

# Race to the top



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Africa's Top Brands Ecobank, Dangote and MTN speak to *African Business* about how they scaled the ranks of [Africa's Top 100 Brands](#) in 2019.

## In conversation – Ecobank's Ama Okyere

When respondents were asked to name their most admired financial institution, Ecobank came out top. We spoke to Ama Okyere, group head of marketing, about what the bank and brand stand for.

*Why do you think you came out top in our ranking this year?*

Ecobank stands for a purpose – our mission is to be a modern bank and to drive financial integration and inclusion across Africa. As the quintessential pan-African bank, many stakeholders resonate with our vision to make a critical contribution to Africa's growth and development. At the same time, the digitalisation effort driven by our Group CEO, Ade Ayeyemi, has resulted in consumers of all demographic orientations being able feeling the impact of the bank in a much more immediate way. Digital transformation has meant that people can see the impact of unique aspects of our brand right there on their mobile phones, tablets or laptops. Our strategic brand development and communications agency, Brand Communications, have also been helping us in diligently articulating and communicating our story.

*You've set yourselves a target to reach 100m customers within five years. What does that mean for the marketing team at the bank?*

We see technology as a means to an end, because what we are after is to grow Africa together. How customers are interacting with banks are indeed changing and you don't have to be a traditional account holder to have a relationship with Ecobank. So the 100m number is an expression of all the different types of customers that can now make use of our solutions across our digital ecosystem. The bank is acutely focused on developing the Customer Experience of the brand and its solutions. The marketing effort is central to this process as we can now align our value propositions to be directly experienced by our customers in the palms of their hands.

*What messages does a bank need to be putting out there to gain customers? Is it about being cool, about being trustworthy?*

User experience is a key component of the broader customer experience, but banking is still about people's money and trust is their key consideration. However, when you stand for something, that also makes people take note. Our pan-African ideology differentiates us our customers and society at large resonate with that. Of course, reflecting contemporary cultural trends are important, in order to be relevant, but the fact that we champion Africa and have the scale to back it up, means customers perceive us as more trustworthy.

*You offer different services, from retail banking to private banking as well as corporate and investment banking... does the approach change in terms of marketing yourselves to them?*

At the heart of it, the message is the same, the context is just different. We all want a slice of prosperity and a bank that can give you greater access to that is very valuable. Whether that is making banking more accessible for individuals, or giving SMEs new tools to speed up the growth of their businesses with, or whether it is to facilitate cross-border trade and the movement of capital across the continent for corporate and investment banking clients. The key is to enable people and as the truly Pan-African bank, we do just that.

## In conversation – Dangote's Tony Chiejina

The Dangote Group once again emerged as our most admired African brand. We spoke to Tony Chiejina, chief corporate communications officer, to understand what it took to build the group's brand and establish it as one of Africa's new corporate champions.

*What is the group strategy when it comes to the Dangote brand? What have you wanted to put out there in terms of messaging and how have you grown the brand?*

We fervently believe that only Africans can develop Africa. That gives us a stronger sense of relevance in all the countries where we have operations. We are touching lives by providing basic needs and empowering Africans more than ever before – creating jobs, reducing capital flight, supporting infrastructural projects and, above all, respecting the laws of the countries where we operate. All these are our credo and we do not compromise it. It is our way.

*What has been the role of the founder in building the Dangote brand, as one of Africa's leading and most prominent industrialists?*

He is the potent force driving the brand. He is like the conductor of an orchestra that directs and sharpens the tone of the music to produce immortal melodies. Aliko Dangote, founder of the group, has an unmatched entrepreneurial zeal and humility which is reflected in his public-spiritedness and embedded in his Aliko Dangote Foundation. It is a rare combination to find in one man.

*Would you say it's similar to Richard Branson, as he built the Virgin brand globally?*

No two individuals are alike. Both Aliko Dangote and Richard Branson are brand icons, yes. Aliko has been, and continues to be a trailblazer. He has helped firmly position Africa with investors as well as inspired and energised African entrepreneurs to dream big and follow their dreams. The biggest game changer for Nigeria and Africa is the 650,000 barrels per day oil refinery, fertiliser and petrochemical plants. For these reasons, his impact, from where I see it, is unmatched.

## In conversation – MTN's Bernice Samuels

Telecoms companies have dominated the marketing landscape these past 15 years. We spoke to Bernice Samuels, chief marketing officer at MTN, about the group's strategy when it comes to branding and marketing and where it fits within the company

### *Where does branding fit in from a strategic standpoint?*

As MTN we believe that a brand is as a brand does, so our branding is strategically significant, not just to drive awareness, recognition and recall but also in defining our customers experiences. So our brand positioning of BRIGHTER LIVES informs everything we design, build and deliver.

