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# The Consumer Is King.

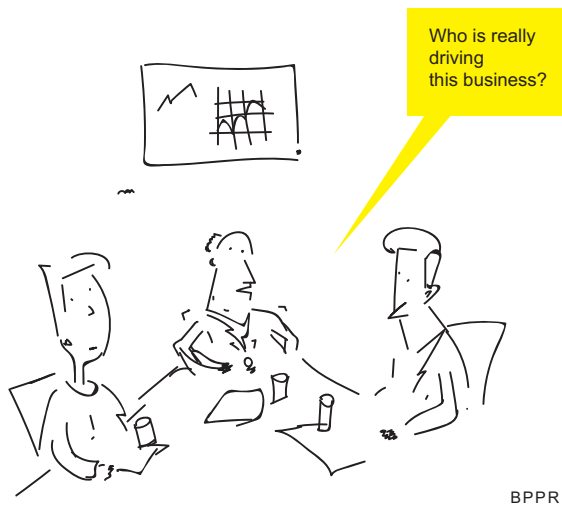
BY  
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& that is not a cliché

} Process, Performance  
and Marketing

I believe many people including non-marketers have heard the phrase, an old mantra that the consumer is king. The phrase is used so many times consciously or unconsciously. Not very surprising therefore that it has taken on the toga of a cliché. In an unusual economy like Nigeria, it can be quite tempting to challenge this concept of the Consumer King. With the frequency of “Oga if you don’t want to buy, go” that one hears every now and then, it is possible to ask where is the king.

The other day, I was in a shop and wanted to buy a particular colour of an item. The shop apparently did not have the colour I wanted. However, the shopkeeper was insistent I must buy any of the other colours they had available. He really worked hard telling me they are the same “just that the colour is dif-



ferent."I reminded him that indeed it was a big difference for me, to which he fired back and asked whether people eat col our. That seems to be the state of play in quite a significant number of Nigerian or ganisations and companies. Size is not a determination of such behaviour – you find it in the small, as well as medium and large organisations and companies. Such is the arrogance of some organisations, some marketing people and some sales men.

On the contrary, great and enduring or ganisations and companies know better. They know the consumer matters and they take the consumer rather seriously. Not by words but by action. A good knowledge of consumers makes it far easier to serve them better either with current offerings or new offerings through innovation. That leads to the magical "aha" from the consumers.

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The journey towards the Consumer Kingdom is not easy but can be very rewarding. Look at the major companies that are doing really very well. One thing they definitely have in common is that they are loyal servants of their consumers. Therefore, part of the winning mentality is to serve the consumer with all your heart and all your might. Serving the consumer right requires a structured and sequential approach. You first need to know the consumers you want to serve.

## Deep Consumer Insight

A good servant knows the master very well. He knows when he sleeps and he knows when he wakes. He knows the type of food he wants and how he wants it etc. It is no different from the way we should know the consumer. Deep consumer insight enables us to "discover a penetrating truth about consumers, their aspirations and motivations...." Another related definition of Consumer Insight I like very much is "A deep 'truth' about the customer based on their behaviour, experiences, beliefs, needs or desires, that is relevant to the task or issue and 'rings bells' with target people." Stripped of all marketing jargons, this

A good consumer insight must be very compelling. It is a rigorous step though and one must be careful not to trade simple observations as consumer insight. A useful way of identifying a good consumer insight is to run it through the "3Ws" test – What, Why and Wow. What are the consumers currently doing now? Why are they doing so? Wow, no one has managed to discover or talked about the problem before.

A good Consumer Insight should be well targeted – It should feel personal, give one the feeling of being involved and being personally addressed. It should address specific gaps in the market for a specific target. A good Consumer Insight should have at the heart a dilemma or tension that needs resolution. It should be very clear that the consumer only needs your solution when there is a problem that needs resolution. Finally a good Consumer Insight should be really fresh. Avoid the obvious that can sometimes be true but very generic.

