

Living Today at the Expense of Tomorrow: Analysis of the Influence of Green Advertising on Youth Behaviour towards Clean Environment

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Abstract

Environmental sustainability has been a global issue and this has made some companies to join the train of green advertising. The indiscriminate dumping of refuse on the streets and road leads to the assumption that Nigerians (especially the youth) have not come to terms with the urgent need to achieve environmental sustainability through clean environment. This paper looks at the influence of green advertising on youth behaviour towards clean environment. Using the survey method, 291 respondents were selected and sampled in three South-South states (i.e. Edo, Delta and Rivers States). There was also a content analysis of green advertising messages on selected disposable products. Findings indicate that youths are aware of the need for clean environment, but this has not positively affected their behaviour. Personal contact with green advertising messages on products ranked higher than the mass media as sources of green advertising for the respondents. The media served more as a reinforcement tool in internalizing green advertising messages. Table water products were more likely than canned fruit drinks to contain green advertising messages. However, message illegibility hampered effective consumption of green advertising messages. The paper recommends that green advertising messages should be visible and have pictorial representation for non-literate consumers of disposable products.

Keywords: *.Green Advertising .Youth .Behaviour .Clean Environment*

INTRODUCTION

The environment is one of the subjects that has attracted rising global attention beginning from the close of the 20th century. Cox (2008) says that the environment has been the focus of some of the most memorable media spectacles of the last 25 years. There has been a relentless bid to find sustainable solutions to environmental problems threatening human existence. Ironically, a lot of the problems stem from human activities, which foul and degrade the biosphere, the interdependent ecosystem that supports life.

World leaders have had various meetings and summits on climate change, global warming and other related global environmental issues. Some of the international events were the recent series of UN-organized conferences in Copenhagen, Denmark (2009), Cancun, Mexico (2010), Durban, South Africa, (2011), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012), Lima, Peru (2014), Paris, France (2014) Marrakech.

Other global and regional meeting have also turned attention to various worldwide environmental problems such as Tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, pollutions, and indiscriminate solid wastes disposal. Indiscriminate dumping of solid wastes like canned drinks, bottles, food packs and many others are rife on our streets and roads. It is the most visible, perhaps, one of the most burdensome in Nigeria, because the environmental hazards they cause are immediate.

Almost every field of human endeavour is touched by environmental degradation, and the fields are each seeking solutions. Advertising practitioners feel particularly affected because

most advertisers are big companies fouling the environment, and who have been accused of enticing journalists not to portray the activities of (especially carbon-based) companies as dangerous to the human environment (Ukonu, Akpan, & Anorue, 2012; Sandell and Blakemore, 2006). Green advertising is one of the ways advertising is contributing in the efforts to find solutions to environmental problems. The use of green advertising has become imperative as it addresses the relationship between a product and the biophysical environment. Green advertising promotes good living, clean and healthy environment, and has also become a strategy to enhance corporate image and social responsibility (Banerjee, Gulus & Lyer, 1995).

Global companies like Coca-Cola, Toyota, IBM, and manufacturer of fruit drinks like 5 Alive (Coca-Cola Nig.), Chivita (Chi Nig.), and others now focus on green advertising and sustainability of the environment. Organisations are now taking interest in green advertising and environmental management through their products and services. In doing this, companies are equally addressing rising consumer concern about the role of industries in fouling the environment. The deteriorating environment has redirected marketing research towards ecological marketing (Chamorro, Rubio & Miranda, 2009). This type of research focuses on how marketing activities impact on the environment and how the environment can be incorporated into the various decisions of corporate marketing. With the increasing number of "green" customers, businesses attempt to understand and respond to external pressures to improve their environmental performance (Chen, 2008).

