

# Study of Product Branding Morphology at Abeokuta urban Communities of Ogun state, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*The branding technique is based on local identity because artificial narratives are not effective. That is, to be real, branding descriptions must be based on reliable values associated with the location and establish a connection with the genuine local identity. The rationality that differentiates the product, helps the artifact compete with other products. In addition, authenticity can combine a constant reinterpretation (to suit consumer taste) with an idealized evocation of the past to strengthen a brand's popularity. This study looks at what makes Abeokuta urban morphology positive to become branding tools. This study adopted a qualitative research approach because the research is confined within a subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior of Abeokuta communities. A research ontological position is that Abeokuta morphological features were used as a branding tool for core indigenous communities of Abeokuta. Since Abeokuta is brandable, Abeokuta morphology must be identified and its meaning is known. For this study Nvivo words cloud and place theory was used for analyzes. Desktop data, Focus group discussions, the personal observation were used as data collection techniques and satellite imagery was used for the base map of Abeokuta. This research discovers what robust brands own and what cities need in order to brand themselves productively. What a city needs to possess to be a good brand; it must possess important and unique characteristics that can be easily identified. These are functional as well as non-functional qualities. These include city form, people's understanding of the city, people's conviction in the city, what the city views for, and what kind of people dwell in the city.*

**Keywords:** City branding, City Identity, City morphology, City image.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

City branding refers to the use of branding methods to geographical locations in an inclusive sense. It is a young discipline that is attracting attention of not only professionals dealing with communication, marketing and urban issues, but also policy makers and academicians from various fields. Abeokuta cannot be branded without considering the city morphology that enhance the perception of the city. Abeokuta is a traditional core that has been transformed from traditional town into solid administrative capital. An attempt to make sense of the origins of Abeokuta urban and its role for branding urban morphology lead to this study. This research explored qualitative dimension of Abeokuta morphology as branding tool for the redefinition of Abeokuta imageability.

Olumo-Rock is seen as religious, cultural and social fulcrum for the entire town. Kavaratzis and Asworth took places as brandable products if their inherent and distinctive characteristics are understood and a special form of marketing developed which accommodates and utilizes these characteristics (1). City branding is a suitable way to define and implement city marketing. However the object of city promotion is the city's image, it is actually the starting point for developing the city's brand (2). City branding perception can be defined as the practice of developing a strategy that underlines the significance the place offers to his target publics, namely residents, workers, employers, investors, tourists and among others. In branding the city, that 'importance' is created, developed and demonstrated through different kinds of actions such as reserves, physical and economic plans, attraction programs, events and communications (3). Kavaratzis asserted that city branding is attempting to create emotional, mental and physical connotations with the city (4). A brand is built on a city's existing strengths, these are the visual, economical, symbolic elements and all the aspects that differentiate a city from the others. Culture is one of the basic raw materials for a city, in branding a city through culture the strategy is based on highlighting the traditional values that the city offers to its target community.

Hankinson stated Place brands offer diversity through broadcasting of logos and symbols (5). Hankinson affirmed that places provide a competitive strategic vision for the city (6). Place branding as a need and an occurrence is primarily stirred by globalization methods where place is market for ideas, culture, reputation, in addition to products, services and funds are fused into a single global community (7). Cities need to distinguish themselves, through creation of an identity that is attractive to the various interested parties, through economic, social or socio-psychological goals. One result of this need is the increase in competition between cities to attract resources, business relocation, foreign investment, visitors, and new residents Kavaratzis and Ashworth, (1). Cities such as Manchester, Lyon, Detroit, Shanghai, Dublin and San Francisco have proven to be able to attract existing companies and set up new ones due to the domestic and foreign investment, thereby augmenting the difference between themselves and their competitors (8).

Anholt, stated that there are natural channels through which the status of a country is communicated namely tourist promotion, export brands, government policies (domestic or aimed at the foreign sector), the way in which investment is sought or which skilled workers are attracted, cultural exchange and the performance on the international arena of the country's leaders (9). Many tourism destinations around the world, including resorts, cities and countries, have launched branding campaigns to distinguish themselves from their rivals and to attract more tourists. Countries like Thailand, Singapore, Australia and Denmark are the best known due to their successful branding efforts. The Australia brand is known as being one of the best strategies for country branding to date. Other examples are Canada, Germany, Ireland or Hong Kong which have all managed their country brand well. Feeling secure definitely plays an important role in place preferences (10).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted combination of historical and qualitative analytical approaches. This study adopted a qualitative research approach because this research is confined within a subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior of Abeokuta urban form. Research ontological position is that Abeokuta morphological features was used as branding tool for core indigenous communities of Abeokuta. For this study Nvivo words cloud and Place theory was used for analyzes. Desktop data, Focus group discussions, personal observation was used as data collection techniques and satellite imagery was used for base map of Abeokuta.

