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## **EFFECT OF HUMOUR IN ADVERTISING OF ‘YELLOW GOODS’ ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION IN AWKA.**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims at empirically investigating the effect of humour in advertising of ‘Yellow goods’ on consumer purchase decision in Awka. Humour appeal is one of the advertising appeals amongst others. Just as differences exist in individuals, perceptions of humour are different in audiences and consumers. It is worthy to note that what constitutes humour in adverts differ from consumer to consumer and these elements – images, pun or word and surprise – may or may not cause humour depending on the individuals and consumers involved. Hypothesis was formulated to guide the research study. The population of this study comprises consumers of ‘yellow goods’ in Awka metropolis. Survey research design was adopted and a sample size of 323 was statistically determined using the formula for unknown population. Multiple regression was used to test the significance of the hypotheses generated for the study. Pun/Language and surprise were seen to have significant effects on consumer purchase decision of yellow goods while image has no effect. Surprise had the highest effect followed by pun/language.

**Keywords:** humour, advertising, pun/language, image, surprise, yellow goods.

### **1. Introduction**

Advertising has become one of the most important commercial activity in the modern day competitive environment. Most companies spend a large part of their budget to produce and run advertisements for promotions to communicate information about their company and products. Advertising has a psychological impact on consumers and influences their buying decision processes. Electronic and print advertisements use some form of appeal to reach potential customers. The most common advertising appeals include use of fear, humour, rational, sex or band wagon propaganda (Wimbush, 2013). Advertisers use appeal to



influence a consumer to purchase a product or support a cause. Appeals speak to an individual's needs, wants or interest.

Influencing the consumers mind is not an easy task (Oglivy and Parker, 2004). The benefit of using humour as stimuli in advertising is appealing to any advertiser and business as they all aim at boosting sales. Humour is used to get the consumers attention without been too direct. In the same vein, the advertising age website (as cited by Root, 2013) stated that humor is a common element in soft-sell advertising. It has been suggested that 24.4% of prime time television advertising in the U.S has some elements of humor (Weinberger and Spott; 2009). Regarding to advertising budget, 10% to 30% of the total expenditure of \$150 billion in the U.S national media is paid for the placement of advertisements having humour content (Spotts, Weinberger and Parsons, 2007). Humour is the tendency of a cognitive experience to provoke laughter and provide amusement. Humour cannot be neglected when designing advert messages. In light of this, this study seeks to know the effect of humour in advertising of 'Yellow goods' on consumer purchase decision in Awka.

Further, graphic designer Kelly Schwarz in (Kokemuller, 2012) opined that a small amount of humour often aids advertising but excessive amount takes away from the brand or product message. He added that humour can lighten the tone in a message or make an advert more memorable, but it should not take away emphasis on benefits or the value proposition for customers. Most times, advertisers in their bid to cause humour take away the intended and original meaning of the message.

The broad objective of this study is to empirically investigate the effect of humour in advertising of 'Yellow goods' on consumer purchase decision in Awka. Specifically, this study seeks:

- a) To ascertain the effect of image on consumer purchase decision.
- b) To examine the relationship between pun/word/language and consumer purchase decision.
- c) To determine the effect of surprise on consumer purchase decision.

Also, this study considers adverts both in the print media (Newspapers and Magazines) and electronic or broadcast media (Television and Radio). Geographically, it focused on consumers in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

This study will serve as a guide to firms and organizations who produce and market ‘Yellow goods’ – low involvement, easily consumed non durable goods e.g. beers, deserts, snacks, alcohol, softdrinks etc. It will help them know the element of humour to employ in advertising their goods. Also, the empirical result that emanates from this study will also add to the body of knowledge in the field of marketing.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Humour**

Humour has been described variously as a word which is hardest to define yet familiar to people across all languages. Kotler, (2010) formulated the basic definitions of humourous advertisement by judging whether the advertisement included puns, satire, jokes, slapstick, irony and incongruities. Humour is a universal phenomenon that is easy to spot and enjoy and to define and analyze. Humour most times is seen as the quality of being amusing or comic; a mood or state of mind. A study based on sampling of television advertisement from four countries (Germany, Korea, Thailand and the United States) determined that humourous advertisements involve the use of incongruity resolution (Shimp, 2010). Humour helps to set a good mood to transfer message and gain acceptance. Thus, many public speakers often open their speech with a joke.

