A Multi-Stage Brand Repositioning Framework for Regulated FMCG Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract- Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) markets in Sub-Saharan Africa are undergoing rapid transformation, shaped by shifting consumer preferences, socio-economic volatility, and increasingly stringent regulatory frameworks. National governments and regional bodies are imposing stricter controls on advertising, packaging, health claims, pricing, and distribution, particularly in sectors such as food, beverages, cosmetics, and personal care. These evolving regulations—while necessary for consumer protection—pose significant constraints on traditional branding approaches, especially for legacy FMCG players and new market entrants aiming to scale in competitive environments. This proposes a structured, multi-stage framework for brand repositioning tailored to regulated FMCG markets in Sub-Saharan Africa. The framework is designed to balance regulatory compliance with brand relevance, customer engagement, and market differentiation. It consists of five key stages: (1) Regulatory Landscape Mapping to understand country-specific restrictions and opportunities; (2) Brand Equity Audit to assess the current perception and performance of brand assets; (3) Value Proposition Recalibration to align the brand's core promise with regulatory constraints and evolving consumer values; (4) Multichannel Strategy Redesign that integrates traditional and digital platforms within legal boundaries; and (5) Performance Tracking and Iterative Learning to adapt brand strategies in response to real-time consumer and regulatory feedback. By applying this framework, FMCG companies can proactively navigate regulatory barriers while simultaneously enhancing brand trust, recall, and market responsiveness. The approach also emphasizes the importance of localized messaging, culturally informed storytelling, and trust-building mechanisms—such as community engagement and regulatory-aligned influencer marketing. Theconcludes with a forward-looking discussion on how digital tools, including AI-powered compliance monitoring and consumer sentiment analysis, can support more dynamic and resilient brand repositioning strategies in the face of continuous regulatory evolution. This framework provides a strategic toolkit for brand managers, marketers, and policymakers alike.

Indexed Terms- Multi-stage, Brand Repositioning Framework for Regulated FMCG Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa

I. INTRODUCTION

Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) markets in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are characterized by a blend of high growth potential and structural complexity. The region is home to one of the world's youngest and fastest-growing populations, with increasing urbanization and rising consumer aspirations (Otokiti, 2019; SHARMA *et al*., 2019). Despite these favorable demographics, FMCG companies face a dynamic and often volatile operating environment shaped by infrastructural deficits, informal retail dominance, fluctuating income levels, and high brand sensitivity. Within this setting, brands must contend not only with economic fragmentation but also with an evolving and increasingly assertive regulatory landscape (Lawal *et al*., 2014; Amos *et al*., 2014).

Regulatory oversight in SSA's FMCG markets has expanded significantly over the past decade, driven by public health priorities, consumer safety concerns, and regional harmonization efforts. Governments and regional economic blocs such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are enacting and enforcing stricter guidelines on marketing practices, product formulation, labeling, advertising, and pricing (Akinbola and Otokiti, 2012; Otokiti, 2017). For example, there has been a marked rise in restrictions on health and nutrition claims, mandatory ingredient disclosures, standardized packaging for food and beverages, and pricing controls on essential goods. This regulatory tightening, while critical for consumer protection, has constrained conventional marketing levers—such as emotional appeals, unsubstantiated benefit claims, and flexible promotional strategies—that many FMCG brands previously relied upon to capture and retain market share (Ajonbadi *et al*., 2015; Otokiti, 2017).

Simultaneously, the African consumer is evolving. Younger, more connected, and socially conscious populations demand brands that are authentic, compliant, and socially responsible. Traditional mass-market strategies are increasingly misaligned with these preferences, particularly when regulatory infractions erode trust or when brand narratives are perceived as culturally irrelevant or opaque (Otokiti, 2017; Otokiti and Akorede, 2018). Furthermore, the growth of digital media and mobile platforms in urban and peri-urban areas has reshaped consumer information flows, amplifying the consequences of reputational missteps and intensifying scrutiny from both regulators and the public (Otokiti and Akinbola, 2013; Ajonbadi *et al*., 2016).

Within this dual context of regulatory tightening and shifting consumer expectations, legacy brand strategies—designed for more permissive, linear, and homogenized environments—are proving inadequate. Brands that once competed on price and generic appeal are now expected to demonstrate credibility, transparency, and local resonance (Wind, Y. and Hays, 2016; Winter *et al*., 2018). Many FMCG companies, both multinational and local, struggle to reposition themselves without violating compliance parameters or diluting their core brand identity. In markets where informal trade remains dominant and regulatory enforcement is uneven, this tension is even more pronounced, leading to strategic paralysis or fragmented branding efforts (George *et al*., 2016; Gillan and Lambert, 2016).