## **3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Olumo rock is one of the major characters that has shaped the town of Abeokuta. The role of Olumo rock in the settlement pattern of the town cannot be overemphasized as a determinant factor that dictated the morphology of the town though other factors such as the railway lines and presence of rivers has also helped shaped the town. The city mental maps contain many elements that can describe experience and the image of the environment. These maps explained the orientation, memorization, and represent an evaluation of the broad legibility which is Olumo rock and itoku market (tie and dye market); Olumo-rock and Itoku market (Adire fabrics) defined the image of Abeokuta. Places do not acquire a new identity because of a catchy slogan or a memorable. A place needs to differentiate itself by means of a unique branding which is Olumo-rock (tourism) and Itoku market (adire fabrics) were recognized in this research. Finally, the qualities of the branding features have to be perceived in the mind of the client as being superior to its competitors; and these qualities and their perception must give rise to a corresponding consumer demand.

### **3.1. MORPHOLOGY OF ABEOKUTA**

Settlement are specifically located on the earth surface where human habitants are formed. Settlement are vital in every areas of life since it is through their development that man can explore the environment for his needs. Several factors influence location and distribution of settlements over space. These factors are; relief, climate, vegetation, political, socio-economic, historic and mythical origin. Settlement pattern of the Abeokuta North and South is nucleated settlement pattern. They are nucleated settlement because the buildings are built together for social, economic and defensive reasons. The settlements pattern blend in an unplanned manner and grow mostly around cross roads, along railway, waterway and at "T" junctions. Abeokuta comprises of four different indigenous communities that have different cultural values and are governed by different traditional rulers but one paramount ruler which is called Alake of Egbaland. The four communities that Abeokuta is made up of include Egba-Ake, Egba-Oke-Ona, Egba-Gbagura and Owu.



FIGURE 1: SHOWING BUILDINGS IN ABEOKUTA ALONG T-JUNCTION, RAILWAY AND WATERWAY

The settlements of Owu, Gbagura, Oke-Ona and Ake are built around Olumo rock. Abeokuta is an antique and historical town that has its story rooted in its name, meaning a city that was founded under the Olumo rock. It was believed that city became known during the time of Oyo and Idahomey wars as Olumo protected the dwellers against wars. Abeokuta came to being in 1830 through a warrior called Sodeke who played a significant role during the time of war. Since then, the people of Abeokuta has been worshipping it and unite the people together. The religious and social lives of the people is rooted in Olumo rock. Olumo as rock tie the people together as one, as well as providing them with means of livelihood by means of abundant of rocks for quarry activity.



FIGURE 2: NVIVO WORD CLOUDS SHOWING OLUMO-ROCK AS WHERE ABEOKUTA CITY EVOLVED FROM

Lisabi day is a popular festival that the entire communities celebrate annually by the reason of rock. Olumo also serves as tourist attractive destination point, it attracts people everywhere by the reason of protective function during the time of war. Today, Olumo is branded as a tourist destination point attracting people all over the nation as well from abroad. Olumo serves as history of the people of the town and sacred place of the Ogbonis’ to meet during an important arrangement that borders on the town. Olumo is seen as religious, cultural and social fulcrum for the entire town.



FIGURE 3: SHOWING OLUMO-ROCK AS A PLACE OF CULTURAL WORSHIP AND REFUSE

### 3.2. ABEOKUTA IS KNOWN FOR

A unique craft of the people has distinguished them among many nations. Tie and dye is a noble craft of the people of Abeokuta also referred to as ‘Adire’ fabric. The people are also known for sculpture ‘Ere gbigbe’. People also visit the town to see the historical Olumo rock and the famous ‘Adire’ fabrics. The town also witnessed quarry activities as a result of the abundance of rocks in the town which is tied round Olumo rock. This implies that, Olumo constitute greatly into the religious and socio-cultural activities of the people. Adire is a unique fabric of the people using as dedicated craft. Wood carving is also prominent among the indigenes as masterpiece of their rich culture which in turn earns them yet another means of livelihood. It must be pointed out that the people are unique in their crafts. The town is a tourist attraction destination point for people because of protection that Olumo

rock offered during various wars in history of the town in addition Olumo-rock is centrally located in Abeokuta and also function as religious, cultural, traditional and social activities among other to the dwellers.