There are various types of humour. Catanescu and Tom (2001) listed and explained

below the types of humour to include:

- a) **Comparison:** Putting two or more elements together to produce a humourous situation.
- b) **Personification:** Attributing human characteristics to animals, plants and objectives.
- c) **Pun:** Using elements of language to create new meanings which result in humour.
- d) **Sarcasm:** These are classified as silliness and includes blatant ironic responses or situations.
- e) **Surprise:** Includes all advertisements where humour arises from unexpected situations.

Catanescus and Toms (2001) research shows that humour is used more in television advertisement than in print advertisements. These findings support the belief that



television is a more effective channel to use humour. Sarcasm is the most popular form of humour used in magazines.

Pricken (2008) provides several more types of humour to include:

- a) **Black Humour:** This is what happens by cancelling out the serious side of socially taboo subjects like death illness, morality or sex and approached playfully.
- b) **Unexpected and Situation Humour:** They do not spring from imagination but are written by a person in perfectly normal everyday situation.
- c) **Blue Humour:** This deals with sexuality and bodily functions.

### **Elements of Humour**

(a) **Image** - An image is an artifact that depicts or records visual perceptions. Such as a two dimensional picture. Images may be two dimensional e.g photography, screen display, as well as a statue or hologram. Pictures to a large extent influence consumers (Tellis, 2005). Animations is closely related to images .Pilling (1997), opined that the field of animation is younger and emerged in the last twenty years. Moreover, most of us find animated cartoons playful and entertaining. Before now, animations was perceived as ‘cartoon for kiddies’ and was made known by Disney and this made animations a no-go-area for advertisers. These days, advertisers now employ the concept of animated images in their advertisement (Power, 2012).

(b) **Language/Pun/Word** - Language is a means of communication. For an advert to be successful and well communicated to the consumers, the key factor is understanding the message (Jabbari and Ravizi, 2012). Linguistic humour is mostly related to sounds and spellings of the words (Delabastita, 1996). The language or choice of word used in an ad message to a large extent influences purchase behaviour of consumer. Pun is also seen as using elements of language to create new meanings (Cantencescu and Tom, 2001). Nowadays, people neologize (coin words) all the time. In their bid to cause humour, advertisers adopt most of these new words in their ads. With the advent of social media (facebook, twitter, instagram, etc) ruling the lives of many Nigerians, advertisers post their ad messages any where, any time, and any day (Ifeanyichukwu, 2016). Humour can help one get to grips with another language even if it just means laughing at ones own mispronunciation.



(c) **Surprise** - Information from two or more sensory modalities can conflict thus, evoking a surprise reaction as well as feelings of amusement, interest, confusion or disappointment (Ludden, Kudrowitz, Schifferstein and Hekkert, 2012). Aristotle also quoted “The secret of humour is surprise”. Alden and Hoyer (2003) found surprise to be a dominant factor in determining the effect of incongruity humour. Surprise is defined as individual experience for encountering unexpected or unusual situations (Wilkinson and Kitginger, 2006). Surprise is also the difference between individuals’ anticipations, expectations and experience. The delight (surprise + humour) makes a positive impact on a person and greatly helps in generating favourable attitude towards exposed message and media (Bergeron and Roy, 2008). Surprise is an effective contributing emotional dimension in an advertisement.

### **Product Type**

The appropriate type of product advertised also determines the effectiveness of humorous advertisements. In a recent study, findings revealed that consumer nondurables including soft drinks, alcohol products, snacks and candies received strong support for being well suited for humour. To create an effective message, advertiser should acknowledge the differences of product in involvement and hedonic value. The Product Colour Matrix is presented to demonstrate the differences between products that need to be considered when developing different message appeals and humour appeal in particular.



