

## Influence of societal values on the outdoor advertising of staple commodities in Lagos state, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Societal values are polysemous and its dimensions are imported into advertising to give it rich content. The polysemous character makes it sensitive and complex phenomena. For instance, value that is acceptable in the western part of Nigeria may be unacceptable in the north or east. This clearly implies that value, although may be of the people, is relative and subjective. This study made use of survey research design with a single research question set to guide it. Data was collected from 362 respondents which were purposively selected in the study area (Lagos State, Nigeria) as sample size. Data gathering was done on the field with the aid of questionnaire and analyzed with descriptive statistics. Specifically, a Table of frequency and percentage distribution was employed and scoring of variables was done vis-à-vis the responses of the consumers of staple commodities to look at the extent to which societal values have influenced product advertisements in the State. The Mean and standard deviation was calculated. The result of the study presented in Table 1 shows that all the societal values scoped for this study (culture, moral, religion, taste, language and colour) influence consumers in one way or the other but the portrayal of religious design concept to influence consumers to patronize staple commodities ranked best of all. The study observed that of all the societal values traceable to advertising campaign in Lagos State, religion-inclined advertising designs are gaining a rising number of influences. It therefore concludes that religious and cultural designs, when appropriately applied help outdoor advertising to thrive well in Lagos State.

**Keywords:** Core values, polysemous, influence, staple commodities, advertising

### Introduction

Societal values in Lagos State are more than variables and are often polysemous. They are age long phenomena which are so important in everyday life and they change within society and from person to person. Pollay (1985) regards them as prosaic and profound. These two characters make them sensitive and complex phenomena. For

instance, what is good or acceptable value in one society may be bad or unacceptable in another. Values may be helpful and comforting but elsewhere it may be forbidden. Beyond these, some deeply-cherished beliefs and heritages passed down by the ancestral progenitors vividly seem to have gone into extinction possibly as a result of infatuation for new Pentecostalism and

the acculturation of the western education civilization, especially in the southern Nigeria where Lagos State is domicile. The fundamentalist perspective of propagation and fanatical enforcement of Islamic laws and practices in many areas of the northern Nigeria is also on the widespread with causative damage on some cultural and moral values. Noted, values are of the people and it pervades all spheres of life; objects of cultural symbolism are regarded in the extremist circumstance as fetish and so would not be acceptable for advertising a product in certain quarters. Yet values can be distorted for commercial reasons by the action or persuasion of an external agent like the advertisers of products and services. Values form a basis for decisions, judgments and are evident as the foundation for religion, the cultural belief systems, political ideologies as well as purchasing decisions (Pollay, 1985). Staple commodities most times fall victim of these defeatist sentiments. In a particular instance, consumer product like bathing soap advertised with a lady bathing half-nude may interest viewers in a heterogeneous socio-culturally inclined environment like Lagos. But when the same advertisement is mounted in strictly religious environments, the whole idea is likely to be met with criticism. Such advertisement of a nude woman is capable of being considered as an abuse of femininity and a violation of certain faith. This is popularly called *haram* (in the Islamic faith) and *abomination* (in the Christian faith). What makes the difference in the two cultural environments could be better explained with a parlance which says *one man's meat is another man's poison*. What excite consumers, especially say, dresses that promote sex appeal or unhealthy behaviours in one society are what disgusts consumers in another. Little wonder, Vytautas and Agne(2013) averred that modern consumers are more interested in the conditions under which products are

being manufactured and advertised in developing countries; ethical and socially responsible consumption are emphasized. It is observed that likes and dislikes differ significantly. Applying visual design concepts that are appropriate to the value system of a particular consumer-society on the outdoor billboard medium for instance, will presumably arouse a feeling of belongingness and a propensity for making favourable consumption decision. In scientific literature, as implied from Vytautas and Agne (op cit) there has been increased interest on socially responsible consumption issue and how ethical principles can influence consumer decision making. Again, scholars in many fields have expressed their concerns as to the potential or actual effects of aggregated advertising on the culture and, more specifically, the values of its citizens. The introduction of value sentiments in marketing campaign accelerates public perception that advertising is a prime factor for the success of any commercial enterprise. Thus, consumer product loyalty and buying behaviour seem to be exhilarating (Malik, Ghafoor and Iqbal, 2014). Cultural, ethical and social affiliations are among what are emphasized for product advertisement in a country like Nigeria. The encomium of advertising researchers on creative advertisements as having striking influences on the buying behavior of viewers or target audience has its pedigree from the affiliation or inclusivity theory. A theory that is not far away from when advertisers manage to discover and identify with the values of the prospective or existing audience and use such values to entice them or campaign commercially to them. A value-based advertisement through the outdoor media contributes to the experiential learning process that drives emotional expression and the discovery of potentials in a product. However, the value dimensions of advertising are also at the heart of the