This proposes a structured, multi-stage brand repositioning framework specifically tailored for regulated FMCG markets in Sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of the framework is twofold: first, to enable brands to comply with regulatory mandates while preserving strategic differentiation and second, to enhance consumer relevance through adaptive, insight-driven repositioning. Rather than treating regulation as a constraint, the framework repositions it as a design input—an essential parameter shaping sustainable brand identity in volatile but promising markets (Teeter and Sandberg, 2017; Nikolakis *et al*., 2018).

The framework comprises five interrelated stages. It begins with regulatory landscape mapping, which provides a granular understanding of country-specific marketing restrictions and identifies strategic inflection points. This is followed by a brand equity audit that evaluates current consumer perceptions, competitive positioning, and brand asset performance. The third stage involves value proposition recalibration, aligning brand narratives with compliance constraints and cultural context. The fourth stage focuses on multichannel strategy redesign, integrating traditional and digital touchpoints under new communication norms. Finally, the framework incorporates performance tracking and iterative learning to monitor effectiveness and enable agile adjustments based on real-time feedback and regulatory developments.

By grounding repositioning efforts in a multi-disciplinary, compliance-aligned methodology, the proposed framework empowers FMCG companies to transform risk into resilience and stagnation into adaptive growth. In doing so, it offers a strategic roadmap not only for survival in regulated African markets but for long-term brand relevance and consumer trust in the evolving landscape of FMCG in Sub-Saharan Africa.

II. METHODOLOGY

This systematic review adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology to consolidate existing knowledge and empirical evidence on brand repositioning strategies within regulated fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) markets across Sub-Saharan Africa. The primary objective was to extract insights and structure a multi-stage brand repositioning framework suited to policy-constrained environments characterized by pricing controls, advertising restrictions, import regulations, and informal retail dynamics. This methodological approach aimed to provide a rigorous evidence base to inform repositioning efforts that account for market fragmentation, sociocultural variability, and institutional complexity.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across academic and grey literature sources, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, the World Bank eLibrary, and UNCTAD publications. Boolean search operators combined key terms such as "brand repositioning," "FMCG," "Sub-Saharan Africa," "regulated markets," "consumer behavior," "market entry," and "marketing adaptation." The review focused on studies published between 2005 and 2024 to reflect current regulatory and market dynamics in the region. Inclusion criteria comprised empirical and conceptual studies addressing brand identity evolution, regulatory adaptation, and repositioning strategies in consumer goods sectors such as food and beverage, personal care, household products, and over-the-counter (OTC) pharmaceuticals. Exclusion criteria eliminated studies focused solely on luxury or B2B products, those without relevance to Sub-Saharan Africa, and studies that did not include market response or brand performance indicators.

The initial search yielded 2,814 records. After removing 729 duplicates, 2,085 records were screened by title and abstract. From these, 321 full-text articles were retrieved and assessed for eligibility. A total of 94 studies met the final inclusion criteria and were synthesized in the review. The review included a mixture of peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, NGO and development partner reports, and government white papers to ensure breadth and contextual relevance.

Data extraction was conducted using a structured matrix capturing variables such as brand repositioning objectives (e.g., compliance-driven, audience shift, value redefinition), stages of repositioning (diagnostic, strategic design, tactical activation, post-launch adaptation), regulatory triggers, consumer response metrics, stakeholder coordination mechanisms, and performance outcomes. Thematic synthesis was employed to cluster strategies across common pathways while highlighting divergence due to local regulatory intensity, market sophistication, or informal sector competition.

Studies were appraised using a modified CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) checklist to assess methodological robustness, clarity of repositioning constructs, and transparency in outcome reporting. Studies with high conceptual clarity, stakeholder triangulation, and longitudinal or multi-market perspectives were weighted more heavily in synthesis. Particular attention was given to brand repositioning within markets where pricing, packaging, language use, and media access were subject to formal regulation, and where informal distribution networks significantly shaped brand perception and reach.

The synthesis identified three primary drivers of brand repositioning in the region: regulatory realignment (e.g., taxation changes, advertising bans, packaging mandates), socio-economic transitions (e.g., rising middle class, rural-urban migration), and competitive disruption (e.g., entry of multinationals, private label growth). Effective repositioning frameworks were typically multi-stage, encompassing: initial market and regulatory diagnostics; strategic redesign of brand identity and value proposition; tailored execution through culturally aligned content and pricing strategies; and adaptive post-launch mechanisms involving community feedback, compliance tracking, and informal market calibration.

