

# Marketing Cultures: Television Advertising In The United States Versus Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research is to investigate the differences and similarities that exist in television advertising in Nigeria and the United States. As a dual national I have been exposed to advertisements in both countries and this research seeks to find comparative themes as a basis of better understanding the two cultures.*

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Growing up in Nigeria in the 80's and 90's, television was a luxury item. Back then only a few families could afford one, and it was a symbol of prestige to own a color television set. Nigerian TV was limited in terms of content, partly due to the epileptic power situation and the existence of only a few non-subscription based broadcast networks. The few private media organizations available were focused on radio broadcasting and the print media, leaving the government with a strong monopoly on television. Broadcasting hours were limited to six hours a day, usually in the evening. Since the broadcast stations were owned by the government, content was one-sided, favoring the government views on all political and economic issues. With the limited time frame, individuals were left with the choice of watching state controlled programming, and television sets were mainly used for watching home videos. Although the power problems remain, TV content has greatly diversified in Nigeria over the last 10 years, as the government has relaxed its monopoly, spurring a growth in private investments in broadcast TV. Competition among cable providers has significantly reduced the subscription cost, creating an array of choices for the Nigerian consumer. Technological advancements as well have ushered in an era of information freedom that has led to less pro-government content, and citizen's criticism of government policies.

Advances in technology have reshaped culture and changed the way we see the world. These advances, particularly the media, serve as a conduit which enables an individual to study and to better understand a particular culture. Television is one of the major inventions in the past century, and has created an arena for information sharing, entertainment and persuasion. The average United States (U.S.) citizen spends about 15% of their waking lives watching television (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As television has evolved, so has the need for media organizations to look for revenue sources to keep their networks economically viable. Advertisement has become a major revenue generator for these broadcasting organizations. Television advertisement, as seen today, consists of brief ad spots, which range in length from 15-30 seconds, to several minutes long, including program length-infomercials.

The author's exposure to advertisements in both Nigeria and the United States has afforded him the unique perspective to compare these cultures and to better understand the differences and similarities that exist in these two societies using the cultural lens of their television advertisements. Throughout this

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research, the author will be adopting a textual analysis framework as a means of exploring the two cultures.

After the literature review on the subject of television advertisements in Nigeria and the U.S., the author will discuss certain themes that emerge in Nigerian TV ads, followed by a comparison of how these themes are presented in U.S. ads. Finally, the author will introduce and analyze a case study of ads in Nigeria and the United States. It is the author's hope that this textual analysis will reveal how certain themes represented in advertisements in each country show the cultural similarities that exist between them.

### ***Nigeria in Context***

Nigeria is a country on the western part of the African continent. It shares a land border with the Republic of Benin to the west, Chad and Cameroun to the east and Niger to the north. Its southern coast lies on the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean (CIA, 2010). The country has a rich ethnic diversity, with more than 250 different ethnic groups--Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba being the more prominent--and the Nigerian people speak 521 languages (CIA, 2010). After years of gradually expanding its influence in the Nigerian territory, the British Government formally colonized Nigeria in 1914 and by default; English became the country's official language. Nigeria became an independent nation on October 1, 1960 (State Department, 2010). However, since some Nigerians are not formally educated, a special dialect known as "brokin English" or "pidgin English" has gained popularity over recent decades. This form of English is understood and spoken by all the 250 ethnic groups in the country (Ihemere, 2006). Nigeria is evenly divided along religious lines, with Muslims predominantly found in the north and Christians in the south.

Nigeria has a developing economy; the third largest in Africa and one of the fastest growing in the world. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a 2006 estimate of 140,000,000. Nigeria is the eighth most populous country in the world and the most populous country where the majority of the population is Black (World Bank, 2008).

### ***Relationship between Nigeria and the United States***

In sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria is the United State's largest trading partner supplying the U.S. with a fifth of its oil imports. Nigeria has the seventh largest trade surplus with the U.S. of any country worldwide; it's the 50<sup>th</sup> largest export market for U.S. goods, and the 14<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of goods to the U.S. The United States is also Nigeria's largest foreign investor (State Department, 2010).

An understanding of the economic relationship that exists between these countries is relevant because Nigeria is a fast growing economy; a lot of U.S. companies are exploring this emerging market, leading to an explosion in demand for American products. As a result, American-styled advertising is being adopted and replicated in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

Shrikhande (2003) wrote that people watching television are bombarded and influenced with images and slogans through advertisements. People memorize slogans and absorb images without questioning them, more importantly; people do it without thinking (Shrikhande, 2003).

