

**AESTHETIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC REACTION TO MALARIA DRUGS
ADVERTISEMENT: A STUDY OF TELEVISION VIEWERS IN CALABAR METROPOLIS**

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Abstract

Members of the public often react consciously or unconsciously to aesthetic appeals of an advertisement which draws their attention, sustain their interest and encourages them to buy products or services so promoted. This explains why pharmaceutical companies and advertisers must be careful while making aesthetic choices, to achieve that which are capable of eliciting the right responses; ignite an aesthetic experience and judgements from their target audiences. These involve a careful rearrangement of a combination of basic aesthetic communication elements like colour, size, light, contrast, style, appearance, colour, music, photographs, sound, motion, etc as can be found in television advertisements. This study seeks to establish the nexus between aesthetic communication and public reaction to malaria drugs advertisement in Calabar metropolis Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted the persuasive theory to drive its theoretical framework and survey research method as its methodology. A structured questionnaire as prepared as primary instrument for data collection. Data generated from the study were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in table and simple percentages. Findings revealed that aesthetic communication components can positively or negatively affect an advertisement. As such, frantic efforts must be made by advertisers and pharmaceutical companies to skilfully select the appropriate aesthetic communication elements in their ads. Such ads must align with the culture, belief systems, values and morals of the target audiences. This is necessary in order to draw the needed attention, reaction and purchase behaviour from the consumers.

Keywords: Aesthetics, aesthetic communication, malaria drugs, advertisement, public reaction

Introduction

Advertising has been seen as a creatively planned communication geared towards the generation of aesthetic experience necessary to stimulate the desired feeling or action from persons exposed to it. Advertisements (ads) are consciously designed to increase consumption and reinforce the loyalty of the public towards a particular product (Cramerotti, 2009). Ads also play other basic functions in the society – like helping corporate organisations sell their products or services, educate or raise public awareness about new products or improvements on existing ones, increase competition that brings about lower prices of goods as well as increase productivity (Dominick, 2009).

In recent times, pharmaceutical companies make use of prescription medicine advertising or direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising to create awareness of a particular diseases or health conditions in order to expose consumers to learning about available medical products that can be used to cure, contain or manage them. (Pardun, 2013). However, for such advertising messages to exert the anticipated power and influence on the public, certain dimensions of artistic creativity are necessarily required to effectively influence public attitude and purchasing behaviour.

Such Ads often contains aesthetically appealing verbal, visual, or sound elements with high production quality, clever dialogue, original colour palette and memorable music to appeal to the potential consumers of the product it promotes (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). As observed by Berger (1986), there's more to an effective advertising message than meets the casual eye. This is because an effective ad, like other forms of communication, works best when it strikes a chord in the needs and desires of the receiving consumer - a connection that can be both intuitive and highly calculated.

It suffices to note here that advertising can positively or negatively affect public acceptability, purchase and usage of a particular pharmaceutical product. As pointed out by Kuechel (2004) a good advertisement can raise awareness, increase sales, add revenue and growth to pharmaceutical practice, on the other hand, it can equally ruin or slam the product at any slightest mistake in the ad. This is why utmost care is required in the selection and packaging of an advertorials to align with the culture, values and more of the target audience.

Zettl (2002) contended that communication aesthetics differs considerably from the traditional aesthetics, rather than engaging in an unending arguments about what is beautiful or not, and what is art or not, communication aesthetics is more emphatic about how the target audience perceive certain aesthetics variable and the combination in the production of mass media content. It embodies the basic properties and structural potentials of the aesthetic elements of media content.

According to Akpan and Etuk (1990), every communication medium has certain aesthetic elements which when properly rearranged, can heighten interest, excite the mind and stimulate the necessary feelings in the beholder about a particular thing. These elements vary depending on the communication media. In radio these includes sound effects, music, and the human voice. In addition, television and film aesthetics can also include light, time-motion as well as two-dimensional and three-dimensional space, while in newspaper, magazine or billboard, the aesthetic communication elements are: the type face, type size, colour, lines, texture, paper, quality, space (including white space) photo accompaniment, headline and columns.