Evidence also highlighted the importance of embedding government relations and regulatory foresight into brand strategy, especially in high-risk categories such as infant nutrition, tobacco substitutes, and pharmaceutical consumer products. Moreover, successful repositioning cases frequently integrated informal distribution actors (e.g., open market vendors, itinerant traders) into last-mile branding activities, often through incentives, micro-franchising, or local ambassador programs.

This PRISMA-based review consolidates fragmented insights into a coherent multi-stage brand repositioning framework adapted to regulated FMCG markets in Sub-Saharan Africa. It underscores the imperative of aligning repositioning efforts not only with consumer aspirations and competitive positioning but also with evolving regulatory frameworks and the social legitimacy of brands. The findings offer actionable guidance for brand managers, development agencies, and policymakers seeking to enable ethical and effective brand transitions in one of the world's most dynamic and regulation-sensitive consumer landscapes.

2.1 Stage 1: Regulatory Landscape Mapping

Effective brand repositioning in regulated Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) markets in Sub-Saharan Africa begins with a comprehensive understanding of the regulatory landscape. Regulatory compliance is not merely a reactive necessity but a proactive strategic lever for differentiation, consumer trust-building, and risk mitigation as shown in figure 1(Sudrajat, 2016; Petersen and Østergaard, 2018). Stage 1 of the multi-stage repositioning framework—Regulatory Landscape Mapping—focuses on three interconnected dimensions: assessment of market-specific norms, engagement with regulatory authorities, and risk mapping of brand assets and communication channels.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, FMCG sectors operate under a mosaic of evolving and jurisdiction-specific regulations. Although harmonization efforts are underway through regional blocs like ECOWAS, COMESA, and SADC, most countries maintain distinct national frameworks governing advertising content, product labeling, ingredient disclosure, importation, and pricing. Understanding these frameworks is critical to ensuring compliance and avoiding punitive actions, brand recall, or reputational loss.

Figure 1: Stage 1: Regulatory Landscape Mapping

Labeling requirements have become increasingly stringent. Regulatory bodies now mandate detailed nutritional information, allergen disclosures, manufacturing and expiry dates, and standardized font sizes for critical consumer information. Some countries require front-of-pack labeling for high-sugar or high-fat foods to curb non-communicable diseases. In the personal care sector, banned or restricted chemical ingredients must be clearly declared, while claims of organic or natural content require substantiating documentation.

Advertising restrictions similarly constrain brand communication. Health-related claims must be evidence-based and are often subject to prior approval by relevant authorities, such as national food and drug agencies. Tobacco and alcohol advertisements face placement and timing restrictions or outright bans. In many jurisdictions, marketing to children is restricted, limiting cartoon characters or child-targeted language on packaging (Jacobs, 2017; Crocetti, 2017).

Import controls influence both product availability and cost structure. Local content requirements, tariffs, and import bans on certain products create dynamic compliance challenges. Regulatory authorities may also impose country-specific packaging standards—such as language requirements or traceability systems—on imported FMCG goods. Brands must, therefore, conduct continuous horizon scanning to stay updated on shifts in trade policy and regulatory enforcement.

Early and ongoing engagement with regulatory institutions is essential for navigating these complex landscapes. Rather than positioning regulators as antagonists, FMCG companies should treat them as partners in market sustainability and consumer welfare. Constructive dialogue enables firms to clarify grey areas, understand evolving expectations, and negotiate transitional arrangements for compliance.

Pre-market consultations are a strategic entry point for engagement. During the reformulation or redesign of products, companies can present proposed claims, labeling formats, and advertising concepts to relevant regulatory bodies to receive feedback before public release. This reduces the likelihood of post-launch penalties or product recalls.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) also offer a platform for shared value creation. For instance, co-developing consumer education campaigns with regulatory agencies can improve health literacy while aligning brand positioning with national development goals. FMCG firms can participate in regulatory workshops, capacity-building forums, and industry consultations that shape future policies (Grayson and Nelson, 2017; Flaherty and Rappaport, 2017). These interactions not only enhance regulatory foresight but also position the brand as a credible and socially responsible market actor.

Moreover, regulatory engagement helps uncover compliance levers that can enhance brand equity. Certifications such as “Approved by NAFDAC” in Nigeria, “KEBS Certified” in Kenya, or “Bureau Veritas Safety Mark” in regional markets can be leveraged in marketing, particularly where consumer trust is fragile. The visibility of such endorsements—if acquired legitimately—serves as a compliance-aligned signal of product safety and quality.

