

The Media Consumer Theories and Emergent Constructs in Post-Post Modern Advertising in Nigeria

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Abstract

The media consumer, otherwise known as the audience is considered to react actively or passively towards media messages based on existing modern theories. However, the emergent constructs evolved primarily by the advertising media audience in reacting to media messages have deconstructed the pillars that exist as strongholds of modern media audience theories. This study is set to identify and justify the rationale for the evolvement of socio-cultural factors among advertising media audience in Nigeria. The study adopts the analytical method in examining outcomes of media adverts in Nigeria. Expectedly, the opportunities created by the post-post modern era are explanatory of the fact that uncelebrated socio-cultural factors are paramount in determining the significant level of influence of media adverts over the audience. The study concludes that the consideration of emergent socio-cultural factors in addition to modern approaches in advertising will result to more effective media advertising in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Media Consumer, Theories, Post-Postmodernism, Advertising

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Introduction

Modern theatre in media communication have remained reliable in the explanation of media consumer behaviour, however, there are emergent constructs that have almost completely debunked the validity of these theories in the post-postmodern era of advertising. Media theories rely on effects on consumer behaviour. Media theories such as hypodermic syringe inoculation, uses and gratifications and the social learning theory all share a similar proposition; that the media audience will possibly be influenced by media messages to which they are exposed.

In Nigeria, the modern media theories have not actually proven the fact that consumers of media messages will take decisions based on mere contact with the technically and persuasive discourse and pictures in the communication channels. In the era that comes after post-modernism, Nigeria witnessed her general elections in 2015. The cynosure of the phenomena was the presidential elections. Political adverts in support of the former president, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan were simply persuasive and overwhelming on national television, national radio and the social media. In fact, the electronic and print billboards across the nation, including newspapers and magazines played very significant and complementary roles in winning the hearts of Nigerians for the People Democratic Party and its Presidential candidate.

The media campaigns were persuasive and logical enough to provide Nigerians with enough reason why they should vote for the PDP. The PDP media campaigns took a draconian dimension against the opposition party; the All Progressive Congress (APC) and its Presidential Candidate, General Muhamadu Buhari. The hate campaigns, as they were called, presented the opposition candidate's image in negative light. With the evidence presented in the campaigns, it was obvious that Nigerians will not vote a man presented as one without any humane conscience. At the end of the election process, the Opposition candidate was victorious.

A survey, conducted on transnational adverts and their influence on consumer behaviour in Cross River State in 2010, revealed that the adverts have no direct impact on the purchasing decision of consumers. Iyorza states that 94.8% of the research population confirmed that they are not moved by media adverts but by the physical sight and quality of the products in question, and the consumer satisfaction that the products promise to offer them (136). Another study on political advertising in the 1999 gubernatorial elections in

Benue State showed that voters voted for their choice of candidates because of their personal experience with him; the candidate's generosity, his personality and his flair for ethnic and ethical standing in the society.

The preceding examples that form the background to this paper therefore question the efficacy of the existing media theories in the post – face of emergent factors in the post – postmodern era. The thrust of this discourse is to re-examine the significance of emergent factors that also determine media consumer behaviour in the light of existing media theories special attention is given to the factors that make media advertising effective in Nigeria.

Media Consumer Effects Theories

The media consumers are the audiences that consume various programmes like drama, discussions, and adverts in the electronic media or those who are exposed to news, feature articles or adverts in the print channels of communication. There are media theories that explain the dimension of effects that media contents have on their consumers. Folarin defines theories as sets of systematic generalizations or ideas, based on scientific observation and leading to further empirical observation, which seek to explain or interpret a given phenomenon (5).

Lule identifies some media consumer effects theories to include uses and gratification, Agenda Setting theory and symbolic interactionism (online page). These theories and more will be discussed subsequently as they explain their effects in the events of media communication such as advertising.

Uses and Gratification Theory: The uses and Gratification theory was propounded by Blumler and Katz in 1974. The care assumption of the theory states that individuals use media messages to gratify their information needs, and have alternate choices to satisfy their needs. It implies that media consumers will select radio or television programmes of their choices (sports, fashion shows etc.) and will patronize and benefit from programmes that will be useful to them.

