

Assessing the Effectiveness of Illustrations in Print Media Advertisements of Home Appliances

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ABSTRACT

In this study, attempts were made to ascertain the attention getting power of illustrations in print media advertisements of home appliances, the interrelatedness of the illustrations to the advertisement messages, clarity and the ability to create buying interest. Survey research design method was adopted for the study and questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. In this study it was discovered that, though, the illustrations attract attention to an advertisement they are not too related to the message of the advertisement and very difficult for the audience to decode at the first contact and at the same time does not propel buying interest in the audience. As a result, it was recommended that relevant illustrations should be used or be entirely left out. The illustrations should bring out the benefit of the product as the case may be. Simplicity should also be employed for clarity purposes.

Keywords: Illustrations, Advertising, Print Media, Home Appliances

Introduction

A man was once telling a friend that “anytime I see an advertisement on that Flat Screen Television, I’m always tempted to rush to the market for a grab of it” “Why”, the friend asked? He answered, “because the picture of the flatness of the television interests me most”. “The Picture (illustration)” of the product “interests me most”. This explains the effect of the use of illustration on print media advertisements of home appliances on consumer behaviour towards such product.

The above incidence explains the fact that the value of white space is regulated by what is put into it. The page of a print medium is an empty vessel, until hard work coupled with genius, sets it aflame with reader’s interest. To this fact, “a picture is worth a million words”. Mee-Eun(1997:87) posits that;

...in studying advertising, special emphasis needs to be put on visual images as nonverbal symbols...the visual imagery provided by the media can have a powerful impact on our attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours, since it can contribute meanings and associations entirely apart and of much greater significance.” The images conveyed by advertising have become so sophisticated and persuasive that they now organize our experiences and understanding in a significant way.

Modern advertising, Mee-Eun continues, “depends on images, and images are symbols which can convey meanings as efficiently as verbal symbols can. Like words, visual images also function as symbols that create multi-leveled meanings that have to be decoded to be understood.” Illustrations in print advertising is especially important since, according to Bovee and Arens (1986, p. 47), “most readers of advertisements (1) look at the illustration, (2) read the headline, and (3) read the body copy, in that order.” Illustrations, therefore, carry a great deal of responsibility for the message decoding in an advertisement.

To use illustrations for the sake of “having pictures in the advertisement” is a false premise and folly. Why then, are illustrative embellishments employed at all? What functions are obligatory? What useful selling purpose is achieved? Livingston (1991:67) stressed that;

The several objectives of illustrations in advertising are as follows:

1. To visualize the product, that an advertisement may become a show case, a counter, a store shelf.
2. To picturize the story of a service performed its pleasures, its convenience, its profit, and its utilitarian advantages.
3. To wet a desire for the product, either through a reflection of service or through the beauty of appearance.
4. To implant, in the public mind, a consciousness that one product of a class is superior to all others. And here again “atmosphere” is the chief ingredient.
5. To “humanize” the inanimate. Certain advertised articles seem to demand this artificial stimulus.
6. To demonstrate an argument or a service visually where words might fail, when unaccompanied by illustrations or by diagrams.
7. To create that impelling desire on the part of the prospect to read the advertising message, which is inherent in all art. Art embellishment is to advertising what stage scenery and costumes are to drama.
8. To familiarize people with packages, containers, the physical appearance of the thing advertised that there may be no consequent confusion.
9. To put the prospect in a more receptive mental frame of mind, due, in parts at least, to skillful play upon emotions.
10. To dramatize the undramatic...
11. To make mechanical problems easier of understanding.
12. To provide a “safety catch” for the careless, indifferent eye, not inclined to read text.

The question it stands to ask is: are all of the above objectives of illustrations achievable in the use of illustration in Print Media advertisement for home appliances? In other words, how effective is the use of illustrations in print media advert for home appliances?

Home appliances of which comprises Television, Refrigerators, Gas Cooker, Electric Kettle, Pressing Iron, etc. are from different manufacturers which include Binatone, LG, Samsung, Sony, among others. This study is not after the competition between these manufacturers but on the effectiveness of their illustrative elements employed to increasing sales. As a result, a relevant illustration on such advert can help to attract attention. “A photograph showing the product in action, with happy, animated people, can be very effective. Strong imagery is the best attention getter. A picture is truly worth 1,000 words when it comes to getting attention. Adverts that feature large visuals (60%-70% of the ad is the photo) score the highest for stopping power.” (Professional Advertising: How design works to bring your customers)

Statement of the Problem

Extensive use of illustrations in print advertisements is not a recent phenomenon. Even 20 years ago, over 75 percent of all print advertisements had illustrations covering at least half of the available space (Baker in Julie, Richard 1983) and advertising researchers were predicting that prints ads would eventually be all illustrative elements (Plisken 1963). Although, illustrations are used extensively to convey information about the brand, to show its users and uses, and/or to create an image or personality for the brand (Runyon 1979), only recently has the illustration component of print advertisements become an object of research interest. This is because the sureness of its efficiency needs to be ascertained.