After understanding the regulatory environment and initiating institutional engagement, FMCG firms must systematically assess the compliance vulnerability of their existing brand architecture and marketing channels. Risk mapping involves identifying brand assets—such as slogans, packaging elements, color schemes, and health claims—that may conflict with current or emerging regulations.

For instance, legacy taglines that use unverified claims (“Boosts Immunity Instantly,” “100% Natural”) may no longer be tenable. Similarly, packaging colors associated with pharmaceutical benefits (e.g., green for herbal or blue for antibacterial) may fall under scrutiny in certain jurisdictions. Risk mapping enables companies to inventory and categorize such elements based on severity, likelihood of regulatory challenge, and ease of redesign.

Marketing channels also pose varying levels of regulatory exposure. Traditional media like television and radio are typically subject to content vetting and broadcast scheduling restrictions, especially for alcohol, tobacco, and high-sugar products. Conversely, digital channels such as social media may operate in a regulatory grey zone but still carry reputational risk due to public scrutiny and viral feedback loops. Point-of-sale marketing—such as shelf talkers and in-store promotions—may be regulated at the municipal or state level, requiring further compliance localization.

A robust risk mapping exercise should result in a compliance risk matrix that categorizes assets and channels into low, medium, and high-risk categories. This matrix forms the basis for informed decision-making in subsequent stages of the repositioning framework, ensuring that high-risk elements are redesigned or retired in favor of compliant alternatives that still preserve brand equity.

Stage 1 Regulatory Landscape Mapping lays the foundation for successful FMCG brand repositioning in Sub-Saharan Africa’s regulated markets. By rigorously assessing market-specific regulatory norms, proactively engaging with oversight institutions, and systematically mapping compliance risks, FMCG firms can anticipate challenges, reduce exposure, and transform regulatory complexity into a competitive advantage (Kumar and Qazi, 2016; Lee, 2016). This stage not only safeguards brand continuity but also informs culturally resonant and regulation-aligned innovation across the repositioning lifecycle.

2.2 Stage 2: Brand Equity Audit

The second stage in a multi-stage brand repositioning framework Brand Equity Audit serves as a foundational diagnostic to evaluate the internal and external status of a brand prior to repositioning. In the context of regulated fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) markets in Sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-economic complexity, informal retail, and policy constraints shape consumer behavior, a meticulous equity audit is crucial (Grabel *et al*., 2017; Kiggundu and Pal, 2018). This stage consolidates insights from internal brand asset reviews, consumer perception analyses, and competitive benchmarking to guide strategic recalibration in later stages.

The internal audit of brand assets is the first critical component. This involves a systematic inventory and evaluation of all tangible and intangible elements that define the brand's current identity and market presence. Tangibles include packaging design, slogans, color schemes, product formulation, and distribution footprint. For instance, packaging may need to be adapted to comply with new labeling regulations, improve affordability through unit downsizing (e.g., sachets or refill packs), or align with sustainability mandates such as reduced plastic use. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where visual cues often substitute for literacy in brand recognition, the design of packaging must be assessed not only for aesthetics but for its communicative efficiency in low-literacy environments. Slogans and taglines are examined for semantic relevance and tone, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Likewise, product formulation must be evaluated for acceptability across markets with differing taste preferences, ingredient regulations, and climatic conditions affecting shelf life. The distribution footprint—particularly the brand's penetration into informal markets such as open-air stalls, mom-and-pop shops, and mobile vending networks—provides insight into physical availability and supply chain resilience.

Beyond internal factors, a consumer perception analysis offers an external lens on brand performance. In Sub-Saharan Africa's heterogenous and rapidly urbanizing societies, consumer expectations evolve alongside shifts in income levels, digital exposure, and cultural norms. Brand equity is therefore contingent not only on recall and recognition but also on relevance, trust, and perceived social value. Tools such as market surveys and focus group discussions are employed to probe awareness, preference, and emotional associations with the brand. These tools are most effective when disaggregated by demographic segments (e.g., rural youth, urban mothers, informal sector workers), as these groups may interact with the brand differently (Agyei *et al*., 2016; Abubakar *et al*, 2018). In addition, social listening, particularly through WhatsApp groups, Facebook, and Twitter—platforms widely used in urban centers—provides real-time insight into public sentiment, peer recommendations, and latent concerns. For instance, a drop in brand sentiment following a regulatory reform (e.g., a sugar tax) may signal the need for proactive messaging around reformulated products.

