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## “Mirror Or Shaper ?” - An Exploration Of The Interaction Between Advertising And Culture In Selected Television Commercials

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### Introduction

In the late 80's, when Indomie Noodles was introduced into the cuisine of Nigerians, the meal was known to only a handful of elites, who had encountered noodles from foreign travels, or foray into Chinese restaurants. Now, noodles have become regular meals; not only for children, but adults as well. With the increase in the number of mothers who work long hours, and the cultural shift from the phenomenon of stay-at-home mums (or housewives, as they used to be called) to full-time working mothers, there has been a move towards quick meals or fast foods. This period also saw the growth of eateries and fast food joints like Mr. Biggs, Tantalizer, Chicken Republic, Mama Cass, and so on.

While some may argue that eating fast foods and visiting eateries are not part of the Nigerian culture, the reality however is that culture is both dynamic and enduring. While some cultures die, new ones emerge. As Kotler (1999:3) intones, “there is not only change; but, the rate of change is accelerating” To him ,today's economic landscape is being shaped by two powerful forces technology and globalization. Through the media, the consumer may feel the pressure to act in certain ways or adopt a new way of doing things. Culture is said to be learned, because it is not present in man at birth, or transferred through the genes. Culture is not rigid. It changes, as society faces new problems and opportunities. As Kotler and Armstrong (1997) pointed out, marketers are always trying to spot cultural shifts, in order to discover new products that might be wanted. For example, the cultural shift in America, towards a greater concern about health and fitness, has created a huge industry for exercise equipment, clothing and other health/fitness services. This shift has also influenced food choices, and encouraged preference for more natural foods with low-fat, low- cholesterol, and low- sugar. In Nigeria, more people

are taking to daily exercises and concerns are increasing about food consumption choices.

This is just one example, of how change has come into the life of the average Nigerian consumer. These changes are usually heralded by the media and because of its ubiquitous nature. Advertising is always the first to get there. This paper looks at the interaction between culture and advertising, from the Nigerian perspective. The paper, through survey, examines consumers' perception of some selected Television commercials, and analyses the extent to which they are a reflection of the culture of South- West Nigeria, where the study was conducted.

As far back as 1964, Marshall McLuhan, a media visionary, postulated that: The historians and archaeologists will discover that the advertisements, of our times, are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made, of its entire range of activities.

A close look at the contents, of most advertisements; suggests that what advertising does is to scrutinize a society, select symbols with which its members can associate, the language which they can understand and values which they can emulate. As Ayeni (1999) emphasized, advertising, which ignores the taste and culture of its target audience is about to fail. Similarly, Fowles (1996:15) was of the view that when one examines the themes and styles of a culture, one can better understand the values of the people. In other words, a people's value system and culture are of the same antecedent. The question then arises, what cultural elements are reflected in the Television Commercials (TVCs) under study; and, to what extent are these adverts a reflection of what obtains in the society, they emanated from?

## Literature Review

Without doubt, cultural changes have implications for advertising message development, and advertising campaigns. Looking at the Nigerian environment, there are changes in the roles of women; and youthfulness is celebrated. In fact, a high percentage of commercials, on television, are targeted at young people, children and women. Marketing executives must be alert to these changes, so that they can adjust their plans to be in step with, or even a little ahead of, the times. Any attempt, to ignore these cultural changes, will amount to living in a fool's paradise and wastage of marketing resources. To take a cue from Ayeni (1999:25), advertising strategies may backfire across cultures if local beliefs and practices are ignored. He further remarked that, although the concept of a pure culture is becoming elusive, the

many sub-cultures and traits within a particular environment should not be ignored. He advised that the best way to do this is to base advertising campaigns on sound marketing research, so that messages can go right to the heart of the target audience. He drew attention to the importance of language as a cultural factor, with emphasis on the uses of intonations. To him, a false or unfamiliar intonation may be offensive to the listeners, or the message may even go unheard.

### **Why is culture important to consumer behaviour?**

Culture is a major consideration in advertising message development, because, like De Muij (1994:142) disclosed, "sometimes buyers buy based on cultural systems of opinions, values and norms which are not explicit and may seem strange to the outsider". Categorically, Moschis (1985:895) identifies the influence of culture as immeasurable. An observation by Anwuluorah (1995) held that: "to understand groups of consumers, one must study the conditions which led to their existence, the past, the present and the image they have of the future". The advertiser has to understand not only the culture, but also the sub-culture of the people. The sub-cultures, may be based on race, national origin, religion, language or geographic location. It is important to understand these sub-cultures because differences among them may influence responses to both the products and advertising messages.

When advertising fails to acknowledge the culture of its target market, it is wasteful and prone to failure. remark that a culture's core value defines how products are used, whether products are seen negatively or positively (Bovee et al, 1995:93). Cultural influences have broad effects on buying behaviour (Wells et al, 1995; Pride and Ferrel, 1985, De- Muij 2005). Thus, culture permeates man's daily life. It determines what he wears, what he eats, where he resides and where he travels to. "It broadly affects how we buy and use products, and it influences our satisfaction from them" (Pride and Ferrel, 1985). Talking about how culture affects what we buy, Riley cited by Brassington and Pettit (1997:112), argued that eating out, is not a major part of the United Kingdom's social culture. So, does this mean there is no market for eateries in the U.K.? It is also often said that relaxation through outdoor activities (like picnicking and travelling) is not a core Nigerian social value.