Green advertising, according to as Nwabueze (2007), explores how advertising principles and practices are employed by organisations on the environment with the aim of ensuring an environmentally sustainable achievement of marketing objectives. Green advertising in this context is a specific type of advertising that is centred on the promotion of factors having to do with the environment. Oftentimes, the companies that use green advertising also use very environmentally friendly operations and products packaging as well. This concept has enabled the re-marketing and packaging of existing products which already or not adhere to environmental guidelines.

Statement of the Problem

Advertising is a popular field both for its uses and misuses. Its role in boosting the national economy and in promoting healthful living has been a lot documented. However, not much has been said about green advertising, especially as a way to show that corporations, contrary to criticisms, are interested in sustainable environmental growth. Inadequate attention to green advertising has affected awareness and interest in the area, and by extension affected how government regulates the environmental impact of industry activities. For instance, no one seems to be interested in explaining why many manufacturers of consumer products such as table/sachet water, canned fruits drinks, canned beer and soft drinks, beverages, etc., do not have environmental message on product packages. Products with messages like 'recyclable', 'reusable', 'keep Nigeria clean', 'dispose properly', 'ozonised' and so on, are hardly conspicuously displayed. There is even little consensus about the identity and nature of green consumers (Peattie, 2001).

It is partly a result of low awareness that consumers continue in their poor attitudes to the disposal of solid waste. The assumption is that the way the public perceive issues about clean environment has been greatly influenced by the level of information at their disposal. Peattie (2001) believes that while green marketing and advertising efforts continue to grow, marketers do not have adequate tools for evaluating the success of green advertising, nor do they have sufficient tools for determining consumers' environmental attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. Nearly everyone has concerns and beliefs regarding the environment, however, environmental attitudes have not been correspondingly ubiquitous (McCarty and Shrum, 2001). This paper therefore attempts to ascertain people's attitudes towards green advertising, and the extent to which companies adhere to green advertising.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study

1. To what extent are youths in the selected states aware of green advertising?

2. How has green advertising influenced youth behaviour towards clean environment in the three selected states?
3. What are the challenges facing green advertising in the selected states?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Green Advertising

The concept of green advertising is not entirely new but the level of awareness is at its infancy. Banerjee, Gulas & Iyer (1995) define green advertising as that which addresses the relationship between a product and the biophysical environment. They explain that it should also have the characteristics of being able to promote a green lifestyle and, at times, enhance a corporate image of social responsibility. Green advertising promotes products, services, ideas or organization's ability to help or reduce environmental harm (Rahim, Zukni, Ahmad & Lyndon, 2012). Rahim, *et al* (2012) submit that environmental awareness is the growth and development of awareness, understanding and consciences toward the biophysical environment and its problems, including human interactions and effects.

Studies on green advertising have categorized it into consumer based and advertising based (Shrum, McCarty and Lowrey, 1995). The former identify characteristics of consumer that differentiate between levels of environmental concern while the latter looks at the viability of advertisement in promoting a healthy and sustainable environment. Interest in green advertising has existed since the 1970s but grew more during the 1990s, when companies began to use claims too environmental compliance to woo customers (Cox, 2008).

Approaches to green advertising has also received research attention. Has been concerned with how audiences react to green advertising, technical issues and environmental sustainability (Dobson cited in Killbourne, 1998). Some scholars talk about the 'shades of green' in discussing approaches to green advertising. The definitions of green has touched on environmental sustainability, management strategy, and consumer concerns. (Carlson, *et al*, 1995; Banerjee 1995; Obermiller 1995; Killbourne 1998; Killbourne *et al*, 1009' Mac Donald & Oates, 2006; Killbourne 2004).

Empirical Studies on Consumer Behaviour towards Environmental Issues

Shrum, MC Carty & Lowrey (1995) have observed that a green consumer is anyone whose purchase behaviour is influenced by environmental concerns. Also, studies have shown varying characteristics possessed by consumers as regards environmental issues. (Banerjee, Gulas & Iyer, 1995; Schlegelmilch, Diamanto Poulous & Bohlen, 1994). Scholars are not agreed on the definition of a green consumer (D' Souza, Taghian, Lamb & Peretaiko, 2007).

