

Audience Assessment of the Use of Models in Billboard Advertising: A Study of Consumers of Amstel Malt in Onitsha, Nigeria

Leo O.N. Edegoh

(Corresponding Author)

Department of Mass Communication
Anambra State University, PMB 02, Uli,
Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: godloveslon@yahoo.com

Ifeyinwa Maureen Nwanolue

Department of Public Relations, Federal Polytechnic
PMB 21, Oko, Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: Maurfeiyi@yahoo.com

Nkiru Comfort Ezeh

Department of Mass Communication, Madonna University
PMB 407, Okija, Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: ezehnkiru_ct@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The study investigated audience assessment of the use of models in billboard advertising and used consumers of Amstel malt in Onitsha, Nigeria as case study. It argues that the use of attractive models in billboard advertising sometimes creates distraction as audience focus their attention on the models rather than the advertised product. Therefore, the study aimed at determining whether models in billboard advertising attract more attention to themselves than the product advertised; finding out what arouses the interest of audience most in billboard advertising; determining what influences action of audience in billboard advertising; and assessing what audience recall most in billboard advertising. The work was anchored on agenda setting theory, the uses and gratifications theory of the media, and the psychodynamic theory. It used 373 sample size drawn purposively from the population of Amstel malt consumers in Onitsha. The work adopted survey research method and used questionnaire as data gathering instrument. Findings showed that models in billboard advertising attract more attention to themselves than to products advertised and that audience recall models in billboard advertising more than the product advertised. It was therefore, concluded that audience attention was more on models used in billboard advertising. Based on this, it was recommended that billboard advertising should use models sparingly and concentrate on making the product or service advertised more conspicuous on billboard to ensure easy recall.

Keywords: Models, Billboard, Advertising, Audience, Assessment and Consumers.

Introduction and Conceptual Clarification

Advertising is a paid form of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor with a view to disseminate information concerning an idea, product or service (Puranik, 2011). The message which is presented or disseminated is called advertisement. In the present day marketing activities, hardly is there any business in the modern world which does not advertise (Asemah, Edegoh and Ojih, 2013). However, the form of advertisement differs from business to business.

Advertising is the structured and composed non personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products, services and ideas, by identified sponsors, through various mass media (Arens 2008, p.7). This definition is closely related to Dominick's (2007, p.321) definition which asserts that advertising is any form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services, usually paid for, by identified sponsor. Asemah, Edegoh and Ojih (2013) state that advertising is a controlled, identifiable and persuasive communication that is presented via the mass media and designed to develop product demand and to create a favourable image for a company. The major purpose of advertisings is to promote the sales of a product or service and also, to inform the masses about the highlights of the product or the service feature. Advertising is an efficient means of communicating to the world, the value of the product or the service.

Advertising is any communication that is paid for, identified by a sponsor, directed at a target audience through the various mass media like radio, television, billboard, newspaper, magazine, with the aim of creating awareness about goods and services. The essence of advertising is to make known in order to sell or buy goods and services. The power of advertising depends on the use of creative and planning skills to achieve its objectives. Advertising is the process of persuading potential customers to buy products or promote its services (Kenechukwu, Asemah and Edegeoh, 2013). It is the branch of marketing that deals with communicating to customers information about products, brands, and services. Advertising is a form of communication used to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to take some action with respect to products ideas and services (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012a). Advertising commends ideas, goods and services to potential consumers through various traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, the new media and outdoor media such as billboard.

Outdoor advertising is a medium of advertising which is used to reinforce the recall of brand names and pay offs (Okoro, 1998, p.158). It is one of the channels of mass communication. It is a medium usually used for dissemination of information or advertising message to a mass audience. The outdoor media have been described severally as "out-of-home media" and as the "traffic or position" media since they depend on people and/or vehicular traffic passing by their locations to deliver their advertising message (Amaechi, 1991, p.77). The billboard as a type of outdoor advertising is asserting itself as a powerful medium for the introduction of new products, with its appeal to all classes of consumers and its high visual impact. Billboard advertising generally belongs to point of purchase (POP). It is one of the most effective outdoor advertising techniques that are used in business everyday. This explains why Russell and Lane (1962, p.50) cited in Mbadi (2005, p.65) successfully claim that "billboard survived the decline of the Roman Empire to become the decorative art of Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries".