### **Does this, then, mean tourism cannot thrive in Nigeria?**

Culture establishes for a group of people certain boundaries. These boundaries are also referred to as norms. The norms of a people are offshoots of their values. Culture influences when purchases can be made. Some years back, many shops in South-Western Nigeria did not open for business on Sundays.

Nowadays, there is an increase in the number of shops that open on Sundays. In short, culture can influence buyer behaviour in ways that are obvious (for instance the types of food that people buy), and in more subtle ways (responses to certain colours and images used in ads).

Furthermore, behavioural patterns can result from a culture's core values, especially the pervasive and enduring values. (Bovee et al, 1995:92). Most cultures are unreceptive to ads that are deliberately violent, offensive and shocking. Brassington and Pettit (1997:114) gave some examples; 'Harley Davidson, A completely irresponsible thing to do' (Ad for a motorbike: the model bought the bike rather than take his sick father to the hospital). Another example is the ad for Great Frog jewellery: "If you don't like it, fuck off". A local example is the ad for Ignis kitchen appliances with the headline: "Your wife is having an affair with IGNIS". It is not only the language that can be offensive; the symbol can create controversies too. Thus, it is important for the marketer to understand a culture because: a market can only exist within a culture, that is prepared to allow it, and support it, It has to act within boundaries set by society and culture (Brassington and Pettitt 1997:114).

In a country like Nigeria with diversities in language, climate, food habits, dance, song, cultural norms, art, religion, social practices and so on, the advertiser will need to be versed in the prevalent patterns of life of the people. This is important in view of the claim by Ayeni (1999:25) that the cultural state of the recipient of an advertising message will affect his understanding and readiness to act on the message. However, one good development, through technology, is that consumers now have access to other cultures, through such culture agents as cable television and the internet. Ayeni (1999) advised that foreign cultures should not be seen as an invasion, but rather, as a system of globalization. To him, the important thing is for both the advertiser and the consumer to be culturally conditioned, to understand their native culture and its influences.

### **Empirical Studies**

Findings from empirical research support the postulation that, advertisements that reflect local cultural values are indeed more persuasive than those that ignore them (Gregory and Munch, 1997, Taylor, Miracle and Wilson, 1997). This view was echoed by Scott Bedbury, a seasoned American ad creative and marketing expert who learned his lesson the hard way with some failed campaigns e.g. Nike. Bedbury (2001: 105) submitted that effective brand building requires making relevant and compelling connections, to deeply rooted human emotions, or profound cultural forces. Brands that

establish themselves within the larger incredibly complex fabric, that we call life, will set themselves apart in a more meaningful way. Citing examples of blunders, that were committed when slogans were translated directly into other languages, Ries and Ries (2004 : 150) observed that care should be taken when translating English slogans into other languages. Sometimes the result can be disastrous. For example, “come alive with the Pepsi generation”, translated literally into Chinese comes out as “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave”. The marketer should remember that culture adapts to changing needs and evolving systems. Culture changes over time and constantly too. It changes at different rates and in different ways. While discussing reasons for these changes, Trenholm (1994:319) identified economic conditions, new technologies and cultural contacts as major vectors of change. Cultural values as the categories which people use when they are evaluating something, such as an experience they have just had, a consumer good on offer, or a communication of any sort (Richards et al. 2002). Cultural values, are transmitted through institutions such as family, religion, school, court (and nowadays) mass media. As a medium of mass communication, advertising has proven to be influential with regards to the portrayal and transmission of cultural values (Cheng, 1994). For instance, “the US culture of the 1990s differs from what it was in the 1890s; or, even from what it was in the 1980s, in some respects ( Bovee et al,1995). While upholding this view point, Lamb et al (1998) observed that “cultural norms will continue to evolve because of our need for social patterns that solve problems”. This was reiterated by Fowles (1996) who observed that advertising is usually one of the first media tools to showcase evolving culture. In other words, advertising blazes the trail by making use of new concepts that are emerging in a culture.

These scholars (Bovee et.al. 1995,Lamb et .al.1998,Fowles, 1996), however, warned that cultural changes are neither universal nor automatic. Therefore, a change in the Nigerian culture may not be transferred to other cultures across the continent, or even within West Africa. Trenholm (1994) advised that the best way to prepare for intercultural contacts is not to learn the dos and don'ts of a culture. Rather, to her, just as soon as one has learned a rule about how to communicate with the natives, one will discover that the rule has become obsolete. Hence, she recommends that one should become sensitive to the kind of differences that occur between cultures as well as develop the ability to learn by observing. To her, “in their rush to sell a product, advertisers don't even recognise the more important effect of their collective arts, in selling lifestyle(s) and social values.”

It is however necessary to state that advertisers don't often set out to teach consumers values and attitudes, but they end up doing so. Wright (1983:4) observed that advertising touches the consumer in four significant ways; "through its persuasive abilities; by its truthfulness or untruthfulness; through its tastelessness; and by its cultural impact on our value and lifestyle".