Livingston (1991) relayed the objectives of illustrations above. From the foregoing, the area of concern that called for research is the effectiveness of illustration. But for the purpose of this study, home appliances are used as a case study. In other words, our problem of interest, however, is assessing the effectiveness of illustrations in print media advertising of Home appliances. So, how true are the stated objectives of illustrations laid by Livingston?

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain the attention drawing power of illustrations in print media adverts of home appliances.
2. To ascertain if the illustrations convey the advert message.
3. To ascertain how easy the target audience can understand the illustrations.
4. To know the propelling power of the illustrations to the buying tendencies towards home appliances.

Research Questions

1. Can illustrations draw the attention of the audience to the advert message of home appliances?
2. Does the illustration used in print advertisement convey the advert message or the intention of the advert message?
3. How simplified are the illustrations of print advert of home appliances that the audiences could easily understand them without tasking their intelligence?
4. Does the illustrations have the power or command the buying interest of home appliances?

Significance of Study

Advertisers of home appliances seek the attention of the audience towards their products and services through the explanation of benefits accruable from the use of their products. In order to convince its potential consumers of these benefits and how to get this value added benefits, the use of illustrations are employed.

This study will help to ascertain the effectiveness of illustrations in print media advertisement and as a result would be useful to advertisers and agencies as they will know the impact of illustrations on advert messages and how better to use illustrations to achieve a more effective print adverts. On the part of graphic editors and copy writers, it will help equip them on better ways to design and write their copies effectively.

In the academic field of study, it would stand as a literature for further research studies.

Literature Review

The major purpose of advertisement is to interpret the want-satisfying attributes of the product in terms of the wants and needs of the consumer. In other words, at the base of every advert is an idea that says something important to the reader. However, an illustration helps the advert copy and the headline to convey the essential ideas. For example, Kleppner states that:

The purpose of an illustration is to convey an idea. The only ideas eligible for use in an advertisement are those that help to express the message the advertisement is trying to convey. (Kleppner, 1996:1)

Kleppner argues that headlines and illustrations frequently act together and mutually reinforce each other in telling the story of the advertisement. In another sense, illustrations are irrelevant when not complementing the headline and the ad copy.

Kleppner's postulation is reinforced when Sandage and Fryburger (1997:135) point out that headline and the illustration work in concert to filter out the best prospects for the product and promise the audience a further benefit. They stated that:

Without an illustration in a print ad, the full burden of attracting the prospects attention and getting them to read the copy rests on the headline. In modern advertising such ads are scarce. In most cases the illustration is the dominant element and the headline serves as a caption to add meaning to the picture. In any event, picture, headline and body text should be interrelated parts and should work together to communicate a unified message.

According to Sandage and Fryburger, it is not enough that the illustration merely attract the attention of the reader. It must also be relevant to the product and relevant to the potential consumers (Sandage and Fryburger 1997: 342). No wonder, Santanders Business Banking in their Director's briefing stated that if you have nothing to illustrate, do not include illustrations just for the sake of it.

In another popular advertising textbook, Wright and Warner emphasized the importance of illustrations:

A well conceived illustration, however, does more than just increase initial reader attention. It amplifies and speeds up each step in the communication process; it helps shape the tone or atmosphere of the entire advertisement, and it conveys abstract concepts...which are next

to impossible to deliver quickly and clearly with the written words
(Wright and Warner1999:327)

In addressing the evaluation of advertising illustrations, Wright and Warner (1999:335) argued that:

The advertiser, however, cannot measure the value of an illustration in the abstract; he must consider it only as specific visual contribution to his message... The first criterion to apply to an illustration for an advertisement, then, is relevancy... To say that the first qualification for an advertising illustration is relevant simply means that it should have a traceable and significant connection with the idea the advertisement attempts to deliver.

Illustrations have different purposes: they attract attention; demonstrate the product or its effect; emphasize certain features of the product; clarify or illustrate headline and body copy ideas; transmit a visual image of the product, package, or brand name; arouse interest in the advertisement or the product; and stimulate desire.

Perhaps the first purpose of the major illustration in an advertisement is gaining attention. Beyond that, however, it should help to create interest in the product advertised and in the advertisement. Thus, the artwork must be appropriate to the sales objective of the advertisement, and not an end in itself. (Mandell in Thomas, 2000 p. 2)

Dunn (1998:339) also echoes the importance of the illustration in the advertisement. He argues that:

We expect the illustrations in an advertisement to contribute to its effectiveness in one or more following ways: (1) communicate a relevant idea quickly and effectively; (2) attract the attention of the desired audience; (3) interest the audience in the headlines and copy; (4) communicate an idea that might be impossible or even offensive to say in words; and (5) help make the advertisement more believable.