### **3.3. IMAGEABILITY OF ABEOKUTA**

The visibility within the study area is clouded with varying elements that deals with visual appearance of city. The city mental maps contain many elements that can describe experience and the image of the environment. These maps can explain the location and memorization and represent an evaluation of the legibility of the people of Abeokuta. The imageability of Abeokuta is not limited to Olumo-rock. In addition, Itoku market functions as a ‘node,’ has ameliorated Abeokuta’s perception in the outside world. The city’s morphology has changed over time to assume its present position. The growth is in the form of a dual process of external expansion and physical or internal growth and reorganization. The presence of government seat in Abeokuta, job opportunities, provision of community facilities (road, water, railway, etc.) and social facilities (hospitals, schools, markets etc.) precipitated the migration of youths from the surrounding towns/settlements for job opportunities among others, leading to increase in population.

The city accommodates quite a number of Federal, State and Local Government establishments (ministries, industries, administrative, educational/research etc.) trade centers, statutory co-operations and quasi-governmental institutions, thus attracting large spectrum of immigrants. It has witnessed remarkable growth in its organization in recent years and its population in the past few decades has more than tripled. The resultant effect is rapid growth of the built-up areas of the city that has made it one of the fastest growing metropolitan centers in southwestern Nigeria. Geographically, Abeokuta lies below the Olumo Rock, home to several caves and shrines.



**FIGURE 4: SHOWING SATELLITE IMAGERY OF ABEOKUTA IN RELATION TO OLUMO-ROCK AND ITOKU MARKET**



**FIGURE 5: SHOWING OLUMO-ROCK AT DIFFERENT VIEWS**

### **3.4. ITOKU MARKET**

One artifact that Itoku market is known for worldwide is the Adire fabrics. The lowness distinguishing of the central hour swoops down on the hung market of itoku in the rocky town of Abeokuta. The noise of the market place is drowned in the quietness of the hour, making it seem as if market is just picking up, the sloppy bend leads to the Adire section of the itoku market from the adjoining Sapon road. Each side of the bend is lined with stalls made of corrugated iron sheets. Most of these stalls were packed full of different Adire fabrics that are the hallmarks of this ancient study area. The right in between the cubicles, there is a narrow path that leads to an open space where the local makers of the Adire are situated. Many dyers are working on fabrics that had been soaked in the steaming dye solution called Aro in the local parlance. Some are using a wooden platform on which the pattern has been neatly crafted on the peach colored material, forming a sequential design in the process. It is quite amazing that all the Adire

fabrics gracing shops on the major roads are produced in this little space. The Itoku market settlement is made up of different families who turn out their works in bits, after which they are sold to the wholesalers.



**FIGURE 6: SHOWING ADIRE PROCESSING AREAS IN ITOKU MARKET ABEOKUTA**

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The major branding features in Abeokuta is Olumo rock and Adire fabrics in Itoku market. The significance of Olumo in branding this historical town cannot be overemphasized. Olumo rock is a natural feature that gave character to the entire town although there were other auxiliary features such as the Ogun River for production of Adire fabric and butchery, railway lines and Itoku market were also identified with this promotion of the image of the town. Olumo is a strong branding feature of Abeokuta people. It must be noted that the people pride themselves over this natural feature as it serves cultural purpose. This great character packaged the city as tourists' attraction destination point, which is witnessed today. It has significantly affected life of the people politically, socially, religiously and economically also shaping the settlement pattern of the people.

The settlement pattern of the people of Abeokuta general is characterized in line with this natural character identified as Olumo rock. Olumo is believed to be a source of vitality to the city at large and as such, the mental cognition of the people within and outside the city cannot be overemphasized. It is important to establish the fact that there is no single community among the four communities stated above can hold claim to exclusive right of this unique natural feature as it is a broad character for all these communities that built-up study area.

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