

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON ADVERTISING:
EXPERIENCES OF LIMCA NIGERIAN BOTTLING COMPANY.**

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Abstract

Advertising has been implicated as having significant correlation with culture. In other words, there are empirical proofs that within most adverts are subliminal messages with divergent cultural nuances. Most times, big organisations have employed these cultural shades in their promotional efforts to reach out to, and equally win the confidence of their target audience. And at other times, when these cultural contexts are employed wrongly, organisations have suffered immensely for such mistakes. This paper critically discourses the significance of culture as an essential part of advertising campaigns of organisations. The researchers made use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in analysing a number of adverts of Limca Bottling Company in Nigeria. They critically looked at the extent Limca has employed different cultural shades through advertising in advancing their products in Nigeria. Findings from the study showed that culture remains a fundamental part of every advertising effort – it to a certain degree influences advertising. The research also discovered that when culture is properly fused with advertising, it can significantly promote the acceptability or aversion for a brand. In addition, the researchers also revealed that Limca Nigerian bottling company employs significant part of the Nigerian cultural nuances in their advertising efforts. It is against this backdrop that the authors of this work strongly recommend that brands and organisations should as matter of importance strategically engage culture in their marketing and advertising endeavors, as this will always give them greater opportunity of being strategically positioned in whatever local or global market they find themselves.

Keywords: Advertising, culture, Limca Bottling Company, Global markets

Introduction

Advertising remains one of the institutions that has come a long way. According to Ukonu (2013, p.234) ‘advertising is deemed as old as such institutions like: the school and church.’ This to a certain degree clearly explains the reason the church and school from the beginning have always employed advertising tools to maintain their relevance in the social sphere. Advertising is principally a sales tool (Khan & Warraich). Organisations are known to depend on it to grow, get their products across to a large number of people and most significantly, persuade customers to purchase their products (Khan & Warraich, Qader, & Hamza, Othman, Anwer, Anwer, Gardi, & Khasrow, 2022) Advertising also remains very relevant across cultures and divides, put differently, advertising effects is appreciated among different cultural climes.

Sometimes, it increasingly imperative to examine why such large Multinational organisations like Coca Cola; Limca, McDonalds and other global brands of diverse businesses pay so much attention to cultural distinctions while carrying out their advertising efforts in any society they find themselves. The reason of course is not far from the fact that there is an influence that culture leaves on advertising and in the same manner, advertising on culture (Torti, 2021, p.30). Focusing on the experiences of Limca Bottling Company, this paper takes careful and critical look on the extent that culture influences organisation’s advertising experiences. The paper employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in interpreting some of the Limca adverts considered in the study and through these analysis draw conclusions.

Understanding the Concept of Advertising: A Quick Evaluation

Advertising is an ancient business. Even though there are no mathematical records, history has it that the ancient Egyptians carved out bill boards from stories (Uwakwe, 2010, p.120). Similarly, the ancient Romans advertised on walls and the ancient Greek employed town criers to advertise their products and services – all these indicated the presence of advertising at these early periods. Archeological studies has over time demonstrated that the Greek and Egyptian tablets were of solicitations to stay at particular inns for the night or announcements of goods for sales. So also were the walls of ancient cities of Greek and Rome, which advertised goods such as food and wine (Rodman, 2018, p.8).

In America, the earliest advertising efforts were published in newspapers and they were targeted at narrow, elite audience (Uwakwe, 2010, p.88). *The Boston Newspapers*, one of the colonial newspapers carried adverts in 1704. Most of the adverts were particularly simple announcements of what a store had for sale and they were directed mainly at local merchants from manufacturers (trade advertising or business-to-business advertising). At that time, there was little point in promoting particular goods. Consumers judged the quality of goods they bought by inspecting them, taking into account the reputation of the individual merchant.