Nworgu (2010:106) argues “each style of illustration tries to present advert message ideas in the most effective and creative manner”. Nworgu stresses that the idea is to tell the audience that this is the product to buy. This method is most effective if the product in question is bought because of its beautiful design. In this type of illustration, according to him, the attraction is the physical look of the product not how it works. Therefore, it is necessary to illustrate product in its natural setting. This tends to add both atmosphere and interest for the product itself. For example, illustrating a flat screen television set in a sitting room can add to the appreciation of the product.

In summary, then, the illustration is a very important features of most advertisements. Its role is usually integrated with that of the headline in attracting audiences attention and demonstrating the product’s benefits.

Effective illustrations are those which best convey the potential idea of the advertisement. It should meet certain criteria. One of these is simplicity. In other words, the best illustrations are the ones which convey a single idea and which make it possible for the reader to grasp that idea almost immediately (Dunn 1998:340). Effective illustrations must also be relevant, they must have a “traceable and significant connection with the idea the advertisement attempts to deliver” (Wright and Warner 1999:335). In a similar vein, illustrations must have meaning for the reader or he will not understand the intended idea and the effort will be wasted (Sandage and Fryburger 1997:340).

Finally, the illustrations must convey the desired image associated with the product. This is essential because consumers usually buy more than just the product, they buy the image of the product as well (Wright and Warner, p. 334-335). Also, “the quality of the illustration will reflect on your product or service.... A poor quality illustration will make your product look cheap and portray poor quality...” (Santanders Business banking: Director’s Briefing-writing and advertisement).

Therefore, an effective illustration is one which conveys a simple and relevant image of the product to the consumer. The degree of effectiveness is the extent to which the reader grasps the intended idea. This exploratory and experimental study sought to measure the effectiveness of illustrations in print media advertisement of home appliances.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamic theories started with the works of Sigmund Freud (1856-1936), who was born in the Czech Republic but later moved to Germany, with his family, when he was young, and then later to Vienna, where he spent the most part of his life. Freud, a trained neurologist, wanted to find explanations for the severally varied and numerous psychological conditions prevalent in his time which seem to lack physical cause, and was influenced by the work of the scientist Von Helmholtz and secondly, by steam power, which was the predominant technology of his time (Freud's Psycho Dynamic Theory, 2006).

Psychodynamic theory is derived from psychoanalysis as propounded by Sigmund Freud and is based on a number of key analytical concepts. These include Freud's ideas about psychosexual development, defense mechanisms, free association as the method of recall, and the therapeutic techniques of interpretation, including that of transference, defenses and dreams. It is based on the premise that human behaviour and relationships are shaped by conscious and unconscious influences.

Tenets of Freud's Psychodynamic Theory

1. Primarily concerned with internal psychological processes
2. Importance of early childhood experiences
3. Existence of unconscious motivation
4. Existence of ego (rationality) and superego (morality), and
5. Existence of defence mechanisms

According to Folarin in Wogu (2008, p. 178),

The theory holds that for a persuasive message to be considered effective, it must succeed in altering the psychological functioning of the recipient(s) in such a way that he or she or they will respond overtly with models of behaviour desired or suggested by the communicator.

In line with this thinking, Davinson (1964) quoted in Wogu (2008,p.178) asserts that

The communicator can influence attitudes or behaviour only when he is able to convey information that may be utilized by members of his audience to satisfy their wants or needs.

The relevancy of this theory to the study lies on the objectives of illustration of which Livingston posits that one of the objectives of illustration is "to put the prospect in a more receptive mental frame of mind, due, in part at least, to skilful play upon emotions". This is achieved through the objective "...to picturize the story of a service performed its pleasures, its convenience, its profit, and its utilitarian advantages" (Livingston, 1991:27).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The survey research design was employed. Survey was considered useful for this study because it is important in obtaining information on the psychographic behaviour of the population. (Sobowale in Jenevive and Eserinune, 2011), said, "The survey technique is the most commonly used research method of behavioural scientists". Surveys do more than mere uncover data; they synthesize and interpret data and point to implications and inter-relationships (Jenevive and Eserinune, 2011). The place of survey in the collection of data from the public need not be over stretched because none can get a useful data on the behavioural change of public through any other means except the one that samples their opinion and reactions. The questionnaire is the instrument used for gathering data for this study.

Population of Study

The study populations were men and women who have source(s) of income to purchase home appliances and reside in Nsukka Urban and University community, and can afford the home appliances.

Sample Size

The sample size is 100 persons and the accidental sampling technique was adopted. The reliability of the research design is ascertained by experts in mass communication department of University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

DATA ANALYSIS / FINDINGS

Research Question One

Can illustrations draw the attention of the audience to the advert message of home appliances?