critique of advertising whether judging the effectiveness of individual advertisements or concerned with the social and cultural ramifications of the largest system of commercial activity (Hanif, Hafeez, and Riaz, (2010), Hamilton, Obispo, Richards, and Stiegert (2009), Pollay, 1985).

### **Statement of the problem**

Since outdoor advertising is a channel for showcasing product capability in public places, Nwoka, Ezirim and Maclayton (2005) observe that the issue probing the minds of many is whether such channel has actually influenced to a significant extent, the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Along this line also, Maclnnis and Jaworski (1989), adopting Cohen (1987) note that since the 1950s researchers have been developing theories to describe, understand and predict consumers' attitudinal responses to outdoor advertising. Of course, outdoor advertisements speak most of the time with art and design concepts, to people with differing levels of appreciative reasoning and aesthetic interpretation capabilities, the underlying design concepts are often subjected to serious misconceptions and negative criticisms. This seems to be the problem why many doubt whether outdoor advertising could have significant influence on the purchasing behaviour of its target audience. For instance, Bovee and Arens (1982) note that as a social influence, the visual design concept for product advertising is often charged, on the one hand with contributing to crime and violence, and on the other hand, with making people conform. To some people, the art of product advertising itself is not bad but the visual design concepts used may be emphasizing a subject in bad taste and exploiting consumers by persuading them to buy things they do not need (Belch and Belch, 1998). This category of the public audience finds the manner of visual presentation of the product, message or visuals on the outdoor

bills offensive to certain value inclination. These have however become a subject of concern as the promotional intent of art and design concepts are yet to be accorded the overwhelming appreciation it is seeking from the audience.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. identify the societal values that are relevant to the advertisement of staple commodities in Lagos State; and
2. assess the extent to which societal values have influenced the advertisement of staple commodities in Lagos State.

### **Research Question**

1. to what extent do societal values influence product advertising in Lagos State?

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **The Influence of Societal Values on Product Advertising**

The work in Masters (2005) centred on societal values. It dwelt on the earliest European settlers and later moved to the present day values. It maintained an impactful knowledge position that societal value or social value in an individual last from 20 to 50 years. It was an excellent analysis of reasons why changes occur in society's social core values, and to name a few reasons, because of scientific findings, evolution of religious beliefs, changes in moral values and the persistence of vision-driven advocates. Others are media, changes in economy, technological innovation, demographic shifts and often times for no discernible reason at all. In talking about societal values, society needs a major shift in its core values to stave off an environmental crisis. Societal values in that complexity of knowledge, values, attitudes and abilities which contribute to the development of a sound moral character, a

sense of community, and competence in responding to the personal, social and cultural aspects of life. How all these affect both the practice of product advertising and patronage is not the focus of the study in Masters (op cit) neither is it the concern of Mendis (2008). Mendis (op cit) is of the position that can there be adequate protection of core societal values within the trade liberalization framework of the WTO GATS or are there additional, overriding principles and legal obligations in international law and policy to which GATS must be subject, which offers the flexibility needed by states to protect their societal interests? The expected outcome of the study is the identification and analysis of core societal values, of protections within GATS and of the above-mentioned other principles and legal obligations and the means and methods of utilizing them for the protection of the said values, if necessary. It is necessary, in the words of Malikail and Stewart (1987), to be great and good in life but it depends on how men and women in different cultures and races can express core societal values. Values which find expression in the human society include truthfulness, compassion, fair-mindedness, justice, respect for the environment, respect for the rights and property of others, and respect for democratic processes (the rights of majorities and minorities) (Malikail and Stewart, op cit).