Malaria is one of the most infectious and commonest diseases tormenting Sub-Sahara Africa including Nigeria. It has encumbered the country both economically and health wise, as several lives are lost daily as a result. It has also been reported that an estimated sum of 130 billions of naira (Nigerian currency) is expended annually as treatment costs, prevention, loss of man-hours, etc (National Malaria Elimination Programme, 2017). The Nigeria Institute of Medical Research, NIMR observed that about 50 million Nigerians still test positive to malaria annually(*Vanguard*, JUNE 21, 2017).An earlier report by the United States Embassy in Nigeria (2011) had reported that 97% of Nigeria's population are at risk of the disease with over 300,000 deaths per year which contributes 11% of maternal mortality in Nigeria, hence posing a serious threat to public health than any other country in the world.

In a bid to combating this impending predicament and maximise profits, pharmaceutical companies have introduced several anti-malaria drugs. These varieties of malaria drugs in the market have however given rise to competition among companies. Drug manufacturers now rely greatly on advertising to excel in the market. A study by Yusuf and Yusuf (2003) revealed that pharmaceutical manufacturers focus on positive advertising

appeal in radio, television and billboards to attract and garner emotional appeal as well as influence discussions on drug purchase and use by majority of Nigerian urban dwellers to patronise over the counter drugs (OTC).

However, for an advertisement to achieve or exert such influence on the public capable of stimulating malaria drug purchase and usage there must have been certain interplay of aesthetics communication elements in the minds of the target audience. This study therefore examines the nexus between aesthetic communication and public reaction to malaria drugs advertisement. In other words, what is the role of aesthetic communication in public reaction to malaria drug advertisement?

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the persuasive theory to drive its theoretical framework. Persuasive advertising is considered a creative guide for advertisers and those who evaluate advertisements. It helps in changing, reinforcing, and shaping audience responses towards a given product or service (Bolaito, 2012). Argument for the relevance of persuasive theory will suffice here. This theory emphasises on advertising messages aimed at subtly changing the attitudes of receivers towards a product or service.

Persuasive theory, as according to 12manage.com (2017), focuses attention on the audiences and content of messages portrayed by an advertisement through the following psychological factors of audiences, namely:

- i. Audience is interested in getting information. Such information must be designed in such a way that can capture people's attention.
- ii. Selective exposure: people are interested in messages that support their already held or existing beliefs, opinion and ideas.
- iii. Selective perception: audiences select advertising messages that they view as being right for them, and a message can be voluntarily misunderstood if it appears otherwise
- iv. Selective Memorisation: opinions transmitted in an advertising message will be better memorised if they are in tandem with that of the audience

Literature Review

Advertising is a planned form of communication intended to convince an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) on why they should purchase or try a particular product, information or services (Kumar & Raju, 2013). Communication in this form has a sensual dimension that has an influence not only on meaning but on sensation that may occur consciously or unconsciously between a sender and a receiver. This sparks an aesthetic interest especially when one focuses attention on the particular way an advertisement is made or should be made regardless of its message content (Thyssen, 2011).

Traditionally and philosophically speaking, the word ‘aesthetics’ is concerned with beauty. It is the science and study of beauty not just of art works alone but also other actions and nature itself can provide. According to Senam (2012) aesthetics is the “perceivable beauty, finesse or attractiveness in a message or object, which is appealing to the decoder and enhances the communicativeness of the message... in the context of mass media contents, aesthetics stimulates the decoder through the senses. It may appeal to any or a combination of the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste” (p.191).

Beauty and ugliness is a vital part of our lives, so is its experiences and judgments (Zangwill, 2014). As such, the beauty, ugliness, likeness, hatred, and appealing disposition of any advertorial is predetermined by its aesthetics composition - be it in radio/television, newspaper/magazine or film/cinema, a moderate application of some aesthetic elements is inevitable. As noted in Zettle (2017), aesthetic elements are often used by advertisers or producers to manipulate the perception of their audience towards a particular product or thing.

Bolatito (2012) pointed out that persuasive advertising seeks to entice consumers into purchasing specific goods or services, often by appealing to their emotions and general sensibilities. It suffices to mention here that, that which is added to an advertisement to achieve its persuasive function are the basic concerns of aesthetic communication.

