

INVENTING HUMOUR ADVERTISING AS A COMPETITIVE PARADIGM IN THE NIGERIAN GSM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the advent and growing popularity of humor advertising as a competitive tool for influencing the buying behavior of consumers of GSM services in Nigeria. Following the liberalization of the industry in 2001, there has been an upsurge in the competition among the licensed operators of the industry with a view to gaining significant market share. As a means of pushing a product/service into the consciousness of existing and prospective consumers advertising works on their attention, liking and persuasion to purchase a product/service. Humor advertising has been reported in the literature as a successful means of gaining consumers' attention, liking, persuasion and action. Primary research method was adopted through the use of questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed to identify the relationship between demographic variables such as age, sex, and education on the effectiveness of humor advertising on consumer buying behavior. A random sample of 100 respondents was selected using multistage sampling procedure. Out of the 100 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 92 (92%) were retrieved. Data gathered were analyzed with the use of tables, charts, percentages and a few inferential statistics including correlation coefficient. Results show that humorous adverts can be used effectively to create affection towards the advertised product/service even in the developing economies like Nigeria. Results also show that gender can significantly influence humor advertising as women appear more likely to be persuaded by humor adverts than men.

Key words: Humour Advertising, Competition, Paradigm, GSM Industry and Comedy.

INTRODUCTION:

Within the space of thirteen years, the GSM industry in Nigeria has grown significantly. Today, there are over 145 million subscribers to the GSM services (NCC, 2013). Not less than five GSM service providers currently offer various services including voice call, text messaging, internet services, etc. As one of the fastest growing GSM industries in the world, there is a rush by the service providers to have significant control of the market. This has led to stiff competition with heavy reliance on advertisement through the mass media in order to gain competitive advantage and higher market share. In their quest to appeal more to Nigerians, and perhaps relying on the notion that Nigerians are the happiest people on earth (BBC, 2003), coupled with recent phenomenal growth in the entertainment industry; particularly the rise of comedy and comedians, there is an upsurge in the number of GSM service providers relying on comedy as a means of communicating

to their target audience(s). Since comedy is one of the elements of culture, and culture is one of the environmental factors that influence consumer behaviour (Belch and Belch, 2007), GSM companies attempt to introduce, establish, consolidate and create loyalty for their brands by using humour as the selling point (Udofia, 2011). Persuasion is the heart of advertising since the focus of advertising is to convince customers to try a product, adopt the product and/or be loyal to the brand or the firm. Ahmed (1996, as cited in Udofia, 2011) suggests that advertising as a form of social communication is greatly influenced by the cultures of the people where it originates. The elements of culture include traditional values, family values, and humour. Marketers therefore pay attention to changes and developments that may occur in a particular culture and the implications of these developments for their advert campaigns and programmes (Belch and Belch, 2007). As a result, in the Nigerian GSM industry today, many commercials aim rather more at the recipients' emotional attention than at presenting a product's features and advantages. In order to appeal emotionally to the viewer/reader, adverts use different strategies including humour. Humour provides one strategy with which an advertiser may evoke positive feelings. These positive feelings can potentially lead to cognitive processes that motivate the recipient to buy the presented product. Considering the fact that *involvement* during commercial breaks is generally rather low, humour may be an appropriate means to catch the recipient's attention. However, the effectiveness of humour at achieving the desired outcome remains a subject of global debate.

Many authors have asked whether humour in an advert does not deprive the product being advertised of the required attention since the viewer/readers' attention may be carried away by the humour or the humour agent. There is also the debate as to whether the liking of a humour advert or the humour agent is directly transferred or transferrable to the product being advertised. If this is true, to what extent can this be achieved? In Nigeria, the advert agents, such as the popular Saka, Basketmouth, Bovi, I Go Dye, and other comedians are known to receive huge amounts of money for their comedy roles in adverts by MTN, GLO, other GSM service providers, and even other service providers. However, the response of the telecom consumers to this strategy needs to be examined so as to determine whether or not the expenses on humour and comedians are covered from sales through appropriate responses to the desired goals of the adverts. In other words, there is a strong need to assess the effectiveness of humour in achieving advertising goals and by extension,

organizational goals. The aim of this research therefore is to examine the extent to which humorous advertising is capable of influencing the buying behaviour of the consumers of GSM services in Nigeria and to determine whether or not the influence is demographic-specific.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The data collected for this study were primary in nature. They were collected through the use of questionnaire developed specifically for the study with the study objective as the guiding principle. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part contains questions about the demographic variables of the respondents. The second part covers structured questions about the respondents' response to humorous adverts by the GSM service providers, and their perception of humour and the humour agents. A 5-point Likert scale with options ranging from Strongly agreed (5 point) to Strongly disagreed (1 point) was adopted for the questionnaire. The population of the study is the subscriber bases of the two GSM service providers under study, namely MTN and Globacom (GLO). As at December 2013, MTN had 56,890,770 subscribers while GLO had 24,490,650 (NCC, 2014), bringing the population of the study to about 82.3 million. From this population, subscribers in Lagos state were targeted because Lagos has the highest concentration of GSM subscribers. From the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Lagos state, two LGAs, namely Oshodi and Ikeja were selected on purpose. From each of the two LGAs five Wards were selected and from each Ward a sample of 10 respondents were randomly selected, making a total of one hundred (100) respondents that were selected for the study.