### **The Concept of Ethics and Morals in Outdoor Product Advertising**

As advertising is increasing in new coverage (Jin, 2003) so are its challenges correspondingly emerging. Challenges discussed in Drumwright and Murphy (2004) is termed 'ethical muteness' and 'moral myopia'. Drumwright and Murphy (2009) refer to ethical muteness as unwillingness of practitioners to acknowledge and discuss ethical problems while it refers to moral myopia as inability

to see clearly ethical issues when they arise. The study is of the opinion that advertising in general requires concise ethical principles at individual, organization and society levels. Even though Tania1083 (2008) admits that advertising is necessary, it joins camp with Drumwright and Murphy (2004) to say that it is of utmost necessity for advertising practitioners, marketers and salespersons to be legal, honest and truthful while dealing with both existing and potential consumers. Indeed, showing advertisements of products that are rife with surrogate, subliminal and predatory pricing have significant telling effects on the consumers (Murphy, Laczniak, Bowie and Klein, 2005).

On ethical standpoint, Reid (2006) and Drumwright (2005) therefore suggest that strong advertising regulatory measures should be put in place to counteract the advertisement of controversial products in the public. While consumer products like tobacco, alcoholic beverages, gambling, prescription drugs and certain medical products are being considered to be harmful Reid (op cit) posits that they are promoters of socially undesirable and potentially harmful behaviours among the public that is consuming the products. As it is, tobacco advertisement through any medium, billboard advertisements on children's war toys, nude and half nude of human pictures for product advertising confers undesirable influences on public imagery and precisely corrupt the vulnerable consumer segments. Other advertising studies that support bans on unethical practices are Whiteside (2008), Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008), Beard (2008), Wooden (2008), Jaffe (2007a), Jaffe (2007b), Jaffe (2007c), Burkitt (2006), Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006); Boulton (2000).

Granted advertisement campaigns to different intended audiences, children inclusive, studies that address advertising impact on children are relatively scarce

(Clay, 2000). As that suggests, an advertisement intended to address children embodies carefully worded technical and moral contents significantly different from those raised by advertisement targeted at matured adults. In Carson (2001) it is noted that the Pontifical Council for Social Communications is aware of the enormous influence of advertisements on the society's understanding of life or the lack of it. It is also conscious of the society's right to information alongside the possibilities of the ethical and moral abuses that could arise from the exercise of these rights. And so, have discussed some salient issues such as lying, deception and withholding of information. Carson (op cit) remarks that the laws concerning deceptive advertising should be enforced on practitioners because deception is prima facie wrong. It is harmful to all stakeholders in the advertising business like consumers, competitors and the social fabric. The gains that will accrue to the advertiser are almost never an adequate justification for deception, lying and insincerity. Perpetrators are described in Carson (op cit) as violators of consistency requirements for morality – the golden rule and the categorical imperative. Waller (2002) is another study that presents opposing views against unethical issues in selling and advertising. It was carried out in Australia. It looks at the attitudes of Australian advertising agencies executives and politicians toward ethical issues relating to political advertising. A sample of 101 advertising agencies executives and 46 federal politicians were compared and some attitudinal differences were found, which could be area of tension in the agency-client relationship.

### **Cultural Disposition of the Masses to Design Concepts and Sales Promotion**

In the views of Assael (1995) cultural dispositions do not only influence the way products are portrayed and advertised on the

billboards; it influences the reactions of the public to such advertisement and the way the products are consumed by the masses. Culture is central to any form of product campaign and sales. Cultural dispositions of a people to product acceptability could be positive or negative. Cannon (1992) puts it forward that it impinges on the values of every member of the society more than any other advertising strategy - thereby influencing both the needs of the consumers or target audience and also the means of satisfying the needs most noticeably. This is because firstly, the society is bound together within the framework of culture diversities-everyone to the freedom of choice and practice. A concept, vogue, phenomenon or product that is allowed in one cultural setup may be forbidden as taboo or immoral in another. All these are clearly defined by education, religious beliefs and the various socially inclined values. An explanation given in Kinsey (1988) suggests that culture could as well be the first stumbling block to promotional activities as it could determine the who, where, and how of buying. Kurtz and Dodge (1991) has it that consumers' attitude to a product advertised is determined by cultural influences most of the time. Culture could also indicate which promotional mix element should be used to get the expected result (Kinsey, *ibid*). For these reasons, there appears to be no sharp distinction between all the promotional mixes i.e. sales promotion, personal selling, exhibition, public relation and advertising in terms of the way culture affects them and the results they yield for the advertisers and the impact they have on the public.

