

Managing Advertising Creativity in a Deregulating Economy

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Abstract

Advertising as an institution impacts on and is subject to the influences of other institutions in society, particularly the economy and politics. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), adopted in Nigeria in July 1986 remains a notable economic policy with profound consequences on the advertising industry. An advertising agency's reputation is, among several considerations, built on its level of creativity, innovativeness and communication effectiveness. This study investigates the influences of Nigeria's SAP, an economic deregulatory policy, on advertising creativity. A content analysis of 18 purposively selected advertising copy produced during three phases of SAP was carried out. Data obtained were analyzed using the analysis of variance (ANOVA), multiple classification analysis (MCA) and Scheffe procedure. Results indicate that the level of creativity in the selected advertisements declined remarkably during the period of economic deregulation than in the preceding or succeeding eras. A significant decline in the use of local creative inputs in advertisements production was much more pronounced during the period of economic deregulation. Appropriate recommendations were made on techniques for managing advertising creativity in a deregulating economy.

Introduction

Advertising agencies, Wright (2000) says, "can rise and fall on reputation built on levels of creativity, innovation and communication effectiveness." Similarly, Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (2000) opine that in advertising, creativity is both a job description and a goal. These views, and several others (Stansfield, 1982; Solaru, 1989; Olorode, 1989; Marshall, 1998; Arens, 1999), underscore the importance attached by advertising scholars and practitioners to the issue of creativity, the focus of this paper.

Aside from being a field of inquiry, a persuasive weapon of influencing consumers' changing habits, modes of living, consumption patterns, and even belief systems, advertising is equally a powerful economic institution within the macroeconomic setting, globally. In awareness of this, Hanson (1978) concludes that advertising reflects the state of the economy of any particular society and will rise and fall with it. Again, Jacobson and Nicosia (1981, p. 21) show that governmental legislation and policies "affect the life of the advertising institution, advertisers, agencies and media." Against this background, this paper examines the influence of Nigeria's economic policy of deregulation

called the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on advertising creativity, along with strategies adopted by practitioners to respond to the challenge.

With a population of nearly 130 million, Nigeria is the most densely populated African nation located in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. October 1, 1960, Nigeria emerged as a politically independent nation and became a federal republic on October 1, 1963. Great Britain was Nigeria's former colonial ruler. The first military coup took place January 15, 1966, and toppled the regime of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first democratically elected leader (prime minister). The nation had experienced many years of military dictatorship, (interspersed with brief periods of democratically elected regimes) until April 29, 1999, when the military handed over power to the democratically elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo, whose second term in office expires in April 2007.

From the period of political independence up to the 1980s, the mixed economic model of development adopted by the nation's leadership implied that the state played dominant roles in the key sectors of the economy. Hence, the government predominantly controlled the electricity, water, postal, telecommunica-

tions, aviation, air transportation and even the broadcast media industries. The economy was one that was heavily regulated.

Another prominent feature of the economy was that it was highly dependent on the importation of foreign goods, western technology and consumption patterns. It remains a monoculturally dependent economy, once on the exportation of cocoa, an agricultural produce, and now on crude oil (fossil fuel) which accounts for more than 90% of the nation's foreign earnings (Philips, 1987; Okigbo, 1989; Onimode, 1989, 1995). Just like many of the developing sub-Saharan nations of Africa, gross economic mismanagement, endemic corruption, huge capital flight, excessive military spending and poor leadership serve as hindrances to Nigeria's economic development. In a report published by *The Punch* (2004, p.46), Transparency International states that most oil-producing nations are prone to corruption: "In these countries, public contracting in the oil sector is plagued by revenues vanishing into the pockets of western oil executives, middlemen and local officials." This aptly describes the Nigerian situation.

It was in response to the above forms of distortions that the military regime of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida on July 1, 1986, adopted a deregulatory form of economic policy called the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), an economic model that seemed to have been prescribed for Africa by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Onimode, 1995).

The key objectives of SAP were the need to restructure and diversify the productive base of Nigeria's economy so as to reduce its heavy dependence on the oil sector and imports, achieve fiscal balance of payments viability, lay the basis for a sustainable non-inflationary or minimally inflationary growth, lessen the dominance of unproductive investments in the public sector/public enterprises (PEs), and improve the efficiency and intensity of the growth potentials of the private sector. Thus, trade liberalization, commercialization and privatization of public enterprises (PEs), and deregulation and currency devaluation were the core components of SAP.