The questions contained in the questionnaire have been carefully structured to obtain the kind of responses that will allow the researcher conduct adequate analyses to arrive at relevant results. The questionnaire was pre-tested using twenty of the subscribers who were selected as samples. The data generated were analysed with the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The result showed a strong reliability coefficient of 0.83 ($p < 0.05$) leading to the adoption of the questionnaire with minimal adjustment. Both the descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for the study. The descriptive tools include percentages, frequency tables and charts to measure the demographic and other components of the questionnaire while t-test and correlation coefficient

were used to achieve the objectives of the study. The analyses were carried out through the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Out of the one hundred copies of the questionnaire distributed, 92 (92%) were retrieved and usable. The following analyses are based on the 92 valid copies of the questionnaire. All tables relating to the analyses are presented in appendix A.

The results of the data analysis based on the demographic variables as presented in tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 show that out of the 92 copies of the questionnaire that were returned, 46 (50%) were females while 46 (50%), 54 (58.7%) were married, 24 (26.1%) were single, 5 (5.4%) were divorced, only 3 (3.3%) were separated while 6 (6.5%) were widows. The implication is that majority of the respondents were married with those single coming a distant second. On education, the analysis also shows that 21 (22.8%) of the respondents were WAEC holders, 16 (17.4%) were OND holders, 34 (37%) were B.Sc./HND holders, and only 21 (22.8%) have postgraduate qualifications. Majority of the respondents were graduates while less than 25% were postgraduate degree holders. Table 4 is on age and shows that 10 (10.9%) respondents were aged between 18 and 30, 30 (32.6%) were aged between 31 and 40 years, 41 (44.6%) were aged between 41 and 50, while 11 (12%) were aged 51 years and above. This may be a pointer to the fact that the market is dominated by 'the youth'. This is expected because GSM usage actually has greater patronage by people of this age bracket for their daily living as well as for social interactions.

Empirical analyses in this study indicate that humor in advertising can create liking for a product/service, thus positively influencing consumers' affective feelings towards the brand. This corresponds with the views of many of the previous scholars (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992; Lonidas et al., 2012; Berger, 1987; Spotts et al., 1997; Baines, 2008) in identifying attention creation and subsequent action as one of the benefits of humor in advertising.

Several empirical investigations carried out in the developed economies (USA, China, France etc) conclude that humorous adverts have been used effectively to create affection towards the advertised product/service (Spotts et.al, 1997; Weinberger and Gulas, 1992; Olsson and Larsson,

2005). Results of this study affirm that this is very much the case even in the developing economies like Nigeria.

The analyses also show that there is a positive relationship between humour advert and consumer buying decision. The .844 correlation coefficient on table 4.6 indicates that the relationship between the two is strong and positive, accounting for roughly 84%. The table also shows that the test is significant ($P < 0.05$). This helps to conclude that humour advert has significant positive relationship with consumer buying behaviour. This corroborates the conclusions of Olsson and Larsson (2005) that there is a positive relationship between humour and attracting the attention of the audience or recipient and that humour may be recommended for use in the advertisement of variety of products especially services. The results of this study upholds this view as responses show a possibility of humour advertising affecting the buying behaviour of the consumers of GSM services in Nigeria.

The effect of gender may be particularly explained by apparent differences in humor appreciation. Results as shown in tables 4.2.8, 4.2.9, 4.2.10 indicate that males have different opinion of the usefulness of humor in advertising with a mean of 3.7 (S.D = 1.474) than females with a mean of 4.4 (S.D = 1.192). It therefore follows that women are more likely to be influenced by humor adverts than men. This somewhat contrasts with some of the previous studies. In a review of the literature, Whipple and Courtney (1981) conclude that men appear to enjoy humor more than women do, and women appear to have a greater appreciation for nonsensical humor. They however suggest that this may change as society changes, or as one move from a particular culture to another. Whipple and Courtney (1981) went further to suggest that culture may affect the differences in humor appreciation by gender; a suggestion that this study has validated

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