The Product Colour Matrix (PCM) classifies product into groups. This is shown in the table 1 below:

Table 1 Product Colour Matrix

| Consumer Objective | Functional/Tools  | Expressive/Toys  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Higher risk        | “White goods” – bigger tools<br>Large appliances<br>Typical cars<br>Business equipment<br>Insurance<br>Auto tires | “Red goods” – Bigger Toys<br>Fashion, clothing and accessories<br>Hair Colouring<br>Motorcycle<br>Sports car<br>Fashion Luggage<br>Jewelry |
| Lower risk         | “Blue goods” – little tools<br>Detergent and household cleaners<br>Motor oil and gas<br>Most non dessert foods.   | “Yellow goods” – Little treats<br>Snack foods<br>Desserts<br>Beer<br>Alcohol<br>Tobacco products   |

Source :Gulas and weinberger (2005). Product Colour Matrix

Gulas findings show that yellow goods are most suited for humour. Therefore, this research work will focus on ‘yellow goods’.

### Purchase Decisions

Some purchase decisions are more important than others, have higher cost or certain higher risks than others too. Therefore the amount of effort differs. Purchase decision produces an image of a consumer evaluating the attributes of a product and selecting the one that solves their identified needs for the least cost (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010). Purchase decision and consumption behaviour differs in various product types and consumers are driven by emotional or situational needs.

Basically there are three types of consumer purchase decision as postulated by Hawkins and Mothersaugh (2010). These are;

- a) **Nominal decision making:** This is also known as habitual decision making (Solomon, 2010). This is a process of making purchase decisions without effort or



with little conscious effort. Nominal decisions are broken into two categories: brand loyal purchases and repeat purchase decision.

In brand loyal purchases, consumers form an emotional attachment to the brand. It is very difficult for a competitor to gain consumers patronage. However, consumers make repeat purchases when they have low involvement in considering different brands. They are repeat purchasers because they are satisfied with the past decision and decide without effort in the next purchase.

b) **Limited decision making:** This involves recognizing a problem with several possible solutions. Consumers make little effort and involvement in considering different solutions (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010).

c) **Extended decision making:** This is likened to the traditional decision making process. Consumers initiate the process when the purchase decision is complex and the consequence is risky.

Based on the literature reviewed so far, we therefore hypothesize as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: Images will have a significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

H<sub>2</sub>: Pun/word/language will have a significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

H<sub>3</sub>: Surprise will have a significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

### 3. Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is survey – which involves asking questions and recording responses of the respondents in order to address the objectives of the study. The population of this study comprises consumers of ‘yellow goods’ in Awka metropolis. The population is unknown because the researcher could not obtain a sampling frame of consumers of ‘yellow goods’ in the area of study. Since the population of this study is unknown, we adopt the formula for unknown population, thus;

$$n = \frac{(Z^2 \times P \times Q)}{e^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

Z = Standard normal deviation





P = Proportion of success or respondents who agree with the variable of interest

Q = proportion of respondents not agreeing with variable of interest (I – P)

e = Error margin.

Therefore, for this study,

Z = 1.96 (see table of normal distribution)

P = 70% or 0.70

Q = 30% or 0.30

e = 5% or 0.05

$$\therefore n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.70 \times 0.30}{0.05^2} = 323.$$

This study made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data used is questionnaire and the secondary source of data includes journals, newspapers, magazines amongst others. Structured questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. The questionnaire comprises two sections, namely section A and B. section A was centered on the personal information of the respondents while section B was based on the constructs of the study. i.e the elements of humour in advertising and consumer purchase decision respectively. A five point likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used in designing the questions. Multiple regressions were used to test the significance of the hypotheses generated for the study. This was adopted because it indicates which independent variable is the best predictor, the second best and so on.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

This section concerns presentation and analysis of the primary data collected in the course of the study and the instrument used for the primary collections is the questionnaire. Out of the 323 copies of questionnaire distributed, 288 (89%) were returned as duly filled and usable questionnaire, thus, giving a captive sample size of 288 which was used in the analysis.





## Hypothesis Testing

In testing the hypothesis, multiple regression was used and statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 22 was also used to analyze the responses.