This ability of advertisers to influence viewers can be partially explained by Cultivation Theory. Cultivation Theory is the effect of the quantity of consumerist content that television programming and advertising has (Speck, Roy 2008). Cultivation Theory deals with the idea that television has the ability to define an individual's perceptions of reality and the world around them (Gebner, Gross, Morgan & Signorelli, 1980). The television set has become a significant part of the family since most members of the family tend to spend most of their time on it (Gebner, 1980). It can be argued based on Gebner's findings that an average American household that watches eight hours of television a day are heavily exposed to television stereotypes (Shrikhande, 2003).

According to Shrinkhade (2003), it is safe to conclude that stereotypes exist and are part of our lives, and people act according to these stereotypes because they are considered socially acceptable. Hence, if an individual was to think of an advertisement for a household cleaner, a female was most likely used in the making of the ad (Shrinkhade, 2003). These stereotypes are ubiquitous in television ads, especially when women are portrayed in subordinate or submissive roles (Masse' & Rosenblum, 1998). Shrikhande (2003) wrote that previous research has shown that ads which stereotype women can form unconscious and unthinking attitudes about women and their abilities in society (as cited by Geis, Brown, Jennings & Porter, 1984). Women are often depicted in television advertising as a reward for men who chose the right product. As a result, advertising has a clear gender bias and the practice of tailoring ads to audiences based on their gender is so pervasive that it becomes obvious to us at an early age (Craig, 1993). These stereotypes eventually become accepted in our culture.

Ahmed (1996) wrote that research has indicated that advertising, as a form of social communication, is influenced by various elements of the originating culture (as cited by Frith & Wesson, 1991; Mueller, 1987; Rice & Lu, 1988; Tansey et al., 1990; Hong et al., 1987); and that cultural values may determine the differential meanings that people derive from advertising messages (as cited by Cundiff & Hilger, 1984; Hornick, 1980; McCracken, 1986; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1983).

Elements of culture could be in the form of traditional values, family values, national pride or humor. Ahmed (1996) explained that humorous advertising in diverse cultures shares certain universal cognitive structures underlying the message. A review of four hundred and sixty two ads by University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire professors showed that humor ranked number one in being able to get to the target market (Marketing Weekly News, 2010). Also, a study done by the New Scientist magazine suggests that Nigerians are the happiest people in the world (BBC, 2003). This shows that humor is a common theme evident in both cultures. As a result, commercial advertising tends to reflect certain underlying values and lifestyles of a particular culture (Pollay, 1987). These values are displayed in Nigerian ads where tribal elders are seen endorsing certain alcoholic drinks and making claims that these alcohols are part of the Nigerian culture (This Day, 2005). This also plays out in U.S. ads where Nintendo markets its Wii games by reflecting American values of family time (Kesten, 2007).

In the following analysis of ads, the author will rely on the following points as a means of comparison: Women in advertising, humor, tradition, and national pride as selling positions.

### **Television Advertising In Nigeria**

In the U.S. there is a continuous battle for advertisers to draw TV audiences into watching commercials and enticing the consumers to act upon these ads. In Nigeria, however, the average consumer does not face the same advertising clutter (Olamide, 2009). Most Nigerians live on less than two dollars per day; this demands that funds are largely spent on life necessities rather than on cable subscriptions (UNICEF, 2007).

#### ***Women and Advertising***

<sup>1</sup>Since Nigeria has a largely patriarchal society, women traditionally are relegated to doing household chores, such as shopping. As a result, several companies that market household products design their marketing campaigns to target women. For example, in a Unilever ad marketing Omo detergent, a young girl who wants to go to a friend's party asks her mom for a new dress. The mother declines the girl's request for a new dress, and instead uses Omo detergent to wash the girl's clothes, making them appear new. The ad suggests that mothers do not have to keep buying new clothes for their kids when they have a detergent that can make the clothes look clean and bright as new. As a result of ads like this, Unilever has been able to dominate the laundry soap market for decades. Pz Cussons also targets Nigerian women with its Imperial Leather soap brand. In one ad, a woman is shown going through different activities at work, and then comes home to do the household chores. At the end, she sits in a tub to take a bath using Imperial Leather. This ad suggests that Imperial Leather is an escape for the working

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woman who has long day and needs to relax. Another example, a Nestle ad, a young woman who is about to get married talks with her mom who advises her to use Maggi Cube to spice up every meal she cooks for her future husband. Nestle uses ads like this to reinforce brand loyalty among its consumers, which helps the company command a substantial percent of the food condiments market in Nigeria. As these examples illustrate, Nigerian ads targeted towards women seek ways to espouse the benefits of a particular product to the Nigerian woman, be it in helping improve her culinary skills as portrayed in the Nestle ad or in helping the woman relax as depicted in the Imperial Leather soap ad.