Finally, competitive benchmarking anchors the brand's relative position within the broader marketplace. In Sub-Saharan Africa, competition often involves both formal multinational corporations and robust local enterprises that adapt quickly to grassroots dynamics. Benchmarking entails comparative analysis of price points, perceived quality, distribution agility, and value-added features across competitor brands. This stage should account for differences in regulatory exposure, marketing spend, and localization strategies. For example, a local soap manufacturer may outperform a global brand in rural penetration due to low-cost packaging and distribution via community-based sellers. Conversely, a multinational beverage brand may leverage advanced compliance capabilities and superior media buying power to dominate urban, regulated channels. Understanding such strategic asymmetries enables brand managers to identify gaps and opportunities for repositioning—whether to reclaim lost market share, shift consumer perceptions, or preempt competitive threats.

The Brand Equity Audit stage is not merely a diagnostic checkpoint but a strategic inflection point. It ensures that brand repositioning is rooted in empirical insight, stakeholder realities, and market constraints. Especially in Sub-Saharan Africa's regulation-intensive and culturally diverse FMCG environments, a rigorous equity audit provides the necessary clarity to craft positioning strategies that are both compliant and compelling. By integrating internal assessments, consumer sentiment, and competitive intelligence, firms can move confidently into subsequent stages of strategy redesign and tactical activation.

2.3 Stage 3: Value Proposition Recalibration

As regulatory tightening and consumer behavior evolution reshape the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa, value proposition recalibration emerges as a critical pivot point in the brand repositioning process (Becerra, 2016; Pant and Ramachandran, 2017). Stage 3 of the proposed framework focuses on strategically redefining what the brand stands for in the eyes of its target consumers, within the bounds of new regulatory realities and emerging market expectations as shown in figure 2. This stage involves three interconnected components: refinement of the core brand promise, localization of messaging, and product-market fit optimization.

A value proposition is the synthesis of a brand's functional benefits, emotional appeal, and social relevance. In SSA's regulated FMCG markets, legacy value propositions often fail to resonate due to outdated assumptions about consumer priorities or conflict with current regulatory standards. Brands that once promised vague health improvements or relied heavily on aspirational Western imagery must now rearticulate their promises in ways that are both meaningful to local consumers and compliant with law (Islam, 2017; Marshall and Morreale, 2017; Goel, 2018).

To recalibrate effectively, FMCG firms must conduct consumer insight studies that illuminate context-specific aspirations, such as affordability, family well-being, community prestige, health consciousness, and convenience. For example, in lower-income urban communities, the promise of "lasting freshness at half the price" may resonate more than ambiguous claims of luxury. In rural areas, the appeal may shift toward durability, multi-functionality, or natural sourcing (Taylor *et al*., 2017; Nocentini *et al*., 2017).

The refined brand promise must be both deliverable and defensible under regulation. If a hygiene product claims to "eliminate 99% of germs," the company must be prepared to furnish third-party validation. If a food product promotes health benefits like "supports digestion," such statements must align with national food safety authority standards. Regulatory legitimacy becomes part of the new brand equity—offering transparency and dependability where misinformation previously thrived (Lin, 2016; Joseph and Hashmi, 2018).

Once the brand promise is clarified, the next step is to tailor messaging to the cultural, linguistic, and semiotic contexts of diverse consumer groups across the region (Dash *et al*., 2016; O'Connor and Zentz, 2016). Sub-Saharan Africa's heterogeneity—across ethnic, linguistic, and urban-rural lines—demands hyper-local communication strategies that embed the brand into the lived experiences of target audiences.

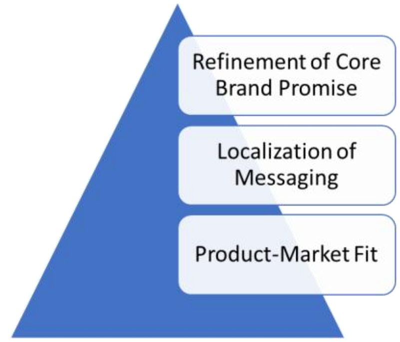

Figure 2: Stage 3: Value Proposition Recalibration

Localization goes beyond mere translation. It requires culturally adaptive storytelling, where product benefits are contextualized within familiar routines, idioms, and values. For instance, rather than asserting a toothpaste's superiority through scientific jargon, brands may find more traction by depicting family scenes where oral health is linked to maternal care or school confidence.