Interest in green research began to grow since early 1990's but somewhat limited to studies on green advertising, (Mayer, Scammon & Zilk, 1992; Scammon & Mayer, 1991). Most of the studies focus on the perception or attitude towards green products and corporate green claims (Cox, 2008; Haytko & Matalich, 2008; D'Souza & Taghian, 2005).

A study on green advertising by Chase & Smith (1992) indicated that only 6% of consumers believed that environmental advertising were very believable and 90% indicated that green advertising claims were "somewhat", "not very" or "not at all believable." Kilbourne (1995) support this finding. He notes that the level of credibility of green advertising is relatively low. A decade later, D' Souza & Taghian (2005) found that there is a significant difference in the attitude of green advertising for the high and low involvement consumer.

In the same vein, several studies emphasized the efficiency of cognitive persuasion strategies in green marketing assuming the consumer's high involvement regarding environment issues as a consequence of a growing environmental consciousness (Kinnear, Taylor & Ahmed, 1974; Cope & Winward, 1991; Hopefenback, 1993; Swenson & Wells, 1997; Fauller, 1999)

Edell and Burke (1987) study provide some important factors to consider when one attempts to conduct a study into public perceptions. According to them, consumers form feelings and judgment or cognition when exposed to an advertisement which affects their attitude towards the advert and beliefs about corporate image. They further note that when observing consumer attitudes towards an advertisements, it is important to distinguish between two separate measures, that is the cognitive evaluations or judgments and feelings

experienced from exposure to the advert, feelings are properties of the individual while cognitive evaluations tend to be properties of the advertisement, and consumers are more likely to agree on whether an advert is credible than to agree on how the adverts make them feel.

This notwithstanding, feelings conveyed by an advertisement do not only influence the attitude towards the advertisement but also has sure effect on how the consumer evaluates the brand of the product being advertised. The cognitive orientation of most green advertising or marketing research is based on studies showing a significant influence of environmental knowledge and consciousness in consumer's environmental attitude (Hines, Hungerford & Toner, 1987; Stone, Barnes & Montgony, 1995). Line-yee, (1997) found that even if people have little knowledge about the environment, they would still exhibit strong emotional attachment to environment well-being. There is a significant difference between the environmentally responsible and environmentally apathetic groups on almost all green advertising question (Haytko and Matalich, 2008).

According to Haytko and Matalich (2008, p.28), those who are environmentally responsible exhibit more positive attitude towards green advertising compared to those who were environmentally apathetic.... Also, female consumers were found to exhibit positive attitude towards green advertising and have increased amount of environmentalism. In a related study, Habib, Idrees and Khursheed (2010) found that Pakistani consumers had adequate exposure to print and broadcast media, but television advertising is preferred. They also show in their study that Pakistani consumers are concerned about their environment and intend to buy green products (i.e. products that are environmentally friendly or products that contain information that could lead to positive attitude towards a clean environment). Another study in Malaysia by Rashid (2009) found that a person having some concern for the environment would have stronger preference for purchasing a green product, if he/she is made aware of its environmentally friendly features through the use of eco-label.

According to Frankel (1992), consumer loyalty to products in terms of green advertising has been on the increase. There appears to be a relationship between what the ads say about a product and the level of consumers' loyalty to that product. It is believed that people are easily attracted to advertisement that addresses a particular concern in their mind. Hence, consumers who are concerned about a clean and healthy environment have their taste reinforced by green advertising and this in turn leads to loyalty to the product.