Agenda Setting Theory: The agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. The theory holds that media orders the priorities of their consumers and do not tell Nigerians what to think but what to think about. In advertising, the agenda setting

theory functions to display product appeals to the needs of consumers (ranging from physical to psychological needs). The media adverts remind consumers that they need to think about the need to belong, the need to look healthy or the need to look sexy.

Symbolic Interactionism: The symbolic Interactionism is primarily a sociological perspective which has found relevance as a media theory. It was propounded by George Herbert Mead and Charles Hopton Cooley. The theory holds that people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation. In other words, the theory supports that a model featured in any television commercial or newspaper advert for a product will eventually emerge a model for the media consumers who would like to patronize the same product, eat or talk like the model in the advert.

Cultivation Theory: The cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner. The theory holds that the persistent long term exposure to television content has small but measurable effects on the perceptual worlds of audience members. Thus, heavy television viewing creates an exaggerated belief in a mean and scary world. This implies that frequency of television advert can greatly influence the audiences' choice, making them to believe in the validity of a media advert claims.

Social Action Theory: The social action theory was developed by Anderson and Mezer. Under this theory, media content is likened to a silver bullet shot from the media gun to penetrate a hapless audience. Media audiences participate actively in mediated communication and construct meaning from the content they perceive. This theory implies that the advert shown on television or played on radio is intended to construct meaning within the communication process and make the audience to interpret the communication as accordingly.

Media Depending Theory: The media depending theory was developed by Ball-Rokeach and Defluer and the key idea is that audiences depend on media information to meet their needs and reach their goals. In other words, social institutions and media systems interact with audiences to create needs, interests and motive in the audience. Closely related to this theory is the Traditional Response Hierarchy model, which Belch and Belch enumerate to include the information processing model, innovation adaption model, hierarchy of effect model and AIDA model (148). The models all emphasize awareness creation, knowledge or information presentation of the product, evaluation, retention, and action or behavior.

Consumer Behavior and Non-Media Influential Factors

Belch and Belch define consumer behaviour as the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires (107). The media audience is first a consumer and the media contents are the products. Thus, the media consumer operates also on the basis of consumer theories, governed by the basic model of consumer decision making and relevant internal psychological processes.

A Basic Model of Consumer Decision Making

a. Stages In The Consumer Decision-Making Process



b. Relevant Internal Psychological Process



Adapted from Belch and Belch (2005:107)