Unclear dichotomies between these mixes expressly reveal why they are erroneously used, it also suggests that they can be used interchangeably. Paliwoda (1994) provides a clue to what promotion is by arguing that promotion is only an umbrella term for all the promotional mixes. This by implication means that when a company is exhibiting,

canvassing, selling, or advertising its product, it is also promoting it and vice versa. Though the concept of promotion may be explained by using its plethoric dimensions, its differing applications have a stake in business that is defined by the Microsoft Encarta Dictionary (2004) as implying something that is designed to promote or advertise a product, cause or organization. In marketing, especially for sales promotion, a company could direct her promotional strategies at the buying audience, her sales staff or the distribution agencies that comprise both the wholesalers and the retailers. But for the consumers who are the heartbeat and the major stakeholder of sales circumstance, commercial companies adopt varying promotional offers popularly called bonanza. But in the interest of sales marketing, such bonanzas are characterized by many differences; periodic price reductions, bonus and gift offers, events and programme sponsorships, and some comedy form of outdoor publicity as well as raffle draws. Presently, mobile telecommunication operators, beverages and photographic industries to name a few have resorted to periodic use of one or combination of these bonanza options.

Indeed, bonanzas share in common the marketing stratagem for creating awareness, interest, and the eventual demand made by buyers. It should be noted that sales promotion is a media and non-media communication outreach further designed to increase consumer demand, stimulate market demand and make more of the products available. Demand at this level gets beyond wishful interest; it is awareness and interest backed up with purchasing power that yields sales. However, lasting within a short time lag, promotional offers are illusionistic pluses on the part of the buying customers as “free has a price”. This means that bonuses are offered to whet the appetite of customers after which they pay back directly or indirectly. It is a mere business

angle on the part of the producers to outwit close competitors in the first instance, and to later scheme out an upward price review of their products shortly after the public has enjoyed free offers, bonuses, gifts or the temporary price reductions. This is however a common promotional technique worldwide.

### **The Behavioural value concept:**

The model for conceptualizing societal values requires that individuals and organizations conceive and define set of values and principles and demonstrate behaviours, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to function effectively in a cross-cultural society (Andereck, Valentine, Vogt and Knoop, 2007). A healthy system according to Liburd and Ren (2009) is one in which an obvious effort is made to get people with different backgrounds, skills, abilities to work together towards a goal. Values are central to human thinking, decision-making and ultimate actions and behaviour (Reamer, 2006). Behavioural value concept is premised on the fact that human beings are creatures of cultural behaviour. The habit of consuming, replacing and exchanging things with others is part of humanity but despite these commonalities, people are still different in the way of perceiving issues, belongingness and preferences.

The action that a person takes in considering, purchasing and using products and services are of the essence. This, in the words of Richards (1976) and Gert (2004) include the mental and social process that precede and follow the consumers’ decision. This becomes a behavioural science that helps investigate into why consumers choose one product or reject and how such decisions are come about (Kaplan & Bryan, 2009).

This study adapt Perner (2010) five stage concept namely:

- i. Stage of Problem recognition: A situation whereby a consumer come to the

realization that a need arises of a product. For example, when clothes are dirty (that serves as a problem) an individual will then come into realization that a key soap is needed to get rid of the dirt.