### ***Humor as a Selling Position***

<sup>1</sup>Ads in the '80s and '90s in Nigeria relied heavily on humor. Indigenous and multinational companies were trying to establish their brands and create loyalty by using humor as the selling point. Pz Cussons, a British company, utilized well-known comedians to appeal across all market segments in selling their products. In one such ad, Chief Zebrudiah, a popular comedian from the 80's, markets Elephant Blue Detergent, claiming that the detergent has a special ingredient formulated to get all dirty stains out. The humor being the comedian's struggle in using the correct grammar to express himself, as he resorts to a mismatch of "Brokin" and Queens English. Ads like this show how significant a role humor plays in Nigeria, since most of the citizenry were familiar with the comedians used in the ads; individuals were willing to try out the products that were marketed.

### ***Tradition as a Selling Position***

Tradition also plays a significant role in how companies advertise. In Nigeria, many companies market their products as being entrenched in the country's tradition (This Day, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>Traditions play an important role in Nigerian Society, though westernization has affected the urban areas. However, in the rural areas, traditional beliefs are strongly held and Western ideology has not succeeded in eroding these belief systems. Every occasion, no matter how minute, calls for libations to be made as a respect to the gods and ancestors. This involves the pouring of hard liquor on the ground while incantations are made eulogizing the dead. Prominent chiefs and tribal leaders have endorsed the product as being the original prayer drink (This Day, 2005). In an ad for Seaman Aromatic Schnapps, a chieftaincy coronation is taking place in which the village elders are offered a different brand of liquor to make libations. The elders reject the alcohol demanding for Seaman's Aromatic Schnapps. They even threaten to halt the ceremony. When Seaman's Aromatic Schnapps is brought to the elders, they are all smiles and the ceremony continues. As a result of ads, which rely on African tradition as a selling position, Seaman has been able to establish itself as a successful brand (New York Times, 1987). As illustrated in the ad, tradition is an important facet of Nigerian culture, strategically marketing a product as a part of the Nigerian tradition has resulted in successful brands in the country.

### ***National Pride as a Selling Position***

Themes of nationality are visible in Nigerian ads, as a lot of them tend to emphasize the country's position as one of the most developed in West Africa (Economy Watch, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>National pride is especially used in the banking and oil industries as a selling position. Union Bank, one of the premier banks in the country, ran an ad that points to its being the "true Nigerian bank" as it is Nigerian owned and has been in the country for over 100 years offering financial products and services to generations of Nigerians. The ad also sets out the bank's goal of adding more services to its product lines to meet the financial needs of Nigerians.

In a United Bank for Africa (UBA) ad, themes used revolve around nationality and globalization. The ad establishes itself as being headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria, a financial hub in West Africa. UBA

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global focus is also shown in the ad, as the bank has established branches in New York, London, and Paris as well as branches in 16 African countries.

Themes of nationality are utilized in these ads as a selling position. Union Bank relies on the fact that it is Nigerian owned and has remained stable through the decades as a selling position. UBA on the other hand not only tries to establish itself as a Nigerian bank but also as a global leader. The ad seems to show that although Nigeria might be a developing country, its banking industry is on par with other bigger players in the global financial world.

### ***Nigerian Ads***

Advertising in Nigeria employs different selling positions. However, humor, tradition, national pride and gender advertising as it relates to women seems to be the revolving themes in Nigerian ads. The author will be making a comparison of these themes as they relate to American ads.

### **Television Advertisement In The United States**

In U.S. society, media is the bloodstream that drives commerce. From the government to small business owners, media plays a key role in relaying messages about business and aiding in brand recognition. People watching television are bombarded with images and slogans through advertisements (Shrikhande, 2003). According to Nielsen Media research, the average American household watches 8 hours and 18 minutes of television in a 24 hour period (Los Angeles Times, 2008). By the time the average American dies, he or she will have spent an estimated one and a half years watching TV commercials (Sutherland, Sylvester, 2000).

### ***Women in the United States Advertising***

A Corona beer ad shows a man and woman sitting in lounge chairs on a beach, with two Corona bottles between them. Another female in a bikini walks seductively in front of the couple, and the male stares at the bikini clad female, prompting the woman he is sitting with to spray lime in his eye. A Reebok ad marketing their Easy Tone line of tennis shoes shows different women each performing different activities wearing their Easy tone tennis shoes. However, the camera focuses on the women's posteriors and not on their feet, with a voiceover saying "better legs, and a better butt in every step." Zimmerman & Dahlberg (2008) assert that scantily clad females have been featured in American advertisement since 1980. Hence, female sexuality is heavily utilized in selling U.S. products (Baranski & Batt, 2003).