Table 2 below shows the model summary results which sought to establish the explanatory power of the independent variable (Surprise, Image and Language) for explaining and predicting the dependent variable (Purchase Decision). R, the multiple correlation coefficients, (i.e. the linear correlation between the observed and model predicted values of the dependent variable) showed a value of .796 indicating a strong relationship. R square, the coefficient of determination (i.e the squared value of the multiple correlation coefficients) showed a value of .657 (about 65.7%) of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the model.

**Table 2: Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .796 <sup>a</sup> | .657     | .548              | .78817                     |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SURPRISE, IMAGE, LANGUAGE

b. Dependent variable: Purchase decision

Source: SPSS Ver. 22

Table 3 shows a statistically significant F Statistic of 17.655 (moreover p value <.50). This figure should be compared with the table F value.

**Table 3: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

| Model        | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 32.903         | 3   | 10.968      | 17.655 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual     | 176.425        | 284 | .621        |        |                   |
| Total        | 209.329        | 287 |             |        |                   |



- a. Dependent Variable: Purchase decision
- b. Predictors: (Constant), SURPRISE, IMAGE, LANGUAGE

Source: SPSS Ver. 22

A look at table 4 below, in the standardized coefficients column show that language and surprise had higher values than image with greater t-values as well, moreover they recorded P-values all less than .05 except respectively.

**Table 4: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

| Model        | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized | t      | Sig. |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|--------------|--------|------|
|              | B                           | Std. Error | Beta         |        |      |
| 1 (constant) | .776                        | .501       |              | 1.549  | .123 |
| IMAGE        | -.075                       | .041       | -.101        | -1.857 | .064 |
| LANGUAGE     | .338                        | .140       | .149         | 2.414  | .016 |
| SURPRISE     | .396                        | .086       | .286         | 4.619  | .000 |

- a. Dependent Variable: Purchase decision

Table 4 shows the beta coefficients, which give the contributions of each independent variable to the model while t-values and p-values reveal the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable and the critical ratio and the p-values respectively. In this model, Image (t = -1.857, P = .064 > .05), we reject the alternative hypothesis that image has a significant effect on consumer purchase decision of yellow goods.

Pun/language (t = 2.414, p = .016 < .05), we accept the alternative hypothesis that Pun/Language has a significant effect on consumer purchase decision of yellow goods. Surprise (t = 4.619, p = .000 < .05), we also accept the alternative hypothesis that surprise has a significant effect on consumer purchase decision of yellow goods.

Moreover, from the magnitude of t-values, surprise has the highest effect followed by pun/language. The unstandardized Beta coefficients were calculated to show the importance of a predictor in the model. The Beta value for surprise (.286) also shows that surprise has the strongest relationship with purchase decision while pun/language (.149) shows the next strongest relationship.



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## **5. Conclusions and Implications**

This study examined the elements of humor in advertising of yellow goods on consumer purchase decision. Empirical evidences shows that surprise remains the most significant predictor of purchase decision of yellow goods, followed by pun/Language.

It is necessary to highlight that the results of this study will provide new marketing dynamics to producers and marketers of yellow goods which will contribute a major share in revenue of these firms. Also, the findings will help advertisers in their operations and strategic plan of marketing and also provide them with indicators for maximum utilization of resources. Based on this background, the following recommendations are made:

Yellow goods marketers should recognize the strategic importance of understanding consumer overall purchase decisions while watching/reading advertisement messages. Therefore, yellow goods advertisers must adopt a customized strategy to influence purchase decisions of consumers which will in turn lead to enhanced sales of yellow goods.

Yellow goods advertisers should offer various attractive features to better appeal to consumers. Also, they should use new coined words and pronounce words correctly with good English, accent and fluency so as to create a distinctive place in the minds of consumers.

Also, they should enhance the surprise element in their advert messages as they most times reveal the hidden benefits of products and marvel consumers who least expect to watch/read these messages.

## **6. Limitations of the Study**

The use of consumers in Awka only limits the generalization of the result. Further research should include more respondents that could represent a geopolitical zone, state or a larger area. The sample size should also be made appropriately larger. This study used only three variables to analyze consumers purchase decision of yellow goods. No doubt, there are other variables that could affect consumer purchase decision of yellows goods. Further studies could focus on other variables or consider more variables.



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