- ii. Stage of information search: Consumers need to be well informed of the many options and valued benefits the options are capable of delivering. This may be through external persuasion (advertisement), testimonies of others or previous experience of self.
- iii. Evaluation of alternatives: This is a stage where a consumer has to compare between products in line with the benefits they have to offer.
- iv. Purchase decision: In this case, a consumer buys a product after considering the comparative advantages of all close substitutes and also based on value conviction.
- v. Stage of post-purchase behaviour: The customer will always recall past experiences in order to make a decision of whether to continue to patronize a product or not. It is mentioned that the applicability of all the five stages to consumer real life situation evolve within many different aspects of the societal values such as culture, taste, religion, moral and preference to mention but a few.

Perner's theory also came up with a theory that helped to discover that a relationship exists between visual designs, consumers and product advertisements in that; a person who discovers that there is a need for a particular product will search for information as to how the need could be realized. In the process, an advertisement could supply the information needed to get such needs realized. The present study is looking at how societal values have influenced the advertising of staple commodities in Lagos State.

### **The 'Quality-of-life' concept:**

The Australian Centre on Quality of Life (ACQOL) (2008) conceived the quality-of-life idea based on the propensity that is in every human being for quality lifestyle. There are two constructs that are valid for quality of life studies. According to ACQOL (2008), first, of direct attention to positive aspects of people's lives and second, it can be measured objectively and subjectively. Schulenkorf (2010) and Benckendorff, Edwards, Jurowski, Liburd, Miller and Morscardo (2009) relate the quality concept to the area of tourism, noting that people travel in order to satisfy or respond to certain needs and wants which they perceive can add value to their level of comfort and happiness. Andereck, et al (op cit), explains that exposure to outdoor activities work as a force vehicle for enhancing quality of life of visitors and hosts, tourism has been able to contribute to economic, social and cultural development around the globe (Benckendorff, Ruhanen and Scott, 2009). Consumers desire the best of products' value. The question of subjectivity and objectivity of quality will however be answered by whether a consumer can afford the price of a product or not. It should be mentioned here as it is in Rockmore (2003) and Perner (2010), that consumer behaviour is guided by the assumption that values embody expressions of possible social utility.

### **Methodology**

The research design is a survey type that involves correlation. It employed questionnaire to survey the opinion of respondents concerning the influence of societal value concepts on product advertising in Lagos State. Three hundred and sixty-two (362) end-users constituted the sample size. Two objectives and one research question were set to guide the study. As a descriptive research, point-of-sale selection and randomization of samples (by gender) whose qualities and product

experiences were considered most valuable to the study were purposively carried out. Data gathering took place on the field after which a Pilot study resulting in the coefficient of 0.61 was carried out. Table of Frequency distribution was adopted as a method of data analysis with the Mean and standard deviation calculated.

**Results**

**Influence of societal values on product advertising in Lagos State.**

The extent to which societal value concepts have influenced product advertisements in Lagos State was looked at in this section by scoring the items on the questionnaire for each respondent (end-users). The results are presented in Table 1.

*Key: NI: Not Influenced, BI: Badly Influenced, FI: Fairly Influenced, I: Influenced, SI: Strongly Influenced.*

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage showing the influence of societal value concepts on product advertising in Lagos State.**

Societal value	NI	BI	FI	I	SI	MEAN	SD
Cultural design concept	30 (8.3%)	96 (26.5%)	70 (19.3%)	88 (24.3%)	78 (21.6%)	3.24	1.28
Moral design concept	35 (9.7%)	99 (27.3%)	74 (20.4%)	91 (25.1%)	63 (17.4%)	3.13	1.26
Religious design concept	33 (9.1%)	84 (23.2%)	78 (21.5%)	91 (25.1%)	76 (21.1%)	3.26	1.28
Taste concept	41 (11.3%)	98 (27.1%)	58 (16.0%)	98 (27.1%)	67 (18.5%)	3.14	1.31
Language affiliation	45 (12.4%)	119 (32.9%)	53 (14.6%)	76 (21.0%)	69 (19.1%)	3.03	1.34
Colour concept	85 (23.5%)	101 (27.9%)	58 (16.0%)	63 (17.4%)	55 (15.2%)	2.73	1.39

Percentage in parenthesis ( )