Television ads over the years have portrayed women in traditional stereotypical roles, such as housewives. TV ads have also portrayed women as being dependent on men who regard them as sexual objects--sexual objects being defined as women who have no role in the commercial, but to appear as an item of decoration (Shrikhande, 2003).

In both Nigerian and American advertising, women are made to play narrowly defined roles in ads. While Nigerian advertising relies on women playing submissive roles as a housewife and mother, as in the Omo ads, the Corona U.S. ad targets a male demographic, using female sexuality as a selling point. The Maggi Cube ad claims that it could help the Nigerian woman by making their food more delicious for their husband, and the Reebok ad uses sexual themes to show that the shoes help the woman look more desirable to men.

Although it takes a different form in expressing itself in each society, gender stereotypes and patriarchal ideology seems to be the underlying systems that exist in both Nigeria and America. The American ad relies on sexual imagery to show the male as the dominant character, the Nigerian ad utilizes traditional notions to express female submissiveness to the males.

### ***Humor as a Selling Position***

A Snickers ad shows a group of men playing football, and one of the men seems to be dragging along slowing the game down, which leads to the guy being told that he is playing the game like Betty White. The guy is offered a Snickers bar which energizes him. The ad tag line is "You're not you, when you're hungry." The humor in the ad is that Betty White plays the character of the slow guy dragging the

game down. An E\*Trade ad shows a baby describing his experience on how easy it is to use E\*Trade to buy and trade a stock. The ad tag line is “get more value at E\*Trade.” The humor in the ad is the talking baby dishing out advice to adults on investing in the stock market.

The Snickers ad campaign featuring Betty White successfully reached the targeted demographic ranking number one on *USA Today's* ad meter (USA Today, 2010). University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire marketing professors reviewed 462 ads that aired from 2000-2009 and showed that humor ranked as number one in the top five variables that makes an ad successful (Marketing Weekly News, 2010).

A comparison of advertising in both Nigeria and the U.S. shows that humor is used frequently as a selling point in television advertising. Public figures that either appeal to a wide range of demographics or the specific demographic targeted by advertisers are frequently used in both Nigeria and the United States. This shows that humorous advertising in these diverse cultures shares certain universal cognitive structures underlying the message (Ahmed, 1996).

### ***Tradition as a Selling Position***

A Nintendo Wii ad shows two Asian males approaching a family and introducing the Wii game to them. The family plays the game together. Another Wii spot shows a father teaching his son how to play a game on the Wii. In a different Wii ad, a family is shown playing Wii Sports and Wii Fit games. By focusing on family values through its Wii ads, Nintendo has been able to widen the video game demographic (Seattle Times, 2007). With the tagline, “we would like to play,” Nintendo tried to represent traditional American values of sharing, family togetherness, and having a fun time in its advertisements (New Level Gaming, 2009).

A comparison of advertising in Nigeria and America shows that advertising is in fact influenced by elements of the culture such as tradition or family values. The Seaman's ad is reflective of the traditional beliefs of the Nigerian society and it shows how Seaman is involved in that belief structure while the Nintendo ads are marketed based on American values of family time and togetherness.

### ***National Pride as a Selling Position***

A General Motors (GM) ad features the CEO Ed Whitacre trying to change the American public perception of the company. The CEO mentions that GM has been able to better manage its debt, gotten American workers back to the factory, restructured its operating system, its new GM vehicles have consistently beaten its rival, and that GM's goal is to regain the public trust by being the best American owned car brand.

Nigerian and American ads share a similarity when using nationality as a selling position. The U.S. ad seeks to regain trust by reminding the public that it is a U.S. owned company and has served the American public for generations. The Nigerian Union bank ad uses similar themes, the ad claims that the bank has been around for generations and is the premier bank in the country; while the UBA ad seeks to level the playing field by showing that the Nigerian banking industry is a major player in the financial world.

These ads show how national pride is utilized by organizations in both countries as a selling point to draw attention to their product or service.

### **Case Studies And Comparison Of Ads In The United States**

While making comparisons in the previous paragraphs, the author has discussed different products in general terms. However, it is important to use products that are closely related in both countries to better explain the cultural similarities that exist between them. The product and service utilized in this next study are Apple iPhone 4 in the U.S. and MTN, a telephone network in Nigeria. It is pertinent to use a central theme in making this comparison. For instance if the focus of this case study is on national pride and tradition, ads for Pale Lager in the U.S. and Champion beer in Nigeria would make a good comparison. Other ads can also be used to explore the different themes that exist in the two countries. However, for the purpose of this research, this case study will focus on a central theme of women and advertising.