This is also corroborated by Manrai, Lascu & Ryans (1997), which indicated that: green advertising strengthens company image. Chan (2001, p.16) lends his voice to the appraisal as he observes consumers would want to switch to products and services that were advertised as being green; consumers prefer products with eco-labeled packages based on current trends in packaging and labelling to include environmentally friendly messages and/or recycling information. The level of awareness of green advertising is believed to have contributed to varying degrees of behavioural changes towards sustainable environment. Scholars have come to agree that there is a limit to which the influence of green advertising can bring about a positive behavioural change attitude to clean environmental.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Klapper's (1960) Reinforcement theory. Klapper (1960) formulated several generalizations on the effects of mass media. His research findings are as follows: "Mass-media ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effect, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors and influences. These mediating factors render mass-communication as a contributory agent in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions."

The main mediating factors which he considers responsible for the functions and effects of mass communications are: selective exposure i.e., people's tendency to expose themselves to those mass communications which are in agreement with their attitudes and interests; and - selective perception and retention i.e., people's inclination to organize the meaning of mass communication messages into accord with their already existing views (Suresh, 2003). According to Folarin (1998), it is only natural that people seek out information that caters for

their own interests, confirms their belief and boosts their own ego while avoiding those that are contrary to their own predispositions and attacks their life style.

The above assertion underscores the tendencies for media audience to choose a particular programme. Issues about clean environment will only make sense to the media audience because he is interested in what will promote good health which is an area of interest to him. This is why the media audience will want to avoid them. He will also be interested in what people or companies around him are doing that may engender health or environmental hazard. This theory explains why the media audience will want to be exposed to programmes on environment related issues because of its direct impact on his health.

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis and survey research methods were adopted. Content analysis was used to examine the manifest content of green advertising messages as contained on product packaging of systematically selected food and drinks. Content categories and units of analysis were developed as basis for analysing the messages on the product labels. Survey helped to obtain relevant responses from consumers (youths) of these products, in a bid to measure use of advertising messages.

The study focused on consumers (youths) that patronize canned and packaged food and drinks in Delta, Edo and Rivers States. Thus, the other two states in South South Nigeria (Bayelsa and Cross River) were not studied. The selected states were purposively chosen because they are more commercialized and have the highest population in South-South Nigeria. Hence, the population of the three states totalled **13494609** (that is, Delta = 4,492,711; Edo = 3,983,534 and Rivers = 5,018,364)

A sample size of 291 was arrived at using the Australian Calculator and it was divided across the three selected states in South-South Nigeria (i.e. Delta, Edo and Rivers states) according to the strength of their population (see Appendix). The sub-sample sizes of 97, 73 and 121 were administered questionnaire using convenient sampling technique. This is so because the sample frame (youths) are dispersed in the sampled states.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data distribution tables, means and standard deviation were used to analyze and present data. There was a 92% return rate of questionnaire (i.e. Delta State = 95, Edo State = 72 and Rivers State = 191; total returned =268 out of 291). The following are a summary of the findings:

Summary of Findings

1. Respondents are aware of the need for green advertising and environmental cleanliness. Majority of the respondents have tertiary education, and this must have affected awareness of green advertising issues. Personal contact with products and media messages were sources of information on green advertising. However, believability of the messages of green advertising was low (Table Two).
2. Green advertising was not a major causative factor in high awareness of green advertising. However, respondents referred to a reinforcement effect. That is, contact with green advertising tended to reinforce their awareness of, and attention to environmental sustainability. The perception theory gives credence to the above finding about the influence of green advertising messages on consumers' attitude towards clean environment (Table 2 and 3).
3. The hindrances to message (green advertising messages) on products as expressed by the respondents are: message illegibility, poor pictorial representation of messages, writing messages only in English, and many products not containing green advertising messages. Respondents also complained of the inadequacy of disposal points on the streets, roads and vehicles given that a lot of products are consumed outside the home (Table 4).
4. The content analysis was a lot in line with the concerns of consumers. Up to 78% of the products did not contain green messages (i.e. Energy drink, canned drinks and packed snacks); but they contain information like: *keep Nigeria clean, Dispose properly, Dispose appropriately, etc*; 92% of those with such messages had no pictorial illustration; and all