There are different opinions on these claims about the influence of advertising on culture. Cross (1996) pointed out that advertising, in its omnipresent public words and images, plays a determining role in creating culture. She however admitted that "most arguments, particularly those from the advertising industry itself, take the opposite approach; ads are mere mirrors reflecting culture, not creating it". In a different opinion, Luna and Gupta (2001:45) argue that the interaction between culture and advertising is mutual. For example, in cross-cultural marketing communication, advertising must be adapted to meet the society's cultural norms and values, as a message is interpreted differently, depending on the recipient's cultural background. In addition, some products are sensitive to cultural values and can be connected with different associations. Many scholars, as cited by Tai (2004), have advocated that "advertising messages should be congruent with the values of local culture" (Zhang and Gelb, 1996; Boddewyn et. al., 1986; Belk et. al., 1985; Harris, 1984; Hornik, 1980; Buzzell, 1968). This same view was upheld by Pollay and Gallagher (1990) who said, "cultural values are the core of advertising messages; and typical advertisements endorse, glamourize and reinforce cultural values". This explains why Coca-cola, McDonalds and other global brands such as Nike, all have "global concepts, but local adaptations", as there are very few truly global brands (de Mooij, 1994:18, de Mooij, 2005:19).

### Theoretical Perspective

The Agenda Setting Theories are of direct relevance to the debate on whether advertising is a mirror of the society, or a shaper of opinions and attitudes. Many new theories arose out of the propagation that "the media worked with other variables to bring about change, either at the individual level, or at the group or societal level" (Folarin, 2005:69). Why set agenda? Normal Felsenthal, cited in Trenholm (1994:284), expressed the view that neither an individual nor a society can give equal attention to everything. We are continually required to determine which problems get our immediate attention, and which problems are simply endured, or even ignored altogether.

Hence, the media help the consumers to coordinate the process of product selection. The term "agenda setting" was first used by McCombs and Shaw to refer to "the process by which issues' hierarchies are mediated to the public,



through election campaign". Folarin (2005:69) concurred that the agenda setting theory promotes the concept that "the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important, at a given time in a given society". This theory was initially associated with news and political issues. It is however of relevance in advertising campaigns. The celebrated Television Commercial for MTN, "Mama na boy" is a case study. For weeks, this advert formed the theme of many discussions both in the print media and the air waves. In fact, the controversy behind the commercial made it to gain more popularity, such that when it was taken off air, consumers (who did not see it when it ran) started looking for it online. Trenholm (1994:284) observed that "agenda setting is a way in which the media decides for us, through the gatekeepers' selection, the issues they feel are most worthy of coverage and wide attention".

In this view, gatekeepers are identified as the selection agent. Burgoon and Ruffner (1978:349-350) see gatekeepers as "individuals within the media, who make decisions about what is communicated and how it is done". They may not, of a necessity, be the originators of the message content; they may just be "creative evaluator," and less of "censors". The term is now extended to apply to "all individuals who exercise some degree of information control in the society". Thus, the media, through the input of the gatekeepers, order the consumers priorities. Not only do they tell consumers what to think about, according to Trenholm (1994:283) "the media tell us what not to think about; and the media affect the way we think". This assertion echoes the view of McCombs and Shaw (1972:97) that agenda setting may indeed end up being the most important effect of mass communication. To them, it is the unique effect of the media to mentally order the consumers' world. Hence, they uphold the notion that: "The mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about".

According to Wilson (1995:13), an agenda is "a list, plan, outline or the like, of things to be considered. Giving an insight into how the media set this agenda, he explained further, the media, over time, by featuring some issues less prominently and still some issues not at all, give us a sense of what issues are important, or in research literature; sense of the issue's salience.

In agreement, Souski (2002) warned that although when simplified, the agenda-setting theory explores the intertwining relationship between the mass media's prioritizing of the news and shaping of public opinion, it also must take into consideration, the public's ability to dictate what essential news stories are. In what appears to be a departure from the main stream, Dominick submitted (1990:535) that: "Although it can be assumed that the media's agenda influence

the public agenda, it is also possible that the public's agenda actually influence that of the media."

This notion becomes relevant when one considers the fact that the available studies "do not address the issues of causation" (Burgoon and Ruffner 1978). More to the point, these authors drew audiences' attention to the fact that... "Although most of us would like to believe, that we receive the most relevant and pertinent information that filters through the various media channels, it is highly unlikely we do". A look, at the likely "causations" of what is salient, will include the communicator's preferences and prejudices; in other words, his personal bias. Other factors are: an appraisal of information disseminated by media competitors, personal convictions of management, editorial opinion of what the audience needs and wants, values held by professional colleagues, and personal idiosyncrasies (Burgoon and Ruffner 1978:350). Souski concluded that, consumers need not to see agenda setting only in terms of inclusion of certain issues, but equally in terms of exclusion of what the media deems as non-issues, "as the media have the power to stress new issues by discussing them on television or in print, they also have the power of exclusion".

