, and maintenance of strong agricultural brands, which impede the sector's ability to build trust with consumers, differentiate products, and create long-term business values.

This research paper explores Branding Awareness and Challenges in Agribusiness among Agricultural Education students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). The theoretical framework for this study draws from various branding theories and business models that provide insight into the concepts of branding awareness, brand perception, and the challenges encountered by students in agricultural education.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of branding focuses on creating a distinct identity that sets a product or service apart from competitors in the marketplace. According to Keller (1993), brand equity is built on consumer perceptions, and brand awareness is the first stage of brand development. The CBBE model identifies brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty as key components that contribute to strong brand equity. This theory will guide the examination of branding awareness among Agricultural Education students, helping to understand how they perceive and identify agribusiness branding.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour [1] is essential in explaining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior shape consumer decisions. Agricultural education students' attitudes towards brands, their social influences, and perceptions of agribusiness branding will play a significant role in their ability to understand and implement branding strategies.

The Constructivist Learning Theory [2] suggests that students learn best when they are actively involved in the process of branding through experiential learning, group discussions, and practical application. By understanding the learning environment at UNN, this theory will offer insights into how students develop branding awareness and their readiness to address branding challenges in agribusiness.

Review of Empirical Studies

Keller (2013), posits that a brand is not just a logo, a website, or a business card – it is an experience that distinguishes an organization in the minds of consumers. Chux et al. (2020) sees branding as a multidimensional construct that consists of numerous

dimensions such as brand promotion, brand orientation, customer-based brand equity, among others. Branding not only creates a lasting impression on customers, but also informs them about what to expect from your business [3-6].

Adekunle (2021), investigated branding awareness and marketing challenges among smallholder cassava farmers in Ogun state. A descriptive survey design method was applied with a structured questionnaire administered to 150 cassava farmers. It was discovered that branding awareness was low, and farmers lacked access to branding resources such as logos, packaging, and promotional strategies. The main challenges they experienced were ignorance, illiteracy, and cost. The study helps to identify real-world branding challenges that agribusiness owners face, and also supports the need to investigate whether future agribusiness professionals (students) are aware of these branding realities.

Okafor and Bello (2019) evaluated in their research, the branding practices in Nigerian agribusiness startups in Enugu and Anambra states. Using a case study approach and semi-structured interview of 20 agribusiness owners, they found out that most entrepreneurs used basic branding elements such as names and logos, but lacked real strategies. The major issues they had were limited knowledge and mentorship. Since agricultural education students are expected to become agricultural entrepreneurs, it is crucial to understand whether their academic program is preparing them to overcome these gaps in branding strategies.

Eze (2020) examined the impact of entrepreneurship education on branding competence among Agricultural Education students in Southeastern Nigeria. A survey was carried out among 200 final-year students across three universities using questionnaires and observation method. The findings from that survey showed that while students had theoretical knowledge of branding, many lacked practical experience and exposure to real branding activities. This, directly relating to the target population of this current research, raises the question of whether Agricultural Education students at UNN also face similar issues of practical skill deficiency.

Nwankwo and Alabi (2018) explored marketing and branding literacy among rural farmers in Northern Nigeria, using a quantitative approach where 100 farmers were surveyed with structured questionnaires. The results showed that only a small percentage of farmers could define branding, and fewer could actually apply it. It further showed that membership in cooperative societies improved awareness levels slightly. This therefore underscores the importance of early branding education and exposure. The current study aims to understand if future farmers (the present students) are being equipped early enough to bridge this gap.

Umeh (2022) examined branding awareness among agro-product vendors in Nsukka Urban. The study employed interviews and observation among 45 vendors. The findings showed that many equated branding with packaging alone, and were unaware of long-term brand building. Some of the challenges they faced included lack of training and customer education. By studying students in the same geographical region (Nsukka), this study supports a contextual comparison. It allows us to analyze whether students are aware of more than just the physical elements of branding.

The reviewed studies consistently show gaps in branding awareness, practical application, and exposure among agribusiness owners and students. While some studies focused on farmers and entrepreneurs, others addressed students. These findings provide a strong foundation for the current research, which uniquely investigates the awareness level and perceived branding challenges among Agricultural Education students at UNN.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine whether Agricultural Education students have adequate knowledge on agribusiness branding, enough to run their agribusinesses successfully, or effectively guide agribusiness owners to successfully scale their businesses through branding. Specifically, the study aims to discover:

- Whether Agricultural Education students have knowledge of business branding and to what extent.
- The perception of Agricultural Education students on branding as a tool for agribusiness growth.
- The challenges faced by Agricultural Education students in gaining branding knowledge and applying it practically.

Research Questions

1. What level of knowledge do Agricultural Education students have about agribusiness branding?
2. How do Agricultural Education students perceive the role branding plays in agribusiness growth?
3. What challenges do Agricultural Education students face in acquiring branding knowledge and applying it practically?