But unfortunately, as Thorlacius (2010) observed, aesthetic aspects of media products often rank low in the eyes of media producers even when successes of most media products are dependent on it. Aesthetics in an advertisement is what leads an audience towards experiencing the intended feelings or reactions anticipated by its sponsors. Senam (2012, p. 192), in elucidating what aesthetics means to media product remarked that every

mass media content with aesthetics components causes the decoder to feel and experience what the encoder felt or experienced, which is referred to as ‘aesthetic experience’. However, for an audience to feel the aesthetic experience in a communication piece, Leuthold (1998) insisted that such aesthetic communication must align with the existing culture, beliefs, and values of the people in whom it is melt for.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- i. find out how aesthetic communication affect malaria drugs advertisements
- ii. establish whether aesthetic communication informs public reaction to malaria drug advertisements
- iii. evaluate public reaction to malaria drugs advertisements that are align to their cultures and beliefs
- iv. ascertain whether aesthetic communication in malaria drugs advertisement induces purchase decision

Research Questions

In the course of this study, the following questions were raised:

- i. How does aesthetic communication affect malaria drugs advertisements?
- ii. Are public reactions to malaria drug advertisements informed by aesthetic communication?
- iii. How does the public reaction to malaria drugs advertisements that are align to their cultures and beliefs?
- iv. How does aesthetic communication in malaria drugs advertisement induce purchase decision?

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method in addressing the research objectives and answering the questions posed by the study. Survey research, according to Osuala (2005), attempts to determine the incidence, distribution and interrelations among variables and focuses mostly on people, their beliefs, opinions, motivations and behaviour about a particular subject matter. A structured questionnaire was adopted as primary instrument for data collection and data generated from the study were analysed using descriptive statistics and simple percentages.

The population of this study was adults living in Calabar Metropolis. This comprises of two local government areas namely; Calabar South and Calabar Municipality, which have a projective population of 486, 300 (Brinkhoff, 2017). A sample size of 300 was drawn from the entire population using the Taro Yamani’s

formula. Accidental sampling technique was used to distribute copies of the questionnaire to the actual respondents who participated in the study.

Results

The results presented here are based on the data generated from the 300 copies of questionnaire duly filed and retrieved by the researchers.

Table 1: Responses on whether the respondents have heard, viewed or seen malaria drugs advertisement before?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	300	100%
No	0	0%
Total	300	100 %

Table 2: Responses on which media often inform them about new or existing malaria drugs through advertisement?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Radio	101	34%
Television	82	27%
Newspaper / Magazine	48	16%
Billboard	69	23%
Total	300	100 %

Table 3: On whether the public are attracted to malaria drugs advertisements that are beautiful?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	300	100%
No	0	0%

Total	300	100%
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Table 4: On whether the respondents also dislike some malaria drugs advertisements that are not beautiful?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	234	78%
No	66	22%
Total	300	100%

Table 5: On what the respondents like in a particular television malaria drug advertisement of their choice?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Colours / light	34	11%
Music / sound	51	17%
Space time	40	13%
Nice pictures /scenes	38	13%
All of the above	137	46%
None of the above	0	0%
Total	300	100%

Table 6: On what the respondents like in a particular Billboards / Newspaper or Magazine malaria drugs advertisement?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Colours& contrast	55	18%
Size of publication	23	8%
Large letters	18	6%
photographs/ illustrations	61	20%
All of the above	143	48%
None of the above	0	0%
Total	300	100%

Table 7: On whether they like malaria drugs advertisement that is in line with their culture and beliefs?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	280	93%
No	20	7%
Total	300	100%

Table 8: On whether they dislike malaria drugs advertisements that are against their culture and beliefs?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	251	84%
No	49	16%
Total	300	100%

Table 9: On whether an interesting malaria drugs advertisement can make them want to buy it?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	266	89%

No	34	11%
Total	300	100%

Table 10: On whether they may like to try malaria drugs from annoying advertisements?

Options	Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	66	22%
No	234	78%
Total	300	100%

Discussion

The discussion of findings is done here by providing answers to the research questions posed by this study as follows:

Research Question One: How does aesthetic communication affect malaria drugs advertisements?

Findings from this study show that the public react positively or negatively to malaria drug advertisement based on the aesthetic features of a particular ad. Data as presented in Table 3 above show that 100% of the respondents are attracted to malaria drugs advertisements that are appealing to them. Also, data from Table 4 show that 78% of the entire respondents dislike malaria drugs advertisements that are not appealing to their emotions, only 22% respondents were of the contrary view. This position aligns with that of Zettl (2017) who opined that the process of clarification, intensification and interpretation of events (advertisements) is based on the selection and the specific use of aesthetic elements that can directly or indirectly manipulate the perception of the recipients. This is why Tyssen (2011) was of the view that no communication is alien to aesthetics.