Anderson (1997) observed that agenda-setting studies have "tended to ignore the whole process through which social issues are taken up by the media". He submits that the process is a complex one and many different factors are involved. Dominick (1990) put it on record that the occurrence of agenda-setting is aided by factors such as "a person's interest in the information, his age, as well as his educational and political involvement". Grossberg (1998:348) reiterated that factors such as individual differences, media difference, issues differences and salience, constrain the media's power to set agenda. However, a general summary of the foregoing would be Watson and Hill's (1993:110) observation that through the agenda-setting models'

Audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue, or not, from the emphasis the mass media place upon it.

The concern of this research, however, is in the area of agenda setting through advertising, since as Umuerrri (1995:48) said:

"The media has a great potential to colour, distort an entire cultural worldview, by presenting images of the world suited to the agenda of the media."

This portends that adverts have great potentials to coat or distort consumers' entire cultural worldview. Thus, consumers can learn new tastes and imbibe new values as well. In essence, if advertising is capable of setting agenda, this study wishes to establish advertising's influence on the cultural agenda.

### **Cultural Norms Theory**

Closely related to the agenda-setting theory is the cultural norms theory. McQuail (1984:34) asked, "Are the media changing something, preventing something or reinforcing and reaffirming something?" These questions become relevant when one reviews the numerous claims about the influence of the media. Macnamara (1996:20) lamented that:

"The media are also blamed for almost every social ill known in our society. The media have been said to cause crime, violence, teenage delinquency, promiscuity, racial strife, and drug taking. But, in fact, little proof or evidence is available to substantiate these claims."

In a similar quest for answers, Burgoon and Ruffner (1978:336) ask:

"Do these mass media serve to educate us about reality, or do they serve as substitutes for reality; and for utilizing our own cognitive and interpretive abilities?"

Answers to such queries have been supplied through research. Joseph Klapper conducted a landmark study of the media, in 1960 titled "The effect of Mass Communication". It destroyed many of the myths concerning the power of the media and shattered widely held assumptions. Klapper concluded, from extensive research, that "persuasive communication was more often associated with conversion". Klapper's basic assertion was:

"Mass communication was more likely to reinforce existing opinion than to change them, and more likely to produce modifications than conversions."

Not everyone agrees with Klapper; but, without doubt, he has pointed out the danger in the generalisation, about the media's power to change opinion or create new opinions. Modern mass communication studies, as well as research findings, in psychology, reveal that "consumers draw their opinions from a range of sources ;and media are but one influence" (Macnamara, 1996:20).

Several authors share McQuail's view, that the mass media, through selective presentations and the emphasis of certain themes, create impressions among their audiences. The belief is that common cultural norms, concerning the

emphasized topics, are structured or defined in specific ways. (Macnamara 1996, Burgoon and Ruffner 1978, Folarin, 2005)

What McQuail is attempting to prove, in essence, is that: Because human behaviour is in large part governed by cultural norms, with respects to given topics or situations, the mass media indirectly influence that conduct. (Burgoon and Ruffner 1978:342).

In other words, the mass media have the potential to influence behaviour by reinforcing patterns, which had hitherto been in existence. Moreover, they are also capable of creating new convictions, or modifying existing norms. Thus, the mass media breed “cultural-level expectations that form the basis of cultural predictions” Anderson (1997:26-27), as if intoning this view, admitted that “There is a good deal of evidence, to suggest that media contribute in various ways to shaping particular cultural climate”.

In a more specific analysis, Trenholm (1994) informed that when one observes what characters do in TV dramas, one internalizes behavioural norms. To her, By viewing films, we learn about our culture's history; and by reading magazines, newspapers and books, we confront questions of value. Media personalities act as role models for us (p. 275).

The attraction, this theory holds for this study lies in the fact that it emphasises the point that, the consumer's mind is not an uncultivated ground, on which the advertiser can plant whatever he wills. So, advertising messages are built around ideas, ideals and beliefs that already exist in the consumer's mind. Hence, the advertiser needs to identify the existing patterns in a culture, and then create adverts that are in consonance with the consumers' beliefs and convictions.

### **Methods**

This study was an ex-post facto research that made use of survey, content analysis and focus group discussions. The universe for the study was made up of literate Nigerians from age 18 and above, with a minimum of secondary school leaving certificate, and were drawn from Lagos and Ibadan. The two cities were chosen because of their cosmopolitan nature. Moreover, over 95% of Nigeria's advertising agencies have their head-offices in Lagos.

Data for the study were gathered from four categories of samples:

- a. the consumers

- b. the ad practitioners (ad creatives)
- c. the ad critic/culture specialists
- d. the television advertisements (commercials)

Since the study focused on literate adults in Lagos and Ibadan, especially those resident in the metropolis, not every local government area was considered for selection. From the fifteen local government areas in Lagos, five were selected, using the purposive sampling technique. The local governments thus selected were Lagos Island, Lagos Mainland, Ikeja, Surulere, and Eti Osa. These local government areas were chosen because of the preponderance of government and private establishments. From Ibadan, a purposive sample of six local governments: Ibadan North (Bodija), Ibadan South-East (Mapo), Ibadan South-West (Oluyole Estate), Akinyele (Moniya), was drawn out of a list of thirty-three local government areas. The selection was limited to Ibadan central because as at the time of the survey, these areas were known to enjoy average electrical power supply, clear television signals and transmission. Hence, the residents are expected to be familiar with the adverts under study. The selected local government areas were further stratified into employment sectors, educational institutions, media houses, private organizations, health institutions and civil service. Subjects were drawn from each stratum, using the convenience sampling technique. Only consumers who had access to television, who were familiar with the brands /adverts under study, and who were willing to take part in the survey, were chosen. A total of forty (40) respondents were selected from each local government. Thus, 440 respondents were selected from all the local governments.