Although SAP had officially been terminated as an economic policy, it however remains the foundation upon which subsequent regimes (military and civilian) in Nigeria continue to build. For example, President Olusegun Obasanjo's economic policy, since inception in 1999, remains geared towards privatization of government investments and economic deregulation. So far, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has earned over N63.5 billion (or US \$432 million) from the sale of its key assets in 27 PEs (Ogbu, 2002). President Obasanjo privatized most of these PEs.

Of particular relevance to the advertising industry, among the objectives of SAP, was the need for private sector participation, especially through direct foreign investments (FDI) in the economy. It should be noted that prior to the adoption of SAP, Nigerians exclusively owned advertising agencies in the private sector, excluding foreigners from participating in the ad industry. This had been made possible through legal provisions as contained in the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972 and subsequent amendments. The decree was otherwise called Indigenization Decree. But three years into the implementation of SAP, April 1, 1989, the Indigenization Decrees were abrogated. A new law, (Nigeria Investment Promotion Decree 16 of 1995) came into effect, categorically allowing foreigners to directly participate in the advertising and other sub-sectors of the economy. Deregulation is an on-going economic policy in Nigeria and continues to impact on the advertising industry, among other sectors.

While some scholars and practitioners welcome the deregulation of the advertising industry in Nigeria (Omojafor, 1991; Odunsi, 1991; Ndiokho, 1994), others have vehemently opposed the policy. Among them, Ndupu (1987) Owoborode (1988) and Shobanjo (1997) contend that the policy of deregulation stifles local creativity and growth of the advertising industry. Even the Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria (AAAN, formerly the Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria [AAPN]), through its then president, Shobanjo (1997, p.7) openly admits "our members have very little chance of competing with wholly owned foreign advertising agencies." Already, Owoborode (1988) and Emokpae (1996) ob-

serve that there is the paucity of indigenous skilled, creative manpower in the ad industry in Nigeria. Although economic deregulation led to the proliferation of advertising agencies in Nigeria, Onabolu (1993, p.25) maintains that due to the identified dearth of local creative expertise, “mediocrity and quack practice,” with attendant negative consequences on ad creativity and ethical standards, have become the norm. To the best of the present scholar’s knowledge, empirical findings on the influence of economic deregulation on ad creativity in Nigeria are far between, a gap which this study attempts to fill.

In the literature, the views in support of economic deregulation and liberalization of the advertising industry in Nigeria clearly point to the free market economic school of thought, while an opposition to it signifies the preference for Keynesianism or neo-keynesianism (Winch, 1969; Amacher and Ulbrich, 1986). While the free market model emphasizes the sanctity of the invisible market forces as key determinants of economic development, Keynesianism calls for planned governmental intervention in economic activities. The philosophy guiding Nigeria’s policy of deregulation, SAP, is that of the free market economic theory, Ndekwu (1987), Onimode (1995), and Philips (1987) contend. The pertinent question remains: What is the influence of economic deregulation on advertising creativity in Nigeria? “This study also hypothesizes that there is no significant difference in the level of creativity of advertisements produced in the periods before, during and after economic deregulation in Nigeria.

Research Methods and Materials

A major study on “The Impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme on the Advertising Industry in Nigeria, (1986-1996)” was concluded in 2003. A section of the study focused on the influence of economic deregulation on advertising creativity. Although the study was for a period of 10 years, data were generated for the period before economic deregulation (Pre-SAP, 1985-1985); era of deregulation (SAP era, July 1986-December 1993); and post-deregulation (After SAP, January 1994-December 1996). This was to enable the researcher to determine the extent to which

changes in advertising creativity are experienced during the study.

In the study, only print media advertisements were examined for creative content. This was because print advertisement copy was more accessible to the researcher than broadcast commercials. Two national newspapers (*Daily Times* and *The Guardian*) were selected, along with news magazines (*This Week*, *Newswatch*, *The President*, *Tell*, and *Times International*) and special interest magazines (*Spear*, *Passions*, *Complete Football*, and *Sportsworld*).

The advertisement categories were limited to both fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) in the beverage category and the financial services sector. Both sectors witnessed a high level of competitiveness and also heavily relied on advertising as a key promotional tool during the era.

Advertisements for the following [food drinks]; (*Bournvita* and *Milo* [soft drinks]; *Coca-Cola* and *7-Up* and financial services (*Union Bank of Nigeria [UBN] Public Limited Company (PLCs)* and *United Bank for Africa [UBA]*) were selected. These brands remained in existence during the study period. Hence, it was possible to consistently monitor the levels of creativity in the sponsored advertisements before, during and after SAP. In all, a total of 18 print media advertisements were selected for the study, using the purposive sampling technique.