However, the history of Nigerian advertising is a recounting of the changing nature of commerce, politics and the media. Although early Nigerian advertising efforts was often thought of as unsophisticated (Olatunji, 2010, p.9), Ogbodo 1990 cited in Okigbo and Okigbo, (2020) opine that “they were highly effective and most essentially, met the needs of that time” Okigbo et.al also explained that ‘sellers of goods and services found them very useful in making the availability of their goods and services known; similarly buyers and users employed them to know where the products and services they wanted actually existed’ Ekwelie (1980) also recounts how children would sing recognizable ditties to announce availability of goods, such as fried bean ball or pap – such characterized the early advertising efforts in Nigeria. In relating the history of advertising in Nigeria, Nworisa (2013) recount the role played by the British marketing giants, United African company (UAC) and the Lever Brothers in the formation of the first agency, West African Publicity (WAP), which was later renamed

LINTAS (Lever International Advertising Services). Nworisa (2013) continues:

There were four broad waves or phases of advertising in Nigeria. They include the first wave – (1928 – 1970, pioneer advertising). Second wave – 1979 – 1989, indigenization era). Third wave – 1990 – 1999, expansion and affiliation) and the Fourth/current wave – 2003 – 2013)

Interestingly, in recent time, contemporary advertising in Nigeria, the United States of America and other climes is characterized by new advances in communication technologies, increased understanding of consumer behavior, and new innovation techniques of machine learning. Most prominent and phenomenal of these developments is the continuing changes in social media marketing, where the most popular channels and platforms are also the most popular and powerful advertising operators in the global context (Okigbo & Okigbo, 2020, p.12). Today, the social media are a domineering societal presence and bringing about considerable changes in all manner of interpersonal communication with far reaching consequences in almost every aspect of life in modern society - from product marketing and branding, to politics and international diplomacy.

According to Dominick (2002) cited in Uwakwe (2010), advertising fulfils four basic function in every society. He explains;

Advertising serves as marketing function serves a marketing function by helping companies that provide products or services sell their products or services. It is educational since people learn about new things, new products new services, or improvement in existing ones. Advertising plays an economic role as it allows competitors to enter business arena. Competitors also encourage product improvement that can lower prices. In addition advertising plays social function by vividly displaying the materials and cultural opportunities available in free enterprise society. It helps increase productivity and standard of living.

Okigbo and Okigbo (2020) underscore the power of advertising vis-à-vis its intersection with culture this way “advertising is a living communication organ in the sense that it reflects extent human culture is interpreted” It is in this way that it reflects and refracts people’s way of life and being”

Advertising and Culture: A Co-penetration of Opposites

Virtually everything we do is directly or indirectly affected by culture. This applies to practically every area of life given that most things we do as social beings is somewhat subsumed in our culture (Omenugha & Okunna, 2012, p.123). In other words, all areas of human life – be it personal relationships to conducting business abroad is inextricably linked to culture. Studies have over time demonstrated that when humans interact within their native values, beliefs and customs, culture clearly acts as a framework of understanding. However, when interrelating with different cultures, this framework no longer applies due to cross cultural dissimilarities or differences (Aeron & Angelo, 2018; Sharon & Aeron, 2020). Cross cultural awareness aims particularly at helping to minimise the negative impacts of cross cultural differences through building common frameworks for people from different cultures to interact within. In business, cross cultural solutions are applied in such areas as Human Relations, Team building, foreign trade and negotiations (Aeron & Angelo, 2018). Furthermore, cross cultural solutions are also critical to advertising (Ofer, 2023; Adler & Aycan, 2018). Services and products are most times marketed in local climes, when these products and services cross international borders, the same domestic advertising abroad will in most cases become ineffective (Leigh, 2008, p.10). It might be instructive to note that the essence of every successful advertising effort is to convince people that a particular product is meant for them – thus, by purchasing such products, people are encouraged through advertising campaigns that they will receive benefits; whether it be lifestyle, convenience or financial benefit. However, when an advertising campaign is taken abroad, different values and perceptions as to what enhances status or gives convenience exist (Pierce, 2016). It is therefore critical to note that while carrying out any cross cultural advertising campaign that an understanding of a particular

culture is required (Aeron & Angelo, 2018). This therefore explains why Bishop (2023) argues that “culture affects everything, including advertising. When advertising professionals don't take this seriously, things can go very wrong” There are numerous areas that culture crosses with advertising - areas like: language, colours, numbers, images etc.

Aeron and Angelo (2018) aptly underscores the implications of culture and advertising this way:

It may seem somewhat obvious to state that language is the key to effective cross cultural advertising, however, the fact that organisations and companies persistently fail to check linguistic implications of company or product names and slogans demonstrates that such issues are not being properly addressed.