### ***United States***

An Apple ad marketing the *iPhone 4* opens to a male utilizing the facetime feature on his *iPhone 4* while conversing with his significant other. She asks if he has a minute to spare and if he is alone. He responds that he is alone, and she goes on to tell him that the ‘thing’ they have both been working on has succeeded and that he is going to be a dad.

### ***Nigeria***

An ad marketing MTN, a phone network in Nigeria opens to a man in his thirties sitting on a bed in a hotel room unpacking his luggage and at the same time dialing a number on his cell phone. The spot cuts to a lady in her pajamas standing by her bed. She stares at her ringing phone, smiles, picks it up and tells the man that their song is playing on the radio. She turns the phone speaker feature on, asks her partner to pretend she is with him and dance with her, the two begin dancing over the phone and the spot fades.

### ***Ad Analysis and Comparison***

The Nigerian and the American ads share the same characteristic. The iPhone 4 face time feature is marketed as enabling consumers that have the same phone to be able to see each other. MTN network availability is marketed as providing the means for the consumers to keep in touch with their loved ones.

Shirikhande (2003) stated that female’s are often portrayed in ads in a traditional role of being submissive to males. Browne (1998) conducted a study on sex role stereotyping in television commercials and concluded that males are given dominant roles while females played the submissive character.

This is evident in the above case study. The Nigerian and American ad each employ gender stereotyping as a selling position. The female in the Nigerian ad is shown as being lonely and vulnerable, while patiently waiting for the male to call. The female in the American ad is depicted as shy, dependent and unsure of what the reaction of the male will be. The male in the Nigerian ad is shown as being strong, macho and confident while the male in the American ad is portrayed as being in control of the situation. Each ad, in its unique way, speaks about the Nigerian and American culture where females are traditionally expected to be subservient to males.

The Cultivation Theory applies here, as it demonstrates how it feeds stereotyping. As individuals are exposed to the same consistent television content, they tend to share the same common values (Gebner et al, 1980). Ads that portray women as a reward for men (Craig, 1993) feed the stereotype that women are lesser subjects in comparison to men. In both ads, the intended message of love and commitment is depicted but the underlying tones of gender stereotype remains.

Also of significance is the technological divide illustrated in the ads. The American ad shows Apple’s technological advancement as evident in the iPhone 4 face time feature, the Nigerian ad depends on an emotional pull by displaying a heterosexual couple’s commitment to one another. The different selling position shows the U.S. as being a tech savvy culture, while Nigeria is portrayed as a culture that places a value on commitment.

An analysis of the ads in this case study, shows the cultural similarities represented in both countries as it relates to gender roles. Although presented in different frameworks, gender stereotyping is a common theme that runs in both cultures. This patriarchal theme is not limited to this case study. Other ads mentioned in this research strengthen this argument, the Corona beer ad stereotypes females, showing women as a reward to men, the Nigerian Omo, Maggi cube, and Imperial Leather ads stereotypes women as only being housewives who cater to the needs of men.

### **Conclusion**

In this research, the author has made a comparison between TV advertising in the U.S. and Nigeria. It’s interesting to note that despite the differences in geographical location, culture and racial make-up that exist between Nigeria and the U.S., the analysis of the TV advertising in the two countries shows similarities in both countries cultural grounding. Ads utilized in this research revealed that

patriarchy albeit being expressed differently, plays an active role in Nigeria and American culture. Whereas one is displayed as the subjugation and placement of women into household roles, the other actively relies on using female sexuality as a means of control. The ads also reflected the traditional values that are expressed in both cultures, as the U.S. culture places a high value on strong family relationships; the Nigerian culture stresses the importance of traditional beliefs. Humor is also seen as a common theme both country share in their ads which gives an insight to its importance in both cultures.

Since Nigeria has a huge market for American made products, American styled advertising has been gradually adopted, this is perhaps due to the fact that more American educated Nigerian professionals are returning back home and are more inclined to use the same advertising techniques in their business operations as they have experienced in the United States. The usage of western styled ad techniques could be seen as a sign of progress that Nigeria a developing country is gradually getting at par with marketing and advertising concepts used in the west. It could also be seen as a potential problem, that although Nigeria shares certain elements of culture with the U.S., it remains a conservative nation and the usage of American styled advertising could lead to the adoption of American consumerist culture which could lead to social and economic problems for the country.



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