One of the instruments adopted for the study was content analysis. This, according to Berelson (1971) and Servein and Tankard (1992) refers to the objective and systematic observation, reading, summarization, coding and interpretation of manifest communication content. The study conceives of creativity in advertising as the creation and dissemination of unique, innovative, imaginative and outstanding messages that sell products, services or ideas. Following a comprehensive review of the literature on key attributes of advertising creativity (Hutchings, 1987; Olaborode, 1989; Ogunro, 1992; Doghudje, 1992; Jewler, 1989), the researcher identified nine distinct advertising creative content categories. These include “attracting attention,” “stimulating interest,” “creating desire,” “offering promise,” “credibility,” “influencing action,” de-

gency,” “simplicity,” and uniqueness.” Based on these categories, the researcher developed a 20-item content code sheet. There were a series of statements on each content category, which solicited responses (Yes or No) on a 2-point nominal scale.

Two coders, who had a minimum of master’s degree in communication studies and were sufficiently knowledgeable in the field of advertising, participated in the coding exercise. Preliminary sessions were held during which adequate information on the purpose of the study and the coding procedures were discussed. During the coding, any identified area of disagreement was sorted out after which coders unanimously arrived at decisions.

The data generated through the coding exercise were relied upon to test the null hypothesis, which states, “there is no significant difference in the level of creativity of advertisements produced in the periods before, during and after economic deregulation in Nigeria.” The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was applied, using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) and Scheffe procedure. ANOVA determined the variance within (SSw) and variance between (SSb) the scores obtained on the levels of advertising creativity before, during and after economic deregulation. MCA compared the scores of the three groups. The Scheffe procedure compared the significant level of the three sub-periods at 0.05 level.

Interviews were held with purposively selected subjects. They include the registrar of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), a member of the Advertising Standard Panel (ASP) of APCON; a past president of AAAN; a former managing director of LINTAS advertising; the executive secretary of the AAAN, and two other advertising agencies’ chief executive officers. The data from the interview subjects, were incorporated into the discussion of findings.

Empirical Results and Discussion

The results of the ANOVA on the level of creativity of the selected advertisements are presented in Table 1 (Appendix 1). In the table, the F ratio of 3.5769 is greater than the table value of .0393 (i.e. F-ratio

> Table value). Therefore, contrary to what the null hypothesis states, empirical results show that there is a significant difference in the level of creativity of advertisements produced in the periods before, during and after economic deregulation.

But at what sub-period(s) did the significant difference occur? To determine this, the data were further subjected to the Scheffe procedure. The results are shown in Table 2 (Appendix 2). It is revealing from the table that the major source of difference in the level of creativity in advertisements occurred in the sub-period during and after economic deregulation. When subjected further to the MCA, the results show that 17.8 percent of the significant changes in the level of creativity in advertising was explained by the adoption of the SAP, the government’s deregulatory economic policy. This implies that factors other than SAP tended to have accounted for other degrees of changes in the level of creativity in advertisements.

While in the coding exercise, it was discovered that the soft drink advertisement copy during SAP was rated low on vital content categories as attracting attention, offering promise, creating desire, and influencing action. The coders remarked that the copy was not culturally relevant. It should be noted that the two soft drink brands (Coca-Cola and 7-Up) are global brands. The advertisers of both brands are known for their “one sight and one sound” global advertising strategies. It is not surprising that the coders agreed that the global messages were not relevant to the local culture.

The interview subjects, particularly Dr. Doghudje (former managing director of LINTAS), Dr. Bel-Molokwu, (APCON’s registrar at the time) and Ekundayo, (executive secretary of AAAN) observed also that the level of creativity of advertisements produced in the era of SAP significantly declined. Doghudje says, “We can only massage our ego by saying that we are doing well As a matter of fact, in terms of creativity, Nigeria advertising agencies are going backward.” In a related development, Bel-Molokwu opines that in Nigeria, “There is a low level of originality with many ads regarded as highly creative being adaptations of, or glimpses from, foreign concepts.” Earlier, scholars (Olaborode, 1989; Onabolu, 1993; Emokpae, 1996)

had identified factors such as insufficiency of skilled manpower, inadequacy of training for agency personnel and dearth of advertising production materials as some of the causes of decline in the level of advertising creativity in the era of SAP, views that are confirmed by this study.

Moreover, results of a study commissioned by the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) show that much after SAP, advertisers are yet to be satisfied with the level of creativity in advertisements produced in Nigeria Awowede (2002, p.20). The report notes that only 36% of the subjects (advertisers) were very satisfied with the level of advertising creativity in Nigeria. The majority (64%) were averagely satisfied. It was reported further that the top four expectations of advertisers from the agencies were creativity (27%), expertise and deadline (23%), transparency (19%), credit facility (4%), and staff training (4%). The present study and others (Olatunji, 2005a), show that advertising agencies are finding it difficult to meet these expectations. This finding tends to provide justification for the call for controlled deregulation of the advertising industry (Shobanjo, 1997; Owoborode, 1988).