In contemporary Nigerian society, the use of models has been predominant and widespread in billboard advertising which has brought tremendous change especially on sales of products. Belch and Belch (2001) opine that companies spend huge sums of money to have models appear in their advertisement. This is because of the attractive force in drawing attention of people to product, sustaining their interest and giving the product a personality. A model is a

person employed to display, advertise and promote commercial products (notably fashion clothing) or to serve as a subject of works of arts (Wikipedia).

Celebrity branding refers to branding in which a celebrity becomes a brand ambassador and uses his or her status to promote a product, service or charity, and sometimes also appears as promotional model (Wikipedia). The source defines a promotional model as a model hired to drive consumer demand for a product, service, brand or concept by directly interacting with potential customers. The most important characteristic of the vast majority of promotional models is that typically they tend to be attractive in physical appearance. Their major function is provision of information about the product or service and make it appealing to customers (Wikipedia). This study, therefore is an examination of audience assessment of the use of models in billboard advertising, using Amstel malt consumers in Onitsha the commercial nerve centre of South East Nigeria, as a case study.

Statement of Problem

The most important role of advertising is to sell product, service, idea, etc. This is also the major aim of billboard advertising. Although billboard advertising could appear fascinating, the crux of the matter lies in its effectiveness in capturing and sustaining attention and in making consumers take required action by buying the product, idea, opinion or service. In spite of the many benefits inherent in the use of attractive models in billboard advertising there is a raging argument regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of these attractive models to pass across the intended message (and nothing more) to the buyers.

The problem associated with the use of attractive models in billboard advertising is many and varied. First, the commuter has very little time to note and appreciate the advertisement before his vehicle speeds past. Second, there exists a problem as to whether the audiences are attracted to the models or to the product they endorse, and whether the audience eventually recall the product advertised or the face of model used. This is a problem because the audience needs to be attracted to and recall the product before he or she can take the desired action. This study therefore attempts to ascertain whether the use of attractive models in billboard advertising is a strength or weakness; whether the models attract attention to themselves or to the product they endorse.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are put forward to provide the required direction to the study:

- i. To find out whether models in billboard advertising attract more attention to themselves than product advertised.
- ii. To determine what arouses the interest of the audience most in billboard advertising.
- iii. To assess what influences action of audience in billboard advertising
- iv. To ascertain what the audience recall most in billboard advertising.

Research Questions

The following questions are posed in pursuant of the study's objectives:

- i. Do models in billboard advertising attract more attention themselves or to the product advertised?
- ii. What arouses the interest of audience most in billboard advertising?
- iii. What influences action of audience most in billboard advertising?
- iv. Does audience recall models in billboard advertising more than product advertised?

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the uses and gratification theory, agenda setting theory, and the psychodynamic theory. Uses and gratifications theory is one of the theories of mass communication that call attention to what people do with the media rather than what the media do to people. It was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. The theory assumes that people influence the effects that mass media have on them (Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso, 2008, p.71). The assumption of the theory is that people are not just passive receivers of media messages but actively influence the message effects. This is because people selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain mass media messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc. Thus, Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008, p.71) rightly assert that there are as many reasons for using the media as there are media users. Uses and gratifications theory holds that media consumers have a free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them.

The relevance of the theory to the study cannot be overemphasized because it perceives recipients of media offerings as actively influencing the effect process, since they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain media messages.

Agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973 (Asemah, 2011, p.176). The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listened to or watched in different mass media (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012b). The media make us to think about certain issues: they make us to think that certain issues are more important than others in our society. According to Wimmer and Dominic (2000) agenda setting theory of mass media proposes that public agenda or what kinds of things people talk about, think or worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicize.