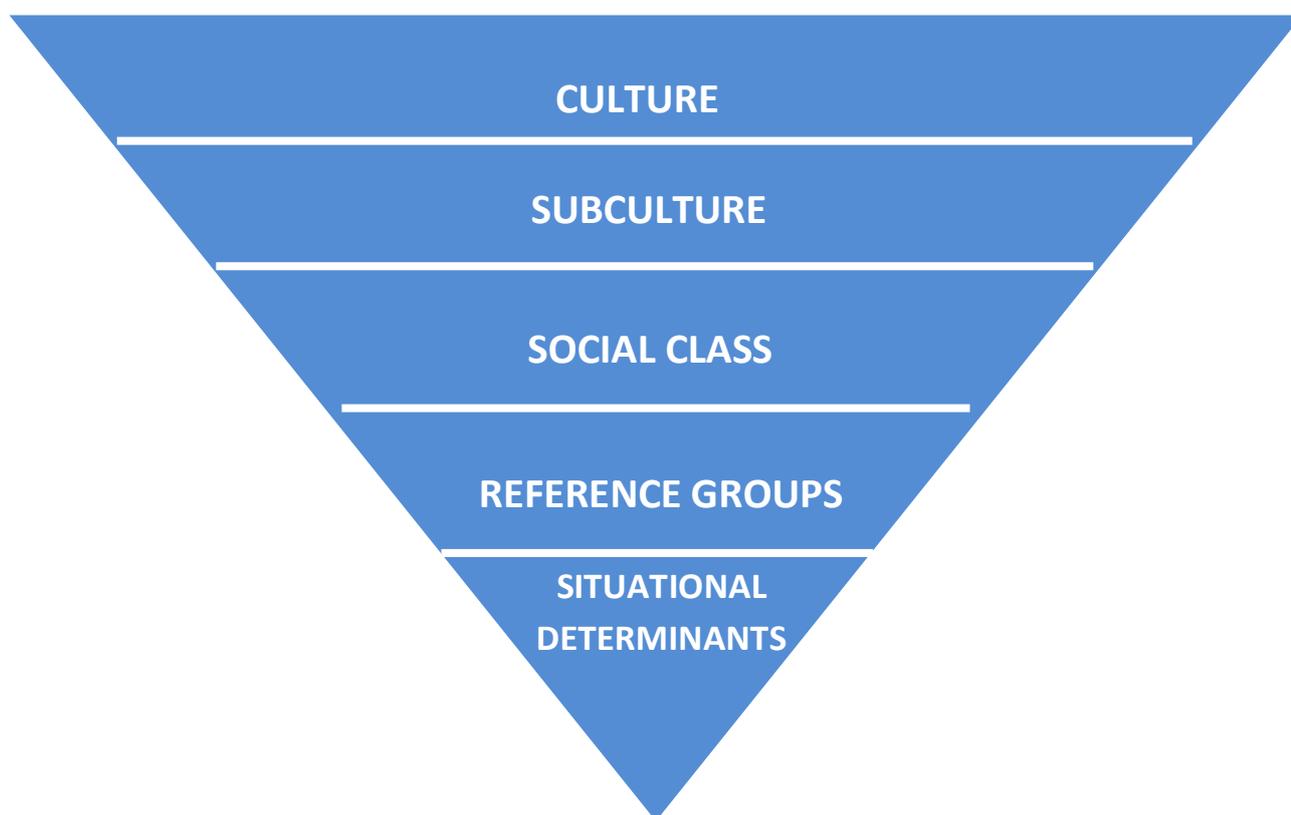
From the above model, the consumer of advertised contents recognizes his need, searches for information about the availability of his needs, which the various media offer, and evaluates the alternative products or brands advertised in the media. At this point, certain factors outside media persuasive discourse dominate his purchase decision, implying that the media consumer does not rely only on the theories employed in media communication.

Apart from the stages in the consumer decision-making process, the media consumer undergoes internal psychological processes including personal or external motivations, perceptions (internal and external), then attitude formation before integrating the attitude into his behavior. Psychologists have recognized the relevance of psychology in consumer behavior. Ugal posits that psychology is concerned with the experience and behaviour of the

individual, while behavior is the expression of subjective experience based on the interaction of the subject (the individual) and the object (the advertised product) (1).

Sequence to the above, Omini identifies learning, through the stimulus-Response Theory (where needs and drives are tailored by some stimulus to cause a response). Cognitive theory (where learning is a mental process of memory, thinking and the rational application of knowledge to solving problem) is a significant psychological force (24-25). Other psychological influences include personality (which is an individual's pattern of traits), attitudes and beliefs (which involve thought processes as well as emotional and self-concept for self-image (which include is the way one sees oneself).

Belch and Belch also identify five (5) non-media influential factors (129).



**The Individual Consumer External Influences
On Consumer Behaviour**

Belch and Belch identify culture as the complexity of learned meaning, values, norms and customs shared by members of a society. Culture is the broadest and most abstract of the external factors that influence consumer behavior; subcultures may be based on age, geographic, religious, racial and/or ethnic differences (130). Social class refers to relatively homogeneous divisions in a society into which people sharing similar lifestyles, values, norms, interests and behaviours can be grouped. A reference group is a group whose presumed perspectives or values are being used by an individual as the basis for his or her judgments, opinions and actions. Consumers use reference groups as a guide to specific behaviour even when the groups are not present, situational determinants are three (3) as identified by Belch and Belch; they include the specific usage situation, the purchase situation and the communication situation (133).