The advertising world is full of the intersections between culture and ad-campaigns that either failed or was successful as a result of poor or very good management of such campaign. For example, in 1983 when Ford introduced one of her very successful automobile; ‘Pinto’ that sold well in other countries into Brazilian market, they noticed that the product failed, irrespective of the heavy ad campaign that they employed to sell pinto. After Ford and their advertising research team carried out sales research, they discovered that Pinto failed to sell in Brazil because of the name. The word “Pinto” in Brazil was translated as “tiny genitals” and Brazilians did not want to be seen driving a car meaning “tiny genitals”. What does this imply? It demonstrates the importance of analyzing every language in order to check for cultural suitability while carrying advertising campaigns.

Again, the slogan employed by the computer game manufacturer, EA Sports, “Challenge Everything” raised complaints of disapproval in religious and hierarchical societies, where harmonious relationships through the values of respect and non-conformation existed (Pierce, 2016, p.123). Likewise, understanding the way in which other cultures communicate allows the advertising campaign to speak to the potential customer in a way they understand and appreciate products and services (Yuni, 2016). For example, communication styles can be explicit or implicit. An explicit communicator, e.g. (USA) assumes that the listener is unaware of the background information or related issues to the topic of discussion and therefore provides it themselves (William, 2006), while implicit communicators like Japan assumes that the listener is well informed on the subject and minimises information relayed on the premise that the listener will understand the implications. Based on the above contrast, an explicit communicator would find an implicit communication style vague, whereas an implicit communicator would find an explicit communication style exaggerated, therefore in cross-cultural advertising, these nuances, which are culture-based are brought to the fore for not only cross cultural communication, but understanding.

In the same manner, colours, numbers, images in advertising, as simple as they appear, need to be inspected under cross-cultural microscope (William, 2006. p.136), this is so because colours, symbols, images do not all translate well across cultures. In some cultures, there are lucky colours, for example, red is seen as lucky colour in China and black is interpreted as unlucky colour in Japan. However, the same black colour in Africa is not seen as unlucky, but strength, fertility, beauty, productivity etc. That explains the reason “black is viewed as beautiful in Africa” Whereas it is common and acceptable to see pictures of women in bikinis on advertising posters on the street of London, such images would cause outrage in the Middle East (Aljenaibi, 2011, p.12). From the foregoing therefore, it is clear that the correlation between culture and advertising is significant and inextricable.

Exploring the Relationship between Advertising and Culture: What relationship what connection?

The relationship between advertising and culture is intertwined as consumers may not patronize products that are not in tandem with their pre-existing attitudes. Remember, culture may be defined as beliefs, objects and activities that help characterize a group of people. These cultural characteristics therefore hold certain meanings to people who are part of such culture. Advertisers hence draw from these meanings and reflect them in their advertisements to make them more appealing (Readers Digest, 2014, p.1). In the same manner,

Roland (2008) avers ‘that culture is reflected in advertisements through its images. Its advertising affects our perceptions and values so much that what we have in the shape of culture is simply an advertisement induced version of culture; today, advertisement no longer gives us the chance to develop our authentic self, rather, all of us try to be like one of the persons we see in advertisements (Schlegelmich, & Rudolf, 2018). This further explains the reason Schlegelmich, & Rudolf, (2018) aver that “When considering an advertising marketing campaign for your business, you understanding the impact of culture and race upon the consumer attitudes of products and services is the first step to creating the perfect advertisement for any business” In fact, advertisement is one aspect of communication that is influenced by culture as much as the programing or stories that they are enveloped within.

Likewise, because businesses in many sectors of the economy are continually becoming global, added with the fact that technology continues to make the world smaller, offering new business opportunities to local companies, it becomes increasingly important that organistions strategize to enter new markets and be successful. In order to do this, these companies must have a good advertising strategy. On the other hand, without learning about the cultures of clients and customers in new markets, companies might be doomed. The implication of the above is that a good advertisement in one country may be offensive in another market because of cultural differences – that explains the place of culture in advertising as an important one (Robbe, 2020, p.12).

Similarly, culture act as a basis and a framework for people to understand one another. In different cultures, there are different value systems, languages, and religions. Advertising messages must reflect these attributes of attitudes, social organisation, aesthetics and the political life of the market. These cultural values are the roots of a consumer understating of consumption (Robbe, 2020, p.1). Advertising is passed on through language, be it words or image, all of which must reflect the culture of whom it is directed. Culture is a weapon that causes the rise or fall of a business brand. Hence, advertising personalities must adopt the appropriate approaches to advertise their products and services, knowing that culture influences what people consume, as advertisement influence choice (Robbe, 2020).