### *How important would you say branding is to the African consumer?*

African consumers are no different from other consumers in their aspirations and expectations of brands. We are all human, and want things to be easy, personal, and give us some control delivering good quality, value, affordability, innovation and access. This being said, MTN is a brand born in Africa, and we want to reflect our African origins in how we go to market.

### *How important is being an African brand?*

With Africa being a young continent, young Africans want to live a modern, connected life. We want to be second to none in shaping and making this possible. We want to lead a modern digital life experience in ways that are relevant to the African context. In enabling this, we believe that we will be the consumers' choice, not only because we are an African brand, but also the very best at what we do in Africa.

### *You are at the forefront of technology and the new digital space. What are the main tools needed to build a brand; have they changed materially since you launched all those years ago?*

Yes and no. We believe that the discipline of marketing is always about putting the customer at the centre of what you do. So it's vital to diagnose the market, understand needs and meet these in a distinctive and differentiated way versus competitors. The channels at our disposal are indeed changing, with social media storefronts, instant messaging, mobile responsive web etc, which expand our route to market for our product and services and thus the design approach in constructing our marketing messages.

### *You operate in over 20 countries. Do you adapt the messaging to the different markets or is there one singular message that you like to put out there?*

We have the same brand positioning as a mother brand in every market in which we operate. What differs are the operational and marketing tactics on the ground which must be locally relevant and resonate with consumers.

## Brand Africa 100 Methodology

The 2018/9 Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands research represents the most comprehensive and most representative study of brands across all African economic regions. It is conducted in 25 countries which represent just under 50% of Africa's 54 sovereign countries but account for an estimated 80% of the population and the GDP of all of Africa.

Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands is a consumer-led survey which seeks to establish brand preferences across Africa. The research, which yielded over 15,000 brand mentions, was conducted independently between January and April 2019 by Brand Africa partners, GeoPoll ([www.geopoll.com](http://www.geopoll.com)), the world's leading mobile surveying platform with a database of over 250m respondents in emerging markets around the globe, with strategic analysis and insights by Kantar ([www.kantar.com](http://www.kantar.com)), the globally respected consumer knowledge and information company, and Brand Leadership ([www.brandleadership.africa](http://www.brandleadership.africa)), Africa's leading brand research, strategy and activation advisory.

Since 2015, Brand Africa has been using GeoPoll's sophisticated SMS-based research platform for data collection rather than a face-to-face method. Due to the high penetration of mobile across Africa, which is used as a primary communication mode and increasingly for consumer transactions, mobile interviewing has proven to be the most effective way to reach African consumers.

Conducting interviews via mobile ensured a wider reach and expediency in conducting research across the continent than would be possible with face-to-face interviews. Individuals aged 18 and older in the sample countries were asked to report on their top three most admired brands, irrespective of country of origin or domicile.

In addition, because of their catalytic impact or influential role, respondents were further asked to rank their top three most admired media and financial services brands respectively. As an African-focused survey and given the growing number of African brands, since 2017/8 a new question was introduced specifically focusing on identifying the most admired African brand.

With the final coded data, Kantar calculated a score for each brand and created an index that takes into account the sample and population sizes of each country, weighted on gender and population of the countries covered. The brands were further analysed to ensure there are no duplications. Where the brand operated under different names in different markets such as Stanbic/Standard Bank and Vodacom/Vodafone/Safaricom, or where the brands were sub-brands of a dominant brands such as Apple's iPod, iPhone and iPad, the results were consolidated under one score for the group brand.

In identifying the list for the most admired African brands, where the brands had a dominant African residual equity or identity derived from their origins in Africa such as Safaricom, M-Pesa and Tusker from Kenya or Castle from South Africa, irrespective of its ownership or shareholding the brand was recognised as an African brand.

To make the list of the Top 100 most admired brands in Africa and the most admired African brands, the brands had to be available and recalled in at least one other country other than their domicile market. Given the fragmentation and proliferation of local media, the media list is based only on truly pan-African media with reach across a significant number of African countries.

Finally, in recognising the impact of brand reputation on the value of brands, this year, Brand Africa 100 analysis also identified the most admired listed brands on leading African bourses.

Overall, the Brand Africa 100: Africa's Best Brands is based on the most rigorous consumer-led methodology consistent with global best practices – and is the most representative and comprehensive study and ranking of brands in Africa.

*Karin Du Chenne, Chief Growth Officer Africa Middle East and Matthieu Sauvage-Mar, VP of Client Development, GeoPoll*

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