Research Hypotheses

- H1:** Agricultural Education students have a significant level of knowledge about agribusiness branding.
- H2:** There is significant perception among Agricultural Education students that branding is important for agribusiness growth.
- H3:** Agricultural Education students face significant challenges in acquiring and applying branding knowledge.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was suitable because the study aimed to collect data from a specific population (Agricultural Education students) to describe their level of awareness, perception, and challenges on branding in agribusiness. The area of the study was the Department of Agricultural Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). This university is located in Nsukka, Enugu state, Nigeria. It is one of the first-generation universities in the country and houses a department committed to training future agriculturists and educators. The population for this study comprised all students in the Department of Agricultural Education, UNN, across 100 – 400 levels during the 2023/2024 academic session.

A total of 44 respondents participated in the study. The sample was drawn using a convenience sampling technique, focusing on students who were available and willing to participate at the time of distribution. While the sample may not be statistically representative of the entire department, it offers valuable insights into branding awareness and perception among Agricultural Education students. The primary instrument used for data collection

was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire had five sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic information
- **Section B:** Branding awareness
- **Section C:** Branding perception
- **Section D:** Branding challenges
- **Section E:** Recommendations and additional comments

Sections B to D consisted of Likert-scale items (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire was validated by an expert in the Department of Agricultural Education, UNN. The expert assessed the instrument for clarity, relevance to the research objectives, and appropriateness of the items. The researcher administered and collected the questionnaires physically through the assistance of her friends in some departments in VTE, UNN. Out of 45 total questionnaires

administered, 44 were validly filled and retrieved and used for analysis. Some respondents left one or more items blank, and those specific items were treated as invalid responses but did not affect the overall analysis of other responses [7-11].

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and weighted mean scores (WM). Responses in Section A were analyzed using frequencies and percentages to show the distribution of respondents by gender, age, level, and agribusiness interest. For sections B to D, responses were coded and analyzed using the Weighted Mean (WM) formula:

- $WM = (4 \times SA) + (3 \times A) + (2 \times D) + (1 \times SD) / \text{Total Valid Responses}$
- Where: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, and SD = Strongly Disagree

The interpretation scale for the mean is as follows:

WEIGHTED MEAN RANGE	INTERPRETATION
3.50 – 4.00	High agreement
2.50 – 3.49	Moderate agreement
1.50 – 2.49	Low agreement
1.00 – 1.49	Very low agreement

Frequencies and percentages were also computed for each item to show the proportion of respondents that agreed or strongly agreed. When a respondent left a particular item unanswered, that item was marked as an invalid response for that specific analysis only. Each item was followed by a brief interpretation of the WM and a summary of the frequencies and percentages. After each section, a sectional summary was provided to show general trends.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents and analyzes the data collected for the study, discusses the findings in line with the research questions, and makes inferences from the patterns identified.

Section A: Demographic Information of Respondents

The demographic profile of respondents is summarized as follows:

- Gender: 21 males (47.7%), 23 females (52.3%)
- Age group: 16-20 years (20 respondents, 45.5%), 21-25 years (20 respondents, 45.5%), 26-30 years (4 respondents, 9.1%)
- Level of study: 100 level (17), 200 level (10), 300 level (8), 400 level (8), with 1 invalid response.
- Agribusiness interest: 29 plan to start an agribusiness, 6 already own one, 8 are not interested, 1 invalid.

This indicates a fairly even greater distribution and high interest in agribusiness among the students.

Section B: Branding Awareness of Agricultural Education Students

- B1. I have good knowledge of branding.
- WM = 3.16 | 83.8% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate awareness.

- B2. I can tell the difference between branding and marketing.
- WM = 3.30 | 90.7% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate awareness.
- B3. Branding is important for agribusiness success.
- WM = 3.55 | 97.7% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: high awareness.
- B4. I have learned about branding in my classroom.
- WM = 2.86 | 63.6% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate awareness.
- B5. I actively follow agribusiness branding trends on social media.
- WM = 2.43 | 59.1% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: low awareness

Section B Summary: respondents generally demonstrated moderate awareness of branding and its relevance, despite indicating high awareness of branding in classroom, and showing low awareness of branding trends in agribusiness, revealing some gaps in deep or practical knowledge on branding. These findings imply that foundational knowledge exists in classroom, but in bits and more targeted branding education and practical may be necessary.

Section C: Branding Perception

C1. Branding is more than logos and colours.

- WM = 2.64 | 54.6% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate perception.
- C2. Branding helps in building trust and loyalty.
- WM = 3.51 | 95.3% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: high perception.
- C3. Personal branding is as important as business branding.
- WM = 3.14 | 88.1% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate positive perception.

- C4. Branding should be a compulsory part of my academic curriculum.
- WM = 3.44 | 86% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate positive perception.
- C5. Nigerian small-scale agripreneurs do not prioritize branding.
- WM = 2.95 | 73.8% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate perception.
- C6. Agricultural education students would like to receive more training on branding.
- WM = 3.36 | 83.4% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: moderate positive perception.

Section C Summary: respondents generally hold moderate positive perceptions about branding. There is a clear desire for branding to be integrated into the curriculum with hands-on experience.