Table 1

Respondents Opinion	Frequency	Percentage Distribution
Yes	78	78.8%
No	21	21.2%
Total	99	100%

The above table measures the attention grabbing power of illustrations to print adverts. This shows that illustration has the attention pulling power notwithstanding the 21.2% of the respondents that negates the beliefs of 78.8% that illustrations have attention grabbing power.

Research Question Two

Does simplified illustration of print advert of home appliances make the audiences easily understand them without tasking their intelligence?

Table 2

Respondents Opinion	Frequency	Percentage Distribution
Yes	59	59.6%
No	40	40.4%
Total	99	100%

Table two analyses the responses to the simplicity of illustrations for easy understanding. According to the table 59.6% of the respondents claims that the illustrations are easily understood by them while the remaining 40.4% disputes that claim.

Research Question Three

Does the illustration used in Home Appliances print advertisement convey the advert message (headline or the intention of the advert message)?

Table 3

Respondents Opinion	Frequency	Percentage Distribution
Yes	61	61.6%
No	38	38.4%
Total	99	100%

The above table states that 61.6% maintains that the illustrations is in consonance with the body content (words) of the advert message while 38.4% says that they are in discord.

Research Question Four

Do the illustrations have the power and the command buying interest towards home appliance?

Table 4

Respondents Opinion	Frequency	Percentage Distribution
Yes	50	50.5%
No	49	49.5%
Total	99	100%

50.5% of the respondents in the above table claims to be moved by the illustration as a component of the advert to buying the product. On the other hand, 49.5% rejects that claim as they stand to the point that the illustrations have no effect on them.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the foregoing analysis, there is no much difference in figures between the two opposing views apart from the attention grabbing power of the illustration. The question stands to ask is why this?

The analysis above stipulates that the use of illustrations in print media advert of home appliances has a creative attention getting power which concurs with the belief of Mandell of which he says that "the first purpose of the major illustration in an advertisement is gaining attention" as well as the view of kleppner that "without an illustration in a print ad, the full burden of attracting the prospects attention and getting them to read the copy rests on the headline".

Deducible from data collected, there is problem with simplicity of the illustrations used in print media advert of home appliances. Not minding the fact that the percentage of its easiness in understanding surpasses the opposing views. Dunn holds that an illustration should “communicate a relevant idea quickly and effectively...” An effective illustration requires no second time because there might be no second chance, so, first impression matters. Dunn maintains that an illustration should communicate quickly and effectively. But with varying percentage of the research question of illustration simplicity, the difference shows that much work need to be done to simplifying an illustrative material on a print advert. This is so because while flipping through the pages of dailies little time and attention is given to advertisements. Same is applicable to the billboard adverts. In explaining the clarity of illustrations when compared with words, Wright and Warner (1966) posits that “it helps shape the tone or atmosphere of the entire advertisement, and it conveys abstract concepts... which are next to impossible to deliver quickly and clearly with the written...”

Taking cue from the relevancy of illustration as made by Wright and Warner in their words they posit that “the first criterion to apply to an illustration for an advertisement, then, is relevancy... To say that the first qualification for an advertising illustration is relevancy simply means that it should have a traceable and significant connection with the idea the advertisement attempts to deliver.” The analysis from collected data relays that there is connection between the used illustration and the message of the advert. This agrees with the stand of Wright and Warner(1966:54).

In supporting the relevancy of illustrations, Sandage and Fryburger (1997) explain that “in any event, picture, headline and body text should be interrelated parts and should work together to communicate a unified message.” In the same line Mandell (2006) maintains: ‘thus, the artwork must be appropriate to the sales objective of the advertisement, and not an end in itself.’ Therefore, the findings prove that the illustrations in the print advertisement of home appliances are interrelated with the message of the advertisement.

Furthermore, the analysis of the fourth research question shows the audiences psyches are not well played on through the use of illustrations. Though, the illustrations might have attracted attention, so easy to understand and correlates with the message of the advert but does not have so much pulling power to the buying tendencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having surveyed the publics’ behaviour towards the use of illustrations in print advert of home appliances, the researcher hereby recommends the following

1. Knowing that media audiences are impatient, all creativity should be employed to make sure that the illustration is so clear and easy to understand at the first contact. Note that there might be no second chance.
2. Only an illustration that is interrelated holistically to the message of the advert of home appliance should be used because “A bad illustration can ruin an advertisement.” So, “If in doubt, leave it out.”
3. The illustrations used should be promising to propel the immediate interest in seeking the product in the market. Remember that the advert is a waste if the essence is not achieved of which most times is to sell the product.
4. Benefits of a product should be explained through the use of illustrations because customers want a need-satisfying product.

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