

# Experts Discuss Way Forward for African Brands

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At a virtual event organised by MultiChoice and Brand Africa, this year's top brands in Africa were released. In the Top 100 most Admired Brands in Africa, media and entertainment company, DStv, telecommunication brand, MTN as well as the Dangote Group were among the African brands in the list.

Occupying the number one in that list is the American footwear brand Nike. It is closely followed by its rival Adidas, while Samsung and Coca-Cola take the third and fourth position. Tecno Mobile and Apple occupy the fifth and sixth position respectively, while MTN perches at number seven and Airtel at number 10. Dangote ranked number 15, while DStv ranked 36 on that list, moving up nine places from its #45 ranking last year.

However, in the list of most admired media brands in Africa, only 24 per cent were African brands. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) occupies the first position, while DStv takes the second spot. Cable News Network (CNN) ranks third and Aljazeera, fourth. The global streaming giant ranks number 10 on the list, while MTN sits at number six. DStv leads the pack in the Most Admired Media Brands in Nigeria, followed by Channels TV and NTA. The most admired Nigerian media brands however have Channels TV in the number one spot.

For most Nigerian brands, Dangote takes the first spot, followed by telecommunications brand Glo and beverage brand Star respectively. Interestingly, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) made the list, sitting at number seven.

Other notable brands on that list include financial institution brand GTB, as well e-commerce platform Jumia.

GTB which has always been on the list of top financial brands in Nigeria emerged number one on this year's list, followed by First Bank and UBA.

Dangote still clinched the number one spot in the most African brands in Nigeria. Little wonder then that it emerged the overall top African brand of the year 2020.

In a panel session moderated by Tosin Adefako, founder of Brand Africa, Thebe Ikalafeng, who unveiled the lists revealed that one of the reasons why non-African brands continue to dominate the African market is because Africans have not fully embraced themselves.

"Fela said it and I have said it for many years, we have not embraced who we are. And if we don't embrace who we are as Africans, it becomes very difficult for you to consume something that is African. To me, that's been one of the biggest problems. We don't champion Africanship because we are constantly bringing down Africans. The standard that we put up for being African is not the same standard that we put up for other global brands that come to the continent.

"But I think the other reason is an institutional one, we have not as African institutions and governments promoted African brands or African businesses. So we're very quick to incentivize global brands which are coming to Africa or businesses to come to Africa, open up the doors for Africa for them to be able to do business in our our countries. The other big challenge is the legacy challenge. Take a look at the Coca-Cola brand which has been 100 years here in the continent. Now if you look at which African brand has been around, only Nigeria First Bank has been around since 1894. But generally, many of the African brands have not been around for so long, so we don't have the tenure in the continent."

Ikalafeng also added that the slow rise of African brands can be attributed to Africans poor investment in research and development. He argued that Africans only invest less than half per cent in research and development, compared to other countries who spend from five per cent upwards.

“So if you are not researching, how will you create?” He argued.

Another reason, according to the brand expert, is intellectual property. According to Ikalafeng, only two per cent of the trademarks registered globally are from Africa. Countries like China and America have about 20 per cent trademarks globally. “Not only are they putting money in research, not only are they creating the brands, but they are also registering their ideas.”

For the the Chief Customer Officer at MultiChoice Nigeria, Martin Mabutho, one of the challenges facing most African brands is the lack of collaboration.

“We set out to become Africa’s number one storyteller deliberately. Without a platform to tell the stories to showcase the talent in music, or in acting or moviemaking, then we will be in a much worse situation. So where we are now in terms of acceptance across borders, I think speaks to the lack of collaboration amongst same talent in other platforms with us. We recently set a given example.

“We worked with an organisation for a virtual concert, trying to raise funds to buy PPEs for COVID-19 in countries across Africa. And that is our role as a platform that cuts across 48 countries in the continent. We will always show content from East Africa to West Africa, Nigerian content, throughout,” Mabutho said, adding that African brands should collaborate more and increase the level of acceptance.

For African brands to emerge at the top, Feyi Olubodun, Founder of Open Squares, advised that indigenous African brands have to be more focused and committed to very rigorous and professional brand building processes.

A market research analyst and business leader, Seyi Adeoye, concluded that for any brand to successfully do well in the next decade, they have to invest in consumer behaviour, be innovative in a way that can travel beyond Nigeria and must have distribution strategy.

Ikalafeng puts its vision for African brands more emphatically: “In the next 10 years, I want to see all the global brands shaking in their boots. I want them to be shaking because African brands are not displacing them, but they are giving them a run for their money, that African brands are slaying, making it difficult or even easy for an African consumer to choose African brands. That’s what I think we’ll see. I’m advocating the rise of African brands.”