Two groups were set up for the focus group discussions. Both groups were made up of students registered for advertising courses at both 200 and 300 levels within the Department of Communication and Language Arts. The first group was made up of eleven people, while the second group had 10 people. The researcher used only two groups because the Focus Group Discussion was intended to complement the two major instruments (interview and questionnaire).

#### **Ad Creatives/Culture Critics**

The ad creatives were purposively selected. The nature of the data required from them, made this essential. Only agencies whose adverts are under investigation were featured in the survey. The copywriters for the campaign were interviewed. Where the copywriter was not available, the creative director was interviewed in his stead.

Moreover, three luminaries in the advertising profession Mr. Bola Agboola, Acting Registrar(at the time the study was conducted), APCON (Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria), Mr. Kola Ayanwale,( one time Chairman of AAAN (Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria) and Chris A. Doghudge, Managing Director of Zus Bureau, an advertising research /publishing firm, were interviewed. Two culture specialists, Prof. AkinwumiIsola and Elder Adebayo Faleti, were also interviewed.All together, 8 ad creatives, 3 senior advertising executives and 2 culture critics, making a total of 13 (thirteen) respondents were purposively selected for the interview[as content analyses].

### Product Ads

Before the selection of the television commercials, the researcher conducted a preliminary test on memorability and likeability of ads on the 200 and 300 levels' students, registered for advertising courses in Communication and Language Arts Department.However, care was taken to ensure that products that have no socio-economic or gender bias in their purchase or usage were selected. The study examined 8 Television commercials namely:

1. MTN's Mama na Boy
2. GLO's Madam Kofo
3. Knorr's- No Left Over
4. Royco's- Angry Husband
5. Panadol Extra- Oga Na Master
6. Medic 55's- Shaky Shaky Daddy
7. Maltina's Graduation
8. Malta Guinness'- I Feel Good

### Rationale for the selection of the medium (TELEVISION)

The researcher chose the audio visual medium of Television. The choice is based on the medium's advantage of combining sight, motion and sound. Bovee et al (1995:407) highlighted television's creative flexibility. To them, television offers countless opportunities for using sight, sound, colour and motion to communicate an ad message. They claim "it is hard to beat broadcast television for reaching huge numbers of people quickly." As Arens and Bovee (1994: 431) observed, "the public considers TV the most authoritative and influential medium." To them, the combination of sight, sound, motion and colour, permit infinite, original and imaginative appeals. The authors further noted that "Hallmark, Xerox, Mobil, Exxon and IBM increased their prestige

by regularly sponsoring cultural TV Programs". Thus, with the popular saying that seeing is believing, consumers may appreciate a product better on TV, or associate with a model they can see.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher gathered data, for the survey, using the following instruments: the questionnaire, an interview schedule, a Focus Group Discussion Guide and a Content Coding Sheet. The questionnaire contained close-ended and open-ended questions as well as a Likert scale [testing the degree of agreement or disagreement of respondents with certain statements]. In all, there were three different interview guides: one for each category of sample. The structured interview for ad creatives comprised twelve (12) questions. Eight (8) ad creatives were interviewed, to gather data on the major considerations that went into the making of the selected television commercials. However, special attention was paid to the role of culture in the considerations of message development. The second interview guide was developed for culture experts. There were nine questions centered on the interactions between advertising and culture. The third interview guide was drawn up to elicit responses from advertising policy makers. It was made up of nine questions. The Focus Group Discussions guide comprised nine (9) structured questions. However, some unstructured questions arose, in reaction to some of the discussants' responses. In addition, the selected adverts were analysed, based on the displayed, or manifest, content. The units of analysis were the setting, the models, the advert copy and the music. To analyse the range of content, the following content categories were looked into: lifestyle, customs, language use, fashion and dress pattern, eating habits, role play, advertising claim and appeal, music type, and value system.

### **Findings and Analysis of Findings**

The most admired culture was revealed to be that of the Yoruba people. This was the view of 214 (53.8%) respondents. Next in popularity to this were Foreign and Western cultures with 106 (26.7%) respondents. The popularity of the Yoruba culture, among the respondents, may be tied to the fact that majority of the study sample, in fact, 348 (84%) respondents, indicated that they were Yoruba by tribe. Also, 265 (65%) individuals, of the total sample, disclosed that they grew up in South-Western Nigeria. In other words, there is a preponderance of respondents of Yoruba origin, as well as respondents who spent the first fifteen years of their lives in South-Western Nigeria. The researcher wondered why foreign/western culture, and not the culture of any other Nigerian tribe, came next on the rating list. This also brought to the fore, a point raised by a respected advertising executive, Mr. Chris Doghudje, when he

said “we do not have a universal Nigerian culture, rather what we have are variations from one ethnic group to the other”. It will be interesting to find out, what values would reflect a national culture.