Such narratives must be crafted to comply with local advertising laws, which may limit depictions of children, claims about medical efficacy, or religious references. Messaging localization also involves channel calibration: community radio in rural regions, WhatsApp groups in peri-urban centers, or influencer micro-campaigns in youth-dense urban markets. Across these formats, the tone must shift from prescriptive to participatory—engaging consumers as co-authors of the brand story rather than passive recipients of messaging (Norris, 2017; Adame *et al*., 2017; Kartika *et al*., 2017).

In addition, brands can leverage co-creation with local artists, content creators, or community leaders to embed authenticity into communication while meeting advertising code requirements. These partnerships serve as both compliance buffers and trust bridges, particularly in markets where outsider brands are met with skepticism or cultural dissonance.

Effective recalibration of the value proposition must also revisit the physical or functional aspects of the product itself to ensure alignment with shifting regulatory and market conditions. This could involve reformulating products to reduce sugar, salt, or synthetic additives in response to emerging health regulations or consumer awareness campaigns. In the personal care segment, this may mean substituting banned compounds or introducing biodegradable packaging to align with environmental regulations and sustainability preferences.

Where reformulation is not feasible, strategic repositioning can serve to reframe the product's relevance. A carbonated drink that once positioned itself as a health booster might now emphasize energy or refreshment for hot climates, avoiding contentious health claims while maintaining appeal (Shewfelt, 2016; Tran, 2016).

In addition, packaging innovations—such as single-use sachets or refillable containers—can improve both affordability and environmental compliance, enhancing fit across both economic and regulatory dimensions. Product sizes, formats, and price points must be reassessed to optimize accessibility while maintaining compliance with unit-based taxation or price control regulations (Wiser *et al*., 2016; Dzwonczyk, 2016).

Recalibration should also be informed by lifecycle data on product use, consumer satisfaction, and returns, ensuring that the redesigned proposition resonates not just at launch but throughout the product journey.

Value proposition recalibration is not a one-time exercise but a dynamic process that enables FMCG brands to thrive in the constrained yet opportunity-rich markets of Sub-Saharan Africa. By refining brand promises to align with consumer aspirations and compliance parameters, localizing messaging to build cultural resonance, and ensuring product-market fit through reformulation or repositioning, companies can create sustainable competitive advantage. In this stage, brands evolve from regulatory risk-takers to trusted, regulation-aligned partners in consumer well-being and development.

2.4 Stage 4: Multichannel Strategy Redesign

The fourth stage in the multi-stage brand repositioning framework—Multichannel Strategy Redesign—marks the tactical activation of revised brand positioning through context-appropriate distribution and communication channels. In regulated fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) markets across Sub-Saharan Africa, a successful repositioning effort must navigate diverse retail ecosystems, fragmented consumer segments, and evolving policy constraints (Chatterjee *et al*., 2018; Kaplinsky, 2018). This stage focuses on customizing engagement across retail formats, embedding compliance in communication, and integrating informal last-mile pathways to enhance brand relevance and accessibility.

At the core of the strategy is channel-specific customization, which recognizes the distinct dynamics of each distribution mode. Traditional retail—comprising open-air markets, kiosks, and mom-and-pop stores—remains dominant in rural and peri-urban areas. Repositioning strategies in these contexts often emphasize affordability, unit downsizing, and culturally resonant packaging. Retailer incentives, such as point-of-sale materials or loyalty programs for informal vendors, help embed the revised brand identity at the grassroots level. In contrast, modern trade channels such as supermarkets and pharmacies—more prevalent in urban centers—require standardization in packaging, pricing, and shelf presence, often accompanied by digital shelf marketing or in-store sampling campaigns. These formats allow for more structured deployment of brand narratives and product innovation.

Mobile commerce has emerged as a vital channel, especially in contexts where smartphone penetration is rising and traditional supply chains are constrained. Brands can utilize USSD platforms, WhatsApp ordering systems, and localized e-commerce portals to reach digitally connected yet logistically underserved consumers. For example, modular pricing, flash promotions, and mobile loyalty schemes can reinforce repositioned brand values such as cost-effectiveness or health orientation. Meanwhile, community activation—through school programs, religious networks, and women's cooperatives—acts as a trust-based distribution and communication channel that aligns with social hierarchies and localized decision-making. These community nodes can be instrumental in communicating changes in product formulation or packaging prompted by regulation.