To illustrate what a good Consumer Insight should be and its transformative power for an organisation, we shall look at the following examples:



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## “Dirt is Good”

This was a global campaign for Persil and Omo that was run by Unilever in many countries. The campaign was very successful with major impact on volumes, market shares and bottom line. The concept is built around the tension a mother faces as the child grows up. On the one hand the mothers are excited seeing their children grow up. However, getting dirty is part of the children going up. There is therefore an inherent positive association of kids and dirt with their mothers. Although dirt is ordinarily undesirable, but mothers saw dirt in this circumstance as “learning as the kids grew up and made them very proud of their kids.” The simple “narrative is that dirt equates to creativity; and parents aspire to have creative, free-thinking and playing kids, as opposed to those locked into pristine-clean conformity.”

This was what gave rise to the powerful insight for the campaign “Dirt is good” that became very well received globally.

The “Dirt is good” campaign achieved significance in that through a deep consumer insight, Unilever was able to turn laundry soap advertising from what used to be a discussion about “molecules” and “severity of stain removal” into “creative progressiveness” with parents aspiring to create free thinking children.



Great consumer insight can lead to great innovation with the capacity to transform organisations. It can be both an art and a science. But it does not happen by accident. For some the power of observation alone coupled with imagination can get the job done. For some, a more structured approach at consumer insight generation works best.

With the technological changes taking place everyday, the convergence of communication that makes every citizen a global citizen, understanding the consumer has become a must, rather than a nice thing to do.

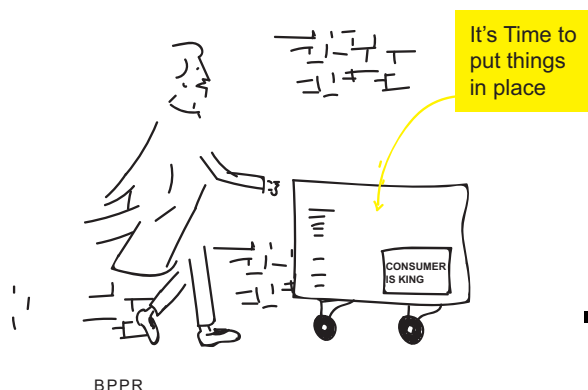
What is most important is to understand that this is not the typical consumer research that can be restrictive in the deeper understanding of the consumer. The Apple story clearly illustrates. No consumer research ever told Apple that consumers needed liberation from the then computer technology that they were seemingly enjoying. However, through the power of observation, which led to deep consumer insight, Apple concluded that the then existing computer technology was a form of “enslavement and tedium.” Its response was the development of “freedom enhancing” products that continue to wow the consumers. Almost every time the response of consumers is “How nice, never really thought of that.”

With the technological changes taking place everyday, the convergence of communication that makes every citizen a global citizen, understanding the consumer has become a must, rather than a nice thing to do. Consumer choices are expanding daily and more complicated. Those businesses that will survive the turbulent consumer “daily” profile changes are those who best understand the consumers and innovate accordingly.



## “Jillz”

This is a sparkling apple cider drink from Heineken that was driven by a great consumer insight. It was Heineken observation that when men went to bars with their women, the men had a swell time enjoying their beers. On the other hand, the women rarely enjoyed themselves, as they were not much of beer people. The most applicable option for them being wines were too variable and that was a major challenge. Heineken, building on this insight therefore developed a concept – a sparkling apple cider drink that was focused on women. It was branded Jillz.



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Tony graduated with B.Sc.(Economics) and MBA, (specializing in marketing). He has attended many senior marketing programmes in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, India, United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and Singapore. He has lived a life of marketing with a wealth of experience spanning Bangladesh, where he successfully managed some major multinational brands and Nigerian breweries, where for over 32 years, he led the teams which built some of Nigeria's iconic brands. Tony is an industry player, an author and has served on the Council of the Advertisers Association of Nigeria. He is a fellow and current president of the National Institute of Marketing of Nigeria.