Thereafter, the researcher enquired about the extent, to which the way the models behaved, reflected the culture which the respondents admire most. A total of 389 (93%) respondents believed that television commercials reflect some aspects of the Nigerian culture, to a great extent.

In a further attempt to answer the research question, on the cultural elements in the selected television commercials, a multi-system approach was employed. The researcher made use of responses to the questionnaire, the summary from the content analysis, as well as reports from the interviews with the advert creatives, advert policy makers and the culture experts. Findings from the questionnaire established that the respondents pay sufficient attention to Television Commercials (TVCs). This showed that they were qualified to make general statements on TVCs. Some of their responses also showed that they were critical of the contents of TVCs. This is indicated in the view expressed by 81% of the respondents, that one should not believe everything one sees in a TVC. More importantly, 94% of the respondents concurred that Television commercials contribute good ideas to the society.

Furthermore, findings show that the three best liked TVCs, out of the eight selected for the studies, were: MTN's Mama Na Boy, Royco's Angry Husband and Panadol Extra's Oga Na Master. Moreso, when the researcher probed further on what endeared the respondents to Mama na boy, the most frequent factor, mentioned by respondents, was cultural setting. Other important variables mentioned included originality of concept and music. Also, 93% of the respondents expressed the view that the TVCs reflected the Nigerian culture in the setting, the dressing, dancing, language and the action of the models.

The content analysis showed that the Television commercials, under study, reflected the following aspects of our culture.

a. Social values and Principles

The social values reflected include achievement and success, material comfort, fitness, health, celebration, peace and beauty.

b. Lifestyle

Most of the commercials under study made use of modern architecture; the use



of traditional architecture was not so prominent. More use was made of modern, as opposed to traditional furnishing. The TVCs portrayed Nigerians as industrious. Six of the commercials except 'Mama na boy' and 'Malta Guinness' gave very little attention to recreation. The mode of recreation shown in "Mama na boy" was playing of Checkers, popularly called Draught, by moonlight. While the men played the board game, the women were busy frying "Garri", a local meal made from Cassava.

#### c. Customs

The selected commercials emphasized the fact that the Nigerian culture celebrates family ties, true friendship, social recognition, respect for elders, and good neighbourliness. These aspects of the Nigerian culture featured prominently in most of the selected adverts.

#### d. Language

Most of the TVCs studied made use of pidgin. The pronunciation of words was clear, and some new words and slangs were used.

#### e. Mode of Dressing

The content analysis showed that there was more use of local fabrics in the selected adverts. The dress styles (designs) were also mostly local. Beads and other traditional accessories featured prominently. Most of the models wore head coverings. General appearance was modest and representative of different Nigerian cultures. In "Mama na boy", the major female character wore a blouse and double wrappers. Some of the other female models in the selected adverts wore long skirts and blouses, which were, at a time, popularly referred to as Stella Obasanjo style. The style was named after the wife of the past Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo; and the dress style is popular across various Nigerian tribes.

#### f. Eating Habit

The selected TVCs featured local system of food preparation as well as western methods. Families were shown sitting at tables eating with cutleries. Choice of menu included both local and foreign dishes, but serving arrangements were foreign.

#### g. Music

The lyrics of the songs were mostly in pidgin language, although English also featured in two of the TVCs. However, there was greater use of modern musical instrument; and the dance steps were also modern, not traditional.

#### h. Social Roles

Most of the female models were portrayed in traditional female roles. More women were shown staying back at home than those going to work. Only women were shown cooking; no man was shown cooking. Where models were shown working in the home settings, only female models were shown working; while the men relaxed. The only commercial that showed men working was the Panadol Extra “Oga Na Master” TVC. It had an all malecast, shown at work in a foundry. Women were presented as waiting on all members of the family.

i. Advertising appeal

The commonest appeal employed in the selected TVCs was slice of life, laced with humour. The themes featured prominently were those embracing physiological needs, security, love, family togetherness, self esteem and sense of belonging.

Some submissions from the interviews are relevant to our discussion. It is interesting to recall the assertion by Mr. Chris Doghujje of Zus Bureau, that there is no single Nigerian culture. This view resonates with the views of other interviewees (Steve Babaeko, Prof Akinwumi Isola, Elder Adebayo Faleti) that Nigeria is not mono-cultural; rather, we have a conglomeration of cultures. To Mr Chris Doghujje, it is rather difficult to use one advert to represent what the whole country believes, because we do not have a single identifiable culture, as a result of the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society. He observed that, “advertising finds it difficult to identify with a particular tribe, because of the problem of tribalism”. Hence, most of the times, the three major tribes are featured in TVCs. Sometimes, however, in a bid to make a TVC to be Nigerian, according to Mr. Chris Doghujje, the medium of pidgin English will be employed. When the ad-creatives were asked to identify the aspect of Nigerian culture, which their TVCs showcased, the reactions were multifaceted. Mrs Yinka Odiboh, of Lintas, said that in the Maltina example, the culture depicted is that of celebration of special occasions. To her, Nigerians, especially in the South-West love to celebrate special moments like marriage, house-warming, naming (christening) ceremony, birthdays, and so on. At least two other adverts under study had a celebration theme. They were MTN's “Mama na Boy” and Glo's “Madam Kofo”. This theme, of celebration, is common in the TVCs on our screens.