Given the regulatory volatility in many African FMCG markets—ranging from advertising restrictions to packaging mandates—regulatory-resilient communication is essential. Traditional broadcast advertising may face limits on content, timing, or product categories (e.g., sugary drinks or over-the-counter medications). As a result, brands must pivot to storytelling, using culturally embedded narratives that convey social utility, heritage, or aspirational identity (Llamas and Thomsen, 2016; Apte and Sheth, 2016). This approach ensures deeper emotional engagement while reducing reliance on prohibited direct product claims. Additionally, influencer advocacy—leveraging trusted voices such as local celebrities, community leaders, or micro-influencers—enables peer-level validation within regulatory bounds. Experiential marketing, including product demonstrations, health camps, or brand-sponsored festivals, creates memorable brand encounters without breaching advertising codes. These engagements are particularly effective in conveying repositioning themes related to wellness, affordability, or environmental responsibility.

An integral element of this redesign is the integration with last-mile strategies, which involves working with informal distribution networks to deepen market penetration while maintaining regulatory compliance. In many Sub-Saharan African markets, informal vendors account for more than 70% of retail activity. However, their alignment with repositioned branding requires structured support: simplified training on new brand attributes, co-branded kiosks, micro-inventory bundling, or mobile apps that facilitate restocking. Importantly, these interventions must respect local customs and informal governance structures, while also addressing regulators' concerns about counterfeit products and tax evasion. Compliance-friendly formats—such as tamper-proof packaging, traceable barcodes, and vendor registration schemes—bridge the formal-informal divide and ensure that last-mile reach does not come at the cost of reputational or legal risk.

Stage 4 operationalizes repositioning through a strategically harmonized multichannel deployment that balances reach, compliance, and cultural alignment. Channel-specific customization ensures brand resonance in retail settings ranging from market stalls to digital storefronts. Regulatory-resilient communication shifts the promotional focus toward emotion, experience, and influence rather than overt persuasion. Finally, the integration of last-mile channels consolidates market coverage by making informal networks part of the brand architecture (Harrington *et al*., 2018; Lim and Srai, 2018). Together, these approaches allow FMCG brands in Sub-Saharan Africa to reposition not just effectively, but sustainably—navigating constraints while cultivating enduring consumer relationships.

2.5 Stage 5: Performance Tracking and Iterative Learning

The fifth and final stage of a multi-stage brand repositioning framework for regulated Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) markets in Sub-Saharan Africa is Performance Tracking and Iterative Learning. In rapidly evolving regulatory and socio-economic contexts, static marketing strategies are inadequate. Instead, FMCG firms must adopt a dynamic feedback system that integrates performance measurement, consumer insights, and regulatory responsiveness (Salam and Khan, 2018; Johansson and Wilhelmsson, 2018). This stage centers on three key components: KPI development, multi-source feedback loops, and the creation of an adaptive learning system as shown in figure 3.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) provide the empirical foundation for assessing the effectiveness of brand repositioning. In regulated FMCG markets, these indicators must go beyond conventional sales and market share metrics to include qualitative dimensions such as consumer trust, brand recall, and regulatory compliance impact.

Consumer trust metrics may include net promoter score (NPS), perceived authenticity of claims, and the extent of user-reported satisfaction with product safety and transparency. In regions where misinformation or counterfeit goods are prevalent, trust serves as both a protective and competitive asset. Tracking fluctuations in consumer confidence—through surveys or community-based assessments—offers insight into the credibility of the repositioned brand.

Brand recall indicators are critical in measuring the cognitive retention of revised messaging, especially after major value proposition shifts or packaging redesigns due to regulatory mandates. Metrics such as aided and unaided recall, message association, and packaging recognition provide quantitative measures of repositioning success.

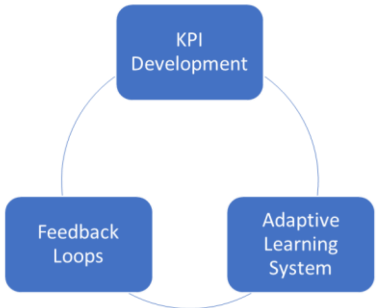

Figure 3: Stage 5: Performance Tracking and Iterative Learning

Sales growth under regulatory constraints must be disaggregated from general market expansion to isolate the impact of compliant repositioning. By comparing performance in regions with differing levels of regulatory enforcement, firms can analyze how well their adaptive strategies are driving market uptake despite formal constraints on messaging or pricing (Leonidou *et al*., 2017; Neise *et al*., 2018).

Real-time and multi-modal consumer engagement mechanisms are essential to closing the gap between brand strategy and on-the-ground experience. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where formal market research infrastructure may be limited, firms can harness a combination of digital and analog channels to gather feedback.

USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) surveys offer a low-cost, mobile-enabled tool for reaching underserved consumers in areas with limited internet access. USSD codes can be embedded in product packaging, allowing users to provide input on product satisfaction, pricing acceptability, or perceived benefits in exchange for airtime or loyalty points.

Social media listening—particularly on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok—provides real-time insights into consumer sentiment, complaints, and emerging trends. Sentiment analysis algorithms can detect shifts in tone or volume surrounding brand discussions, flagging issues before they escalate or identifying opportunities for micro-campaigns and influencer engagement.

Field agents and local sales teams serve as trusted community intermediaries who can collect qualitative insights that are difficult to capture through digital means alone. These include observations about product usage contexts, competitor strategies, and consumer expectations around new regulatory disclosures. Structured reporting tools and mobile data collection platforms (e.g., KoboToolbox, ODK) can streamline field data into centralized analytics systems.

Together, these feedback loops enable continuous input from multiple points along the consumer journey, ensuring that brand repositioning is grounded in lived experience rather than speculative assumptions.

A truly iterative approach requires FMCG firms to institutionalize a learning mindset—where repositioning is seen as a process of constant adaptation rather than a one-time fix. The development of an adaptive learning system involves translating feedback and KPI data into actionable strategy refinements.

This system should be built around regular review cycles, where multidisciplinary teams (marketing, compliance, product development, and field operations) convene to evaluate data and iterate on messaging, packaging, or promotional tactics. For instance, if brand recall scores are low in a particular region, the team may redesign local radio ads or re-engage with community influencers.

Regulatory feedback must also be looped into the system. Changes in legislation, enforcement trends, or public health campaigns may necessitate proactive shifts in communication or product design (Bhavnani *et al*., 2017; Smith *et al*., 2018). Embedding regulatory horizon scanning into the learning system ensures that repositioning efforts remain compliant and forward-looking.

Technological tools—such as AI-powered dashboards, predictive analytics, and scenario modeling—can support adaptive decision-making. These platforms allow brands to simulate how a messaging change might affect compliance exposure, consumer sentiment, or retail velocity, before deployment.

Stage 5—Performance Tracking and Iterative Learning—cements the repositioning framework by embedding agility, accountability, and insight into FMCG brand strategy in regulated Sub-Saharan African markets. Through targeted KPIs, diverse feedback mechanisms, and an institutionalized learning process, brands can evolve in step with shifting regulations and consumer expectations (Kurtmollaiev *et al*., 2018; Lakiza and Deschamps, 2018; Salam and Khan, 2018). This continuous recalibration not only ensures compliance but also builds lasting relevance, trust, and competitive edge in a complex and high-potential market environment.

CONCLUSION

The multi-stage brand repositioning framework for regulated FMCG markets in Sub-Saharan Africa offers a robust, context-sensitive roadmap for navigating increasingly complex branding landscapes. By sequentially integrating brand equity audits, regulatory alignment, stakeholder co-design, and multichannel strategy redesign, the framework ensures that repositioning efforts are both strategically sound and operationally viable. Its utility lies in balancing two often conflicting imperatives: maintaining regulatory compliance and revitalizing brand relevance across heterogeneous consumer segments. This is particularly critical in Sub-Saharan African markets where shifting policy regimes, fragmented retail structures, and culturally diverse populations require adaptive and localized approaches to branding.

Strategically, the framework adds value by enabling sustained market share growth through evidence-based and stakeholder-aligned branding interventions. It positions brands to remain resilient amid market disruptions, including the introduction of new advertising codes, packaging mandates, or fiscal measures such as sugar or plastic taxes. Furthermore, by embedding community engagement, informal sector integration, and regulatory responsiveness into the repositioning process, the framework enhances both consumer trust and institutional credibility—critical enablers of long-term competitiveness in the region’s regulated FMCG space.

Looking forward, emerging technologies present new frontiers for strengthening this framework. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools offer significant promise in automating regulatory monitoring, flagging potential non-compliance risks in product labeling or advertising content. AI-driven brand health scoring systems, integrating retail performance data, social media analytics, and sentiment mining, can provide near-real-time diagnostics of brand performance. Additionally, machine learning models trained on regional socio-linguistic data could enhance consumer sentiment prediction, enabling hyper-localized and predictive repositioning strategies. Integrating these tools into future iterations of the framework would not only increase agility and precision but also ensure that FMCG brands remain ahead of the regulatory and market curve in an increasingly digital and data-centric Africa.

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