Limca Bottling Company Nigeria: Exploring the Intersection within Culture and Advertising

The use of culture by Limca bottling company in both local and global marketing is pronounced (Aram, 2013). Limca is a brand that specializes in production of sugar-liquid drinks. Although the Limca bottling company has its local bottling plants in Nigeria, it is also a brand that is globally accepted (Nwabueze, 2019, p.12). One of the reasons that Limca brand or product has remained successful both in Nigeria and the global market is its incorporation of culture into it marketing, advertising and sales strategies – the organisation incorporates culture, especially in its advertisements. They also have the predilection for portraying elements of culture in their adverts (Ogbonna, 2019. p.2). Therefore, this creates and promotes positive values amongst the local population. A particular significant brand strategy that Limca adopts is portraying its drink as culturally compatible with local values, beliefs and norms. Therefore, the company operates an advertising strategy in relation to culture (Tannert, 2014). Furthermore, Tannert (2014) also argues that Limca implements strategic elements of culture, including holidays, cultural dress codes, languages, and aesthetics. The company usually captures images to deepen its public perceptions effectively, thus making the brand more culturally acceptable. Similarly, through ads, Limca is usually noted to capture its target audience, therefore, boosting brand loyalty and commitment. From the above, it is evident that the central strategy of Limca is advertisements, they make very good use of these adverts laced in the nuances and values of Nigerian culture to capture the Nigerian market.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Limca Advertisements and Cultural standards of the Nigerian Society.

As simple and modest as most of the Limca advertising campaigns are, they have embedded within them, overt and/or covert cultural contexts of the society they do business in. They fuse the cultural nuances of their host country into their adverts, producing a sense of acceptability and tolerability.

Fig.1



The advert above titled “*The perfect combo*” captures a delicacy savoured in Nigeria, especially the western part of Nigeria. A close look at the Limca advert will reveal a bottle of limca drink, a tin of Titus Sardine fish and a very popular bread known as “*Agege bread*”- which is usually relished in Western part of Nigeria, especially Lagos. Agege is a town in Lagos, and the name *Agege bread* is somewhat related to the town of Agege. Also in in the advert is a tin of Titus sardine, which is another delicacy relished in Nigeria. When this advertising appeal is critically and contextually analysed, it paints a picture of the Limca being well-suited to such local delicacies like “*Agege bread*” and Titus fish; which are Nigerian local delicacies. In other words, this particular advert highlighted lucidly, the local delicacies in Nigeria – these delicacies are no doubt part of the society’s food and are culturally accepted, especially in Lagos and cities surrounding it. Lagos apparently, is a very large market for the company and placing side-by-side in Limca’s advert, delicacies that are savoured in Lagos, and by extension, Nigeria would mean an advert that culturally compatible. Joy Telu and Segi (2023) captures the link that exist between a peoples culture and their food this way: “Each culture has a staple food around which the people’s beliefs, rituals, and traditions are built, and as the environmental conditions including economic changes, the beliefs and rituals are modified” Advertisers have over the years employed these cultural contexts in producing their adverts for different cultural climes (Nwabueze, Ejezie, & Nweke 2012, p.293).

Furthermore, a closer view and interpretation of the adverts will also reveal that they were particularly produced during the Ramadan period, a time that most Nigerian Muslims, especially the Southern Muslims, observe their Ramadan fast, which begin and ends with the appearance of the crescent moon. It is likewise important to note that people’s food as well as their religion is an integral part of their culture (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012;) in other words, the advertisers clearly understood that if they employ the use of the local food of Nigerians and their religion which are part of the native’s culture, it possibly would end up influencing customers, especially in the Ramadan period who ordinarily would presumes that “with *Agege bread* and a tin of sardine (Their local food), Limca becomes a product that must be purchased and sarvoured with these local food during a religious festival like Ramadan.

Fig. 2. Limca advert captured in a tropical African forest – a typical Nigeria scene



Here is an intersection of culture, environment and advertising. The advert at this point displays one of the Nigerians symbols of fruitfulness. Cashew a tropical legume-like fruit is highlighted in this advert and this somewhat blends with the Limca product in the advert. The tropical rain forest of Nigeria is also highlighted here, demonstrating a combination the country’s agricultural accomplishment and fruitfulness. The advert carefully, yet clearly embeds all these cultural nuances within their products. This might therefore provide answer to the reason why the brand has survived over the years and continued to provide refreshment to Nigerians.