Other aspects of Nigerian culture on display, in the selected adverts, include the music, the dance, the dressing, the language, and so on. When the policy makers, in advertising, reacted to the issue of what cultural elements are prevalent, in the selected TVCs, the views were varied. One time Acting

Registrar, of Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), Mr Bola Agboola, said in an interview that, generally, issues relating to the family dominate Nigerian TVCs, and Nigerian adverts in general. This suggests that Nigerians value family relationships. Some of the adverts show certain products, and associate their use with building strong family relationships. He further observed that, Television commercials also capitalize on the emerging trend of glamorising wealth. For instance, he pointed out the recurrent theme of materialism which is depicted in TVCs. He said this was a true reflection of the Nigerian society, where money was being worshipped. However, on the positive side, Mr. Agboola noted that, Nigerian TVCs depicted what happened in the society every day: the celebration of special occasions, popular dance and music, styles of dressing, and so on.

Commenting on the cultural elements in Nigerian Television Commercials, one time Chairman of the Association of Advertising Agencies in Nigeria (AAAN), Mr. Kola Ayanwale, who was also the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of Centrespread FCB, reiterated the point that, by and large, TV commercials celebrate “our environment, and our language”. He observed, like Mr. Doghudge, that pidgin is very strong on TV and “it’s a Nigerian creation”. He further espoused the view that pidgin is popular, because it is the only available option, in an attempt to talk to a diverse audience, unless one is running a regional campaign. Mr. Ayanwale also drew attention to mode of dressing, as another celebrated cultural element in TVCs. To use his words, “TVC all the way, have showcased us as Nigerians by bringing into view our different ethnic groups in the costume of the models”. This echoes the views of the participants in the Focus Group Discussions, who concurred that TVCs celebrate/promote among other things, Nigerian music, dance, mode of dressing, success, hardwork, a sense of achievement, communal living and the beauty of family life.

The opinions of the culture experts clinch this discussion on the cultural elements, in the selected adverts. To quote Elder Adebayo Faleti:

We cherish children and childbearing.,

We cherish friendship, good, sincere friendship.

We cherish truth, simplicity.

We cherish hardwork, being a gentleman, having a good family background or name.

While trying to explain what having a good family background or name entails, Elder Adebayo Faleti intoned that Nigerians expect that a reputable family must not be known as debtors; neither should they have a history of bankruptcy,

or heinous diseases like madness or leprosy. Onyenyili-Onuorah (2005:44) also noted that the African thought emphasizes harmony, and communion with the essence of being. While commenting on the issue of the Nigerian culture, Prof. Akinwumi Isola noted that one's cultural values determine the rightness or wrongness of issues. Cultural values set standards. He further identified the intangible aspects of the Nigerian culture, as honesty, transparency, accountability and probity. He advocated that, apart from the use of literature, language, proverbs and idiomatic expressions, the media can be employed to reflect acceptable cultural heritage, and standards, through drama, films, radio jingles and television commercials.

One major observation, across the various groups of interviewees, is that culture is evolving and dynamic. Hence, the Nigerian culture is also undergoing change. The implication for advertising is that, as the culture changes, new additions will be made to what is seen as the secondary Nigerian culture, although the core cultural traits, especially, will remain. One pointer to this changing culture was the uproar against "Mama na boy," which, though popular, was criticized for being gender-biased, by announcing that the new born was a boy. The TVC was later repackaged and the announcement was "mama she don born". Glo's Madam Kofo, on the other hand, attempted to be more gender sensitive; because, when Madam Kofo (a popular Nigerian TV actress, known for her skyscraping headgears) was told about the arrival of the baby, she did not ask whether it was a boy or girl; rather, she rattled off a list of the people, she would invite for the party. The maid, that broke the news of the baby's arrival to Madam Kofo, was however appalled; because Madam Kofo did not ask this culturally expected question, of what sex the baby was. The question is, which of the two adverts is culturally acceptable? The one that called attention to the sex of the baby, or the one that was silent on the sex of the baby? Do Nigerians prefer male children to females? The findings, from the survey, suggest that the answer to this question is yes. Male births are more celebrated, especially if it is the family's first child.

In essence, whatever the culture component, be they core beliefs, or sub-cultural values (Bergh and Katz, 1999: 205), advertising can be used to reflect these unique beliefs. It will be of importance to factor cultural considerations into the development of advertising messages, because, like Arnould, Price & Zinkhan (2002: 144) observed, members of a community channel their choices and purchasing power in conformity with the cultural blueprints of their society. In consonance with this view, Bovee et al (1995: 196) confirmed that success, in both intercultural and international advertising, requires a solid understanding, both of the cultural composition of your audience and the

factors that shape culture over time. The findings of this research have confirmed these views, as consumers have shown more affinity for the Television commercials, which have tried to showcase buyers' social realities. From the foregoing, the researcher has been able to identify those cultural elements that are on display, in the TVCs selected for the study. Also, through the contributions of the culture experts, the advert creatives, the policy makers, and the consumers, the interactions, between culture and TVCs, have been shown to be highly reflective despite the diversities present, in the Nigerian culture.