the messages were in English. However, as shown on Table 5 all the fruits drinks and table/sachet water had pictorial representation on the green advertising messages.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have shown that educational level of individuals has direct impact on how they understand messages whether written or pictorial. Exposure to green advertising messages does not mean the same as understanding as it is possible for one to be exposed to what he/she does not understand. Advertising thrives in constant repetition, hence it helps message retention. It is obvious that knowledge influences behaviour and since some disposable products do not contain green advertising messages, they could not influence people's behaviour towards clean environment. Green advertising messages complement the innate attitude in individuals towards having clean environment and the mechanism that enhances practice of green living (i.e. availability of trash cans) is a determining factor for measuring green advertising effectiveness.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Green advertising messages should be visible, and have pictorial representation for non-literate consumers of disposable products.
2. There should be periodic evaluation of advertising messages to help fashion out ways to improve advertisements that can influence positive attitudes from consumers towards a particular way of doing things.
3. There is need for audience research before any advertising campaign is run to ensure message effectiveness in terms of audience understanding.
4. Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria (APCON) should come up with standards of practice, to which all producers of products with disposable packaging must adhere to as regards green advertising.
5. Environmental sustainability is the duty of all and not just that of consumers or producers alone. Hence, government should come up with sanctions to enforce environmental laws.
6. Government should provide enough trash cans to enhance green living as it is the focus of green advertising.
7. Consumers should see it as a duty to properly dispose packs, cans and sachet of water and canned drinks after use to ensure green living which promotes good health for the nation.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Distribution of responses indicating the educational level of respondents

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	9	3%
Secondary	9	3%
Tertiary	268	94%
Total	286	100

Table 2: Distribution of responses for the extent of awareness of green advert in South - South Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	261	91%
No	25	9%
Total	286	100

Table 3: Distribution of responses showing the extent to which green advertising influences respondents' attitude towards clean environment

Are attitudes towards clean environment influenced by Green Advertising messages?	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	St. D
Green advertising messages make one socially responsible	128	112	21	12	13	4.15	1.038
Green advertising messages make one show positive concern about his environment	129	105	28	20	4	4.17	0.964
I adjust my lifestyle towards clean environment each time I am exposed to green advertising	132	112	21	8	13	4.20	1.011
Green advertising messages make one conscious of his environment being clean	154	76	31	11	14	4.21	1.097
Each time I am exposed to green advertising messages I am prompted to take action about my environment	111	122	31	13	9	4.09	0.978
I am always conscious of having a clean environment with or without green advertising messages	134	121	20	5	6	4.30	0.842

Table 4: Distribution of responses indicating the challenges facing green advertising that affect message comprehension and practice

What are the challenges facing Green advertising message and practice in South-South Nigeria?	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	St. D
Green advertising messages are not conspicuous (easily seen) on products	148	82	14	29	13	4.13	1.170
There are not enough trash cans on the street to aid green living practice	132	122	14	1	17	4.23	1.006
Green advertising messages are not contained in all products	166	91	25	2	2	4.46	0.742
Green advertising messages on products are not written in local language for the non-literate population	128	117	20	11	10	4.20	0.975
Green advertising messages on products lack pictorial representation to influence positive action towards clean environment	148	64	27	36	11	4.06	1.210

Table 5: Distribution of data indicating the pictorial representation of green advertising on products

Products	Green ads with picture		Green ads without picture	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Fruit Drinks	5	100%	0	0%
Energy Drinks	3	60%	2	40%
Canned Drinks	4	80%	1	20%
Packed Snacks	4	80%	1	20%
Table and Sachet Water	5	100%	0	0%
Rechargeable Cards	No green message	-	No green message	-

Table 6: Distribution of Population and Sample Size of study

S/N	STATES	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE
1.	Delta State	4,492,711	97
2.	Edo State	3,983,534	73
3.	Rivers State	5,018,364	121
	Total	13,494,609	291

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