Fig:3 Limca advert in India a sharp contrast to demonstrate cross cultural influenec of adverts



A close analysis of the advert in figure 3 above reveals a striking difference between the adverts that were produced in Nigeria Limca bottling company and that of India. It might be important to note that the dress code of the two persons used in the advert in figure 3 show a striking dissimilarity with the adverts that were produced in Nigeria. In other words, embedded subliminally within the advert in figure 3 is the people dress code; a submission that underscore the relationship between dress codes, which is a part of the peoples’ culture (Gupta & Santhosh, 2017. p.56). Guptha et al (2017) further argues that “organisations are well aware that strategies employed in local markets might not be suitable for the international market and advertising”. In this adverts, the dress code of Indians is reflected in the Indian advert just like the Nigerian local food “*agege bread*” is lucidly highlighted in demonstrating the “Nigerianess” associated with the product. What the above assertion presupposes is that the culture to a very large extent influences either covertly, or covertly, advertising campaigns of organisations (Neelankavil, 2015; Robbe, 2020). Figure 3 above also throws light to the fact that language, which is an integral part of every culture, is essentially employed in advertising campaigns. Evidently, Limca bottling company does not take this fact for granted as they strategically employs the tool of language in advert found in figure 3. The text, “*Issch Biasanchi Chade Hele Taatze*” sends a message across the audience in the local language of the country (India) where Limca

bottling company does their business. Ghani (2014) gives emphasis to the view espoused above, when he wrote “values, language, beliefs, aesthetics, and religion are enduring part of a culture that guide individuals in specific situations. Having knowledge of these beliefs, values, aesthetics, language etc. and incorporating them into advertising is a worthwhile endeavour for businesses, as it influences consumption levels and situations (Ghani, 2014, p.12). In other words, it might be correct to infer that culture influences organisational advertising at all times.

Fig. 4. Limca advert reflecting Nigerian colour Green White and Green



Yeu, Leong, Tong, Hang, Tang & Bashawir, Subhan, Muhammad. (2012) notes that “the high patronage McDonald received in China is associated with its red and gold theme colours. Red in China culture symbolizes good fortunes and joy, while gold colour symbolises prosperity and wealth. Likewise, Pepsi received much patronage in Brazil following the use of green and gold colours which symbolized the country’s high gold reserve and extensive amazon rainforest (Gtahr, Gertner & Guthery, 2015, p.23). In the same manner, it might be insightful to aver that Limca’s understanding of the significance of colour as an important part of culture, would have informed the company’s use of the colour, “green white green” (the colour of Nigerian flag), a colour that indicates the green vegetation and agricultural strength of Nigeria. Furthermore, white colour, which signifies strength, power and authority is also highlighted in the advert. The importance of colour in cultural interpretations and contexts cannot be overemphasized (Kommonen 2014). Furthermore Stewart (2018) captures the significance of colours as a part of cultures this way:

Colors carry deep meanings with them in every culture. Western, Far Eastern, Middle Eastern, Indian and African cultures have stark differences in the symbolism of colors within their cultures. For instance, in some cultures, white represents innocence, but in others, it can represent death.

Advertisers clearly understand the importance of colour in different climes and they heavily employ it to their advantage in their promotions of products (Seher, Arshad Ellahi, Shahid 2012). This explain why Limca employs these cultural objects in their adverts of their products.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, very important facts have emerged – first that culture remains a fundamental part of every advertising effort – it somewhat influences advertising. However, when these cultural nuances are wrongly applied, it negatively affect advertising efforts (Lee, 2019). Interestingly, research has also shown that when culture is properly fused with advertising, it can significantly promote the acceptability or aversion for a brand (Ocansey & Enahoro, 2014). From the critical discourse analysis employed in this study, it is evident that Limca Nigerian bottling company appears to have good understanding of the relationship that

exists between culture and advertising and robustly employed culture as a tool of promoting their brands vis-à-vis their adverts.

Recommendation

It is against the background of this study that the following recommendations are made:

- Brands and organisations should strategically engage culture in their marketing and advertising endeavors. Strategically using culture, especially by making it a determinant factor in advertising effort enhances its chance of greater success and achievement of marketing goals.
- Visualising components of culture is essential in marketing and advertising. Brands should as well endeavour to visualize culture; as this has been empirically proven to create greater connection between the consumer and the brands.
- Important elements of culture such as language, belief system and aesthetics should be incorporated into brands; marketing strategies as this would largely increases the potentials for advertising success.

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