Thus, to answer the question of shaper or mirror, the findings [from the survey] support findings from previous researches and theories. For instance, Hyunsun (2003) citing Pollay (1987) described advertising as 'the distorted mirror', based on humanists and social scientists' attacks on the unintended consequences of advertising what he calls the "conventional" or "prevailing opinions," (CWOPO) which consider advertising as a socially destructive force". The argument, by Pollay, is that 'the conventional mirror metaphor is apt because advertisements do reflect a culture (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990: 360). The mirror is, however, distorted, because advertising reflects and reinforces, only certain attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, philosophies, and values those that serve the seller's interests". Advertising borrows from the society and reflects our social realities. In response to Pollay's distorted mirror, Hyunsun further cited Holbrook (1987: 100), who argued that, in most cases, advertising seems to merely mirror or reflect, rather than mould or shape, the values of its target audiences". However, when new wants or needs are introduced, to take care of desires that were previously unattended to, advertising is always the first to get there, to introduce this wonder product, meeting an old need in a new way or a new need through an already existing means. The creative writers live among us, and they know the idiosyncrasies of consumers. They always select familiar icons in the society that resonate with the consumer. In other words, no matter how creative a concept is, if it does not address the consumers' needs, and work from his background, then the message is lost and the commercial will be a mere entertainment; and not a sales message.

The studies reported in this table show a summary of other studies that have looked at cultural values, reflected in advertising. Findings are presented in Table 1 as documented by Hyunsun 2003.

Table 1. Previous studies of cultural values reflected in advertising

Author (s) (Year)	Description
Belk et al. (1985)	- The focus was upon the comparison of Eastern and Western cultures, namely, Japan and America
Belk and Pollay (1985)	- It reveals that even though there is a clear evidence of increasing Americanization in Japanese advertisements, deep-seated Japanese cultural values remain distinct.
Mueller (1987,1992)	- Mueller (1987) discovered that the cultural appeals used in Japanese and American magazine advertisements tend to differ in degree rather than in kind. - Mueller (1992) updated and furthered her study of 1987, suggesting that 'Japanese advertising is still far from being westernized. In fact, there are indicators that it may be becoming increasingly Japanese...' (1992: 22). Her conclusion supported Belk and Pollay's (1985) findings.
Tansey et al. (1990)	- They focused on advertisements for one particular product, automobile, and examined cultural themes in Brazilian and US car advertisements. They concluded that values differ between the business sub-cultures in these two countries.
Pollay and Gallagher (1990)	- It presents a method for measuring the cultural character of advertising and challenges the notion that advertising merely mirrors social values.
Cheng (1994)	- It gauges the value changes in Chinese magazine advertisements from 1982 to 1992. Results indicate that while the values less frequently used in 1992 ads are utilitarian in nature and centering around product quality, the values increasing in their occurrences are more symbolic and suggestive of human emotions.
Cheng (1997)	- The author analyzed the content of Chinese television commercials and results show that 'modernity', 'technology', and 'youth' predominate in Chinese advertising in the 1990s.

Hyunsun Catherine Yoon "Cultural Values in contemporary Korean advertising: with special reference to the images of the elderly" Vol. 1 No. 2, 2003 Journal of the Asian Research Center For Religion and Social Communication1

### Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the mirror/shaper argument from the point of view of the consumers, producers and regulators of advertising. One thing is certain, advertising affects us and we cannot deny this influence, no matter how subtle. Like the agenda setting theory suggests, the media may not always tell us what to think; but they succeed in telling us what to think about. The selected TVCs showcase Nigerian culture; and present us as people, who love life and enjoy celebrating happy moments, with family and friends. We love success, peaceful co-existence, well being and peace. Nigerians show respect for elders and still maintain some sort of communal living. Women were portrayed as care-givers and managers of homes. Pidgin English has emerged as the language of choice for many Nigerian adverts, as it cuts across the language barriers, created by the multiplicity of tribes and tongues, as well as the inadequacy of the English language to express some local experiences. One recent example of effective use of pidgin is "I don port o," in the controversial MTN TVC where a popular comedian [who had been a brand ambassador of Etisalat] moved his mobile phone subscription to MTN, a rival GSM service provider. Other successful campaigns include the one for Lagos Lotto, where the slogan was "Levels go change o". In some of these examples, we see advertising as a shaper. The expression "Port" is new in the Nigerian vocabulary, but through advertising, it has become commonplace. In conclusion, the paper agrees with the submission of several empirical studies, as cited by Tai (2004) which concluded that "advertisements reflecting (some) local cultural values are more persuasive than those that ignore them." (Gregory and Munch, 1997; Taylor et. al., 1997; Han and Shavitt, 1994; Honget. al., 1987; Madden et. al., 1986; Marquez, 1975).

### Recommendations

This paper makes two major recommendations based on the findings of the study:

- i. Advertising creatives should make use of the rich platform presented by Television Commercials to showcase our rich cultural heritage as a way of preserving our practices and giving them legitimacy.
- ii. Advertising creatives should be sensitive and selective in the choice of what they mirror or display. When cultural changes are featured in the rich and captivating ambience of TVCs, the changes should not be provocative

or unhealthy practices which may wrongfully influence vulnerable consumers.

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