Post-Postmodern Advertising and Emergent Constructs in Nigeria

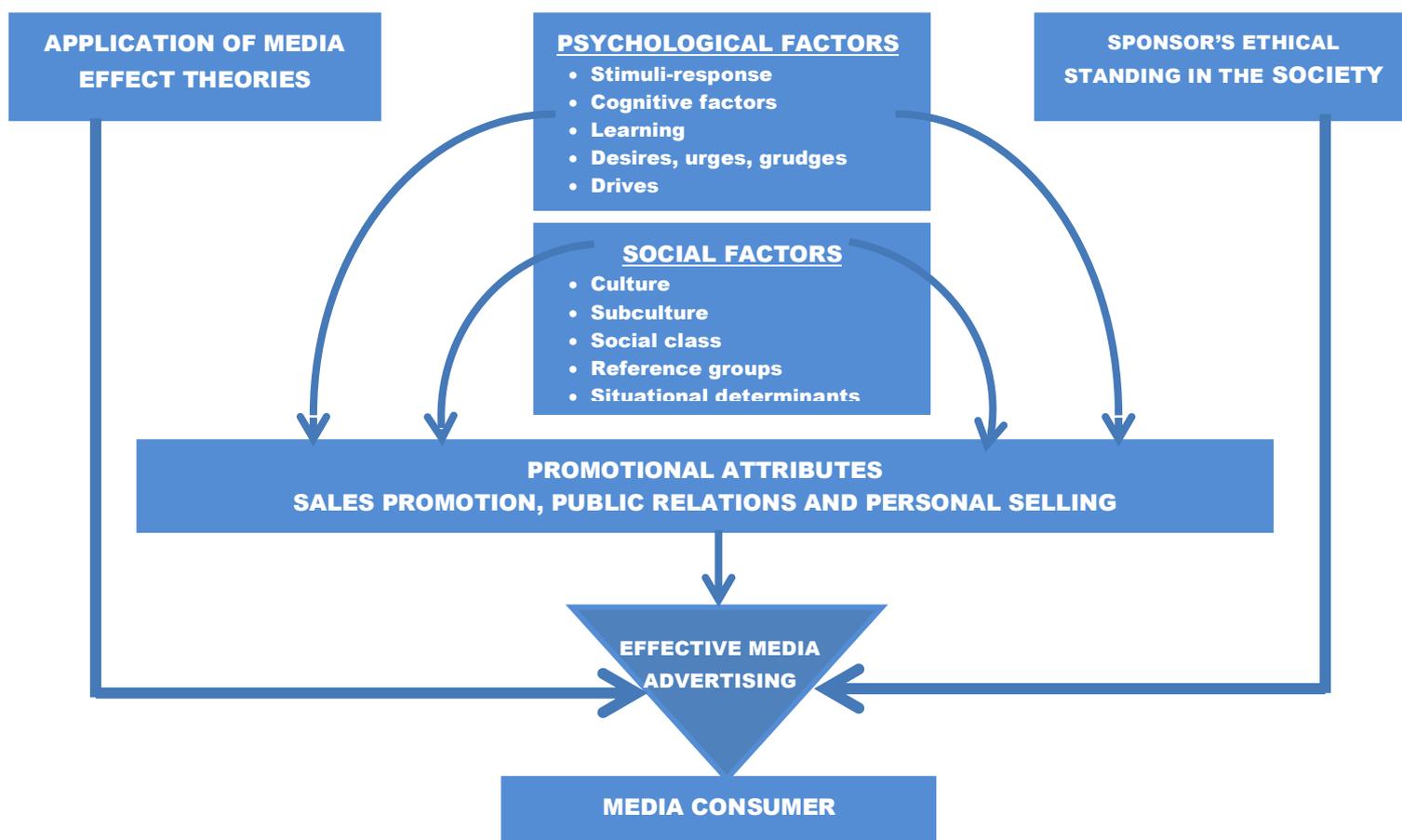
Iyorza and Bassey define post-post modernism as thoughts or reconstructions that have reshaped the antecedents of postmodernism (9). Postmodernism is a term that describes the representations and analysis of a perceived breakdown in the universalizing and rationalist metanarratives of enlightenment. First, modernism should be understood as an era that faded the old and analogue or primitive way of acting, thinking and believing. The modern period ushered in new and scientific approaches towards communication and transformation. It was a period that was characterized by research's that brought about innovations and technological breakthroughs that ushered in new means of communication including radio and television advertising.