Research Question Two: Are public reactions to malaria drug advertisements informed by aesthetic communication?

This study finds aesthetic communication as a cardinal reason for public reaction to malaria drugs advertisement. This can be seen in the respondents' reaction in Table 5 & 6 above, which shows that the public like a particular ad based on its aesthetic communication elements. Zettl (2017) pointed out that aesthetic

elements are used in the clarification, intensification and communication of significant experience in an advertisement. As such, advertisers must select those aesthetic elements that not only result in optimally effective communication, but reflect on one's artistic sensitivity and capabilities.

Research Question Three: How does the public reaction to malaria drugs advertisements that are aligned to their cultures and beliefs?

This study reveals that people like malaria advertisements that are in line with their existing beliefs, culture and values. As recorded in Table 7 above, 93 % of the respondents will like malaria drugs advertisements that are in line with their culture and beliefs. Only 7% of the respondents opposed the view. Also, data from Table 8 above show that 84% of the respondents dislike malaria drugs advertisements that are against their culture and beliefs.

This confirmed the study by Kumar and Raju (2013) that customers are likely to view, read or listen more to the ads which affect their opinion. Also, Zhang and Shavitt(2003) asserted that cultural values are very pervasive in advertisements. Advertising must reflect cultural values of a particular people it is meant to appeal, however this is not without a planned rearrangement of aesthetic elements in it. Leuthold (1998) asserted that aesthetics is all about the real, personal and social behaviour that occurs in every culture and reveals how value systems are embedded in our physical and emotional relationships to the world in which we live. This is why a study by Ahmed (2002) argued that with evidence from cross-cultural differences in advertising that universally standardized advertising is rarely feasible.

Research Question Four: Does aesthetic communication in malaria drugs advertisement induce purchase decision?

Data from the study reveal that the public will most likely purchase malaria drugs introduced that go with an interesting advertisement. Data from Table 9 above show that 89% of the respondents hold that an interesting malaria drugs advertisement can make them want to buy it when the need arises. Also, data from Table 10 above shows that 78 % of the respondents may not like to try malaria drugs from offensive advertisements. This confirms the position of Kumar and Raju (2013) that Ads will be able to change the opinion

and easily convince the customers to buy a product. Another study carried out by Zia (2016) found that there exist a positive relation between the advertising and consumer buying decision and that when there is a great advertising of a product the customers are more influenced by it.

Conclusion

The role of corporate advertising in raising awareness and attracting potential buyers as well as consumers to a product in modern times can never be overemphasised. Corporate entities like pharmaceutical companies rely heavily on advertising to market their drugs to the general public. These pharmaceutical companies often go for the best of ads believed to be capable of garnering the expected responses from members of the public.

Malaria is almost a house-hold name in Nigeria, as every region in the country has its story to tell about the adverse effect of malaria to their collective well-being. This is incumbent on the fact that the disease has cost the country great economic and human resource losses due to the loss of lives and the amount of monies expended daily to contain this health disaster troubling the country. This has given rise to the proliferation and influx of malaria drugs in the market, in which product advertising is eminent due to the high level of competition involved among pharmaceutical companies.

However, to achieve the cardinal aim in advertising malaria drugs – which is to create awareness of the drugs and increase sales requires careful selection and rearrangement of a combination of basic aesthetic communication elements used to attract attention, maintain same and induce purchase decisions from the intended audience. This study concludes that the aesthetic communication elements in malaria drugs advertisements do consciously or unconsciously induce public reaction, patronage and usage of the drug by members of the public. That is to say, public acceptance or rejection of a particular malaria may to a large extent depend on the attractiveness and pleasantness of advertisement of such drug. This is why frantic efforts must be made to select appropriate aesthetic communication components in an advertorial in line with the ethics, culture, beliefs, values and more of a particular people.

Recommendations

1. Advertisers should carefully select appropriate aesthetic communication components in an advertorial in line with the ethics, culture, beliefs, values and more of a particular people.

2. Pharmaceutical companies must understand that advertising can make or mar their products in the eyes of the beholder. As such they must exercise due care in what they approve as ads for their products to avoid incurable losses.

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