Source: Author's field work, 2017

Table 1 shows that religious concept does not only have positive influence on product advertising as revealed by percentage frequency of positive responses (fairly influenced, influenced and strongly influenced) which were made up of 245 out of 362 for respondents, it also has the strongest influence on product advertising. It has an aggregate percentage of 67.7 percent. The aggregate percentage of end-users who said that religion does not influence product advertising is 32.7 percent. The Mean value

and standard deviation were calculated to be 3.26 and 1.28 respectively. Cultural concept follows religious concept closely in terms of deep influence with 236 out of 362 attesting to its influence. From the Table, 65.2 percent indicates that it influences next to religious concept in the State while 34.8 percent is negative. The mean and standard deviation were calculated to be 3.24 and 1.28 respectively. The Table also shows that 62.9% of the respondents indicated that moral value concept influences products

advertising in Lagos State while 37.0% of the respondents were of the opinion that the concept has no influence on product advertising with mean and standard deviation of 3.13 and 1.26 respectively. The Table further revealed that taste and language affiliations have influence on product advertising in Lagos States as shown by the percentage responses of 61.6% and 54.7%. Mean value and standard deviation were calculated to be 3.14, 1.31 and 3.01, 1.34 respectively. However, the same Table reveals that colour fascination does not influence the consumers when products are advertised. A greater percentage (51.4) of those who responded to the influence of colour on the questionnaire indicated that colour has no significant influence on product advertising with the mean 2.73 and standard deviation of 1.39.

### **Discussion**

In answering the research question for this study, it is revealing that societal values have dimensions and perspectives which the advertising agencies are exploring, such as culture, moral, religion, taste concepts, language affiliation and colour affiliation. All of these have been proven to have one influence or the other on product advertising. The use of religious design concepts for outdoor advertisements, according to this study has the strongest influence on the citizens of Lagos State when it comes to purchasing staple commodities advertised on outdoor billboards. People in the State are lovers of religious and culture heritages. Most of the respondents sampled show that the cultural design concepts rank next in influence to religious concepts when it comes to responding to outdoor product advertisement. This means that they respond more excitingly to billboard product advertisements when they see religious and cultural designs on display more than any other societal value. Skinner (1990) remarks

that getting the attention of the outdoor target audience is not an easy task; so, advertisers are turning to a variety of design concepts to track their target audiences to get awareness and interest in their products. True, no advertising firm can operate profitably unless there are demands for its products or services (Moutinho, Goode and Davis, 1998). The result of this study is also that, some respondents agree that advertisers in Lagos State use moral design concepts to get result, but not like religious and cultural designs which deliver meaningful pictorial messages, drive home their points most freely with motivational textual messages that reflect value preferences and try to stimulate the public in order to make customers and consumers out of them. However, a few of the respondents were of the opinion that there is moral decadence in Lagos State already and as such, moral design concepts on outdoor advertisements might not have made significantly new influence on the public. At the same time, other societal values such as taste and language follow the same trend as moral design concept. Thus, this study agrees with the findings in Masters (2005) which maintains an impact knowledge position that societal values or social values are influential and are inherent in every individual. Advertising design can always make individual value dimensions salient and suggests the instrumentality of product consumption toward realization of those values (Pollay, 1985). Masters (op cit) also notes that societal influence on an individual can last from 20 – 50 years and by extension, can always affect reaction to visual elements in advertisements and the ultimate decision made for or against buying a product.

### **Conclusion**

Values are a necessity for a balanced and healthy society. Advertisers always pay conscious attention to it in the course of

campaigning for products to be patronized. Societal values and the outdoor advertising business represent a highly complex and varied phenomena which affect the daily lives of every individual in a society. Values change from person to person and from society to society. It has been said that even though western education and the eventual civilization coupled with various religious sentiments have interfered with the character of societal values handed down by the ancestors, values still remain active and indomitable to instincts. The value dimension that is permissible in one culture may not be in another. This is why it presents a challenging situation for the advertisers when adopting value dimensions as visual design concept for product advertising. This study which was set to look into the influence of societal values on outdoor advertisements have identified six variables namely; culture, morals, religion, taste, language and colour as value dimensions. Of all, religious design concept ranked first in influencing consumers to patronize staple commodities advertised on the outdoor bills in Lagos State. Cultural, moral, taste, language and colour design concepts ranked successively in that order.

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