Section D: Branding challenges

- D1. Lack of financial resources limit ability to invest in branding.
- WM = 3.58 | 90.7% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: major challenge.
- D2. Branding education is not well integrated into course of study.
- WM = 3.14 | 79.1% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: noted challenge.
- D3. They struggle to access branding tools and digital resources.
- WM = 3.12 | 83.7% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: noted challenge.
- D4. Having a mentor in branding would help them better.
- WM = 3.58 | 93% agreed/strongly agreed. Interpretation: major support need

Section D Summary: students face significant branding challenges, primarily financial constraints and limited access to tools and guidance. Mentorship was widely supported.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Agricultural Students have high awareness of branding (Section B), largely understand its relevance, and strongly believe in its importance for business success. However, some misconceptions exist, especially concerning the scope and purpose of branding. From Section C, students have a favourable perception of branding and are open to learning more, with a clear call for integration into academic content. The perception that branding builds trust, and is crucial to both personal and business growth is widely held. Section D outlines major barriers: financial limitations, poor integration of branding into education, lack of tools and mentors.

The findings of this study align with the theoretical frameworks that guided this research.

First, Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model supports the observation that students view branding as essential for building trust, visibility, and loyalty. The CBBE model emphasizes that the strength of a brand lies in the perception and awareness built in the minds of the audience — a view confirmed by the high perception scores recorded in this study.

Similarly, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour emphasizes that behavioral intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The students' willingness to embrace branding and their openness to training and mentorship reflect strong attitudinal readiness, even if practical constraints (e.g., finances, access to tools) affect their control over branding implementation.

Lastly, Vygotsky's (1978) Constructivist Learning Theory highlights the role of social interaction and scaffolding in knowledge development. The students' emphasis on needing branding mentorship and training workshops supports the idea that learning is enhanced through guided experiences and expert interaction.

These reinforce the need to increase branding awareness and also create enabling environments that support students' practical application and agribusiness success and longevity.

Overall, the study shows strong student interest and motivation, but points to systematic gaps in exposure, support, and curriculum development that need to be addressed.

Although not all respondents filled the SECTION E, a few notable suggestions emerged. When asked what strategies they think can improve their branding awareness given three options to select all that applied to them, 29 chose that practical branding workshops and seminars be introduced, 26 chose that branding courses be integrated into the curriculum, and 30 chose mentorship programs with branding experts be introduced. When asked what they would do first if given N100,000 to brand an agribusiness, majority had no clear answers to give to these. While one said "I will buy more material", some others said "I will look on the product and know what to do next", "more materials to boost agricultural business", "upgrade the packaging", "invest on bee farming", "I will start getting needed materials", "I will process the products so that they can be simple and accessible to as many customers as possible", "I will create containers carrying my honey name (customized)", "I would conduct market research", "I will take strategic approach to ensure the investment has a lasting impact", "source for quality brand designs", "improve advertising". This showed that they had an idea on what to do with the money, but lacked sufficient understanding of various branding areas to invest the money into, which was the main essence of being given the N100,000.

Answers to Research Questions

1. Research Question 1: What level of knowledge do Agricultural Education students have about business branding?
 - Answer: The findings from Section B indicate that students have a moderate to high level of awareness of branding. They understand its importance for business success, but have limited practical knowledge and exposure, particularly in identifying tools and applying them.
2. Research Question 2: How do Agricultural Education students perceive the role branding plays in agribusiness growth?
 - Answer: Section C reveals that students have a positive perception of branding. They see it as a means of building trust, loyalty, and visibility in business. Most respondents believe it should be part of their curriculum and are eager to receive more training.

3. Research Question 3: What challenges do Agricultural Education students face in acquiring branding knowledge and applying it practically?
- Answer: Section D shows that students face major challenges such as lack of financial resources, limited branding education, and limited access to tools and mentorship. These barriers hinder their ability to effectively apply what they know in real-life agribusiness settings.

Conclusion

This study explored the awareness, perception and challenges of branding among Agricultural Education students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with the aim of understanding their awareness, attitudes, and readiness to embrace branding in agribusiness. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, with population comprising Agricultural education students across levels 100 to 400, and a sample of 44 respondents drawn using convenience sampling technique. The study concludes that while Agricultural Education students understand the importance of branding and are positively inclined toward it, their actual readiness and access to tools and support is low. There is a significant gap between branding awareness and branding implementation, largely due to financial, educational, and mentorship-based limitations. Integrating branding more formally into their training and creating supportive structures will be essential to bridging this gap. Based on the findings, branding should be formally included in the Agricultural Education curriculum as a compulsory topic or course. The department should organize regular branding workshops, webinars, or guest lectures from agribusiness professionals. Mentorship platforms should be created, connecting students with experienced agripreneurs. Students should be helped to gain access to branding tools and platforms, possibly through subsidized programs or digital labs. Finally, students should be introduced to business competitions, branding support initiatives, and start up grants especially for final years upon graduation to help overcome financial barriers. Further research could examine gender-specific branding challenges among young agricultural entrepreneurs, and investigate the impact of branding on actual business performance.

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