But trade liberalization and economic deregulation are not altogether evil. As Dornbusch (1992) argues, the obvious advantages of economic deregulation, particularly for developing societies are: skill acquisition, exposure to foreign training and inflow of sometimes better technology. Advertising agencies and practitioners in Nigeria harvested these gains. Even now, a good number of practitioners have entered into strong technical partnership or affiliation with foreign global agencies (Olatunji, 2005b). The problem with this form of relationship remains that it lowered the level of local originality and creative input into advertisement production, (Onabolu, 1993; Olatunji, 2005a). It also bred a culture of dependency of local agencies on foreign affiliates in matters of advertising creation and production. Leading advertising agencies in Nigeria are increasingly producing their commercials offshore, even as the use of foreign models in local advertisements is becoming a dominant trend. Olatunji (2005b) concludes “global agencies design and impose on their affiliates, commercials and copies that have little or no relevance to the rich cultures of Nigerians.” This re-

duces local ad agencies to media buying agents, as the Promasidor (Nigeria Limited) case shows (*The Punch*, 2002, p. 39; Olatunji (2005b)).

In an article, “Challenges in Nigeria advertising for creatives” Doghudje (2004) draws attention to such problems as scarcity of stimulating briefs, hasty presentation of briefs, underdeveloped film industry and unskilled support services as well as poor reproduction/transmission of advertisements. These and similar other problems identified in this paper call for creative policy and managerial interventions, if the level of creativity in advertisements in Nigeria will need to be improved.

Managerial Implications

In view of the critical significance of creativity to the attainment of both the communication and advertisers’ objectives, it is important that practitioners consciously increase their commitment to the production of award winning creative advertisements and campaigns. This they can do when imbued with the creative spirit which, according to Doghudje (2004, p.21), is “always searching for new (and better) ways of doing things.”

Towards increasing the level of creativity in advertisements in Nigeria, it is suggested that, in addition to the existing awards for creative excellence, the government, advertisers and other non-governmental bodies should institute annual awards and prizes to honor most outstanding advertising agencies and practitioners in terms of creative concepts, messages and campaigns. Local advertising agencies should also be encouraged to participate in global ad creative competitions.

It is also important that the governments of the Nigerian federation, proprietors of ad agencies, ad regulatory bodies, professional associations and institutions of learning redouble their present commitment to addressing the problems of manpower insufficiency, unhealthy business practices, dearth of essential advertisement production materials, and the underdeveloped state of the film industry or other ad support industries. Ad agencies in Nigeria should create more and more advertisements that are relevant and sensi-

tive to the nation's diverse cultures. The heavy reliance on global agencies for idea generation, message design and execution, including the increasing use of foreign models, should be de-emphasized.

Conclusion

Economic deregulation has, undoubtedly, opened up Nigeria's advertising to global competition. This, as observed elsewhere (Olatunji, 2005b) induces participation of global advertising agencies in the local industry. It increases advertising spend, even as new multinational advertisers are becoming key players in the Nigerian market. For instance, while the total advertising billing in Nigeria in 1998 stood at N3.5 billion (or \$23.81million), it increased to N7.0 billion (or \$49million) in 2000 and picked at N9.0 billion (or \$61.23million) in 2001. These have potentials for enhancing growth and development in the advertising industry, particularly in the realm of advertising creativity. This is not to mention the current inflow of advertising technologies, especially the information communication technological devices. But these benefits should be harnessed in such a way that the local advertising industry continues to experience growth and development in terms of creativity and increased local content in advertisement creation and production.

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Appendix 1

Table 1
Analysis of variance on the level of creativity of selected advertisements

Sources of variance	Degree of Freedom (df)	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Squares (MS)	F Ratio Computed	F Table Value	P
Between Groups (SSb)	2	20.6667	10.3333			
Within Groups (SSW)	33	95.3333	2.8889	3.5769	.0393	0.05
Total (SST)	35	116.0000	3.3143			

Source: Olatunji, 2003a

Appendix 2

Table 2
Scheffe method investigating sources of difference in the level of creativity of selected advertisements.

Mean	Groups	Groups		
		2 During SAP	1 Before SAP	3 After SAP
37.16667	Group 2 (During SAP)	–	–	–
37.8333	Group 1 (Before SAP)	–	–	–
39.0000	Group 3 (After SAP)	*	–	–

* Denotes pairs of groups significantly different at 0.05 level. Source: Olatunji, 2003a

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