The modern period, according to Iyorza and Bassey, lasted between 1650 and 1950 (4). Wilson posits that the postmodern era lasted between 1950 and 1980s, while the post-postmodern era took off from there till date (238). The post postmodern period has deconstructed the earlier constructs of the modern and postmodern period, or improved on some of the previous constructs that give rise to today's ideologies. It is an era that characterizes beliefs and science as well as humanism.

Belch and Belch define advertising as any paid form of non-personal communication about an organization product, service or idea by an identified sponsor (15). The post – postmodern advertising is therefore a new era of methods involved in the process communicating a person or an organization, its products or services to the public. Post-postmodernism therefore defiles the modern theories of modern media advertising and the

effects thereof. Whereas the modern media consumer theories are still relevant, there are additional factors that should be considered in achieving success in the post-postmodern era. These factors are known as emergent constructs.

Model of Emergent Constructs in Effective Media Advertising



The above model of emergent constructs is best in explaining effective media advertising in contemporary Nigeria. Thus, advertising succeeds owing to five reasons that are complementary to the advertising process.

- i) Application of Media Theories: The application of modern media effects theories in designing and transmitting adverts to the media consumer is significant to a reasonable extent in exerting influence on the message recipients.

- ii) **Sponsor's Ethical Standing:** The sponsor's ethical standing, as illustrated by Aristotle's persuasive triad (ethos, pathos and logos) contributes significantly to effective media advertising. The sponsor or communicator must be credible with known good moral record to win the consumers over to his goods and services. Larson posits that Aristotle's persuasive theory is most effective when is based on the three constructs identified above because it provides a common ground between the persuader and the persuade (8).
- iii) **Psychological Factors:** Factors like what products stimulate the response of the consumer in a product, his thinking and beliefs about a product or service, what he knows already and what we desires strong factors outside media advertising and they determine the purchase choice.
- iv) **Social Factors:** Factors such as cultural background, subcultures (age, status), social class, reference groups and situational determinates are strong consumer factors that can be considered in planning advertising messages.
- v) **Promotional Attributes:** McLuhan states that the continuous pressure should be to create adverts more and more in the image of audience motives and desire (226). Promotional selling of products is very effective when fused into advertising appeals such as the need to belong and health. Cutting down prices, and talking to individuals can work.

Conclusion

Consumer behaviour is widely studied in almost every discipline of human endeavour because man does not existing isolation. Media consumer theories have been propounded over the years as media effects theories by media and communication scholars. The theoretical applications of the media consumer theories have been applied in the dissemination [of information or media content with the audience. however, programmes like media advertising need just more than information or entertainment. adverts go a long way to persuade.

However, in the post-postmodern era, in Nigeria and other parts of the world, dependence on the media theories alone for success in communication appear to be inadequate as research shows that there are other numerous psychological and social factors that influence the buying decision of the consumer. Such factors include knowledge or information about the product. Such factors include knowledge or information about the

product as learned by the consumer or some cultural or social reasons that may guide his decision making process.

In Nigeria, the increased application of media theories in political advertising and consumer advertising did not prove significantly that the media communications and their persuasive strategies did not work more than other factors such as beliefs and ethnic standings of the consumers. Whereas it will be hazy to conclude that psychological and social factors that influence the consumers' choice are more significant in decision making, basic conclusions can be provided thus:

- Media theories for influencing consumers' purchasing decisions are still relevant in the post-postmodern era.
- Psychological and social factors play more significant roles in influencing the choice of media consumers' purchasing decision
- Encoder's moral and ethical standing is paramount in the efforts to succeed in any persuasive communication like advertising. This is in line with Aristotle's persuasive triad.

Finally, in the post-postmodern Nigeria, this paper recommends that the application of media theories in persuasive communications like adverts should be complemented by the sponsors or communicator ethical standing in the society. Media practitioners engaged in the struggle for media consumers attention should also consider the psychological and social factors that influence the consumer and weave them systematically in their piece of communication designed to persuade.

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