The theory is relevant to the study in that the media set agenda for the public to follow and have the capacity to influence what people think about. Thus, models (particularly in billboard advertising) are used to persuade potential buyers of a product to accept that product by initiating buying action.

The psychodynamic theory, according to Folarin (2002, p.74), was formulated by Sigmund Freud in 1900. The theory is based on individual differences perspectives. It holds that for a persuasive message to be effective or considered effective, it must succeed in altering the psychological functioning of the recipient(s) in such a way that he or she or they will respond overtly to the model of behaviour suggested by the communicator. The theory provides basic explanation of how thoughts and experiences end up in the unconscious mind. In line with this thinking, Wogu (2008, p.178) citing White (1964) asserts that a communicator can influence attitude or behaviour only when he is able to convey information that may be utilized by members of his audience to satisfy their needs. From the advertiser's angle, the intention of using models in billboard advertising is to draw attention of the audience or consumers to the product being advertised and influence their attitude and behaviour in order to buy the product.

The adequacy of this theory in explaining the study is not in doubt because the audience have different perception of what they are exposed to and will selectively pick what they like, what attracts and what arouses their interest. In this case what the audience perceives becomes a problem: is it the model used in billboard advertising or the product being advertised?

Review of Literature

Billboard is a branch of outdoor media, but in most cases, some scholars who distinguish it from outdoor media see it as a form of advertising (Anna, 2006, p.13). Billboard is usually targeted at passers-by, drivers, those in moving vehicle and pedestrian traffic. They are characterized by attractive models images and catchy slogans that attract attention. Duncan (2013) writes:

Billboards take two forms. The most common definition of a billboard is an outdoor sign or poster you usually see on freeways, highways and streets. A billboard is also an announcement of a sponsor or sponsors at the beginning, middle or end of a radio or television broadcast. A billboard that is an outdoor sign or poster is also known as outdoor advertising.

Billboard advertising is the use of large signs along roadways to advertise a wide range of products, services and causes (Wise GEEK, 2013). The source further asserts:

In general, the signs used in the roadside advertising campaigns must be over a certain size in order to be truly referred to as a billboard. In general, the sign must be large enough for a driver or passenger in a vehicle to be able to clearly read the lettering while navigating the vehicle along a road.

Billboards are large format advertising displays intended for viewing from extended distance generally more than 50 feet. Billboard displays include but are not limited to: bulletins, junior posters, posters and spectaculars. The major types of billboard include: digital billboards, mobile billboards, inflatable billboards, multipurpose billboards, billboard bicycle, mechanical billboards and dimensional billboards.

Ariyibi –Oke (2007) aptly captures the importance of billboard advertising when he asserts “another great benefit of outdoor advertising is that it does not interrupt consumers in any way. There is no obnoxious sound, smell or any type of negative attention grabber. Billboard got noticed because of their messages, bright bold colour and creative graphics”.

In his own contribution, Okoro (1998, p.77) states that the importance of billboard includes: high visual impact, low cost, high product visibility, high frequency, and immediate message delivery. Another important contribution which is hard to ignore is that of Simcoe (2008, p.19). According to the author “one of the most effective ways to strengthen your company’s brand recognition is billboard advertising. If placed in the right location, billboard advertising can increase traffic to your business, familiarize customers with your brand/product/service, and attract new customers who make impulse buying”.

Anna (2006) affirms that “billboards are here to help us and be tangible reminder of what we have become and what we have achieved. Not only do they improve the visual quality of the area where they are placed, they also serve as beautiful reminders of our past and the future”. Still on the importance of billboard advertising, Plumely (2000, p.13) states that “one most important advantages of billboard over other advertising media is that it has the potential to capture the attention of the audience on the go”.

Unlike the media offerings of the electronic media which are transient, billboard messages are permanent. One can expose himself to them over and over again and this makes their message(s) indelible and easily recalled by the audience (Okoro, 1998).

Sugget (2013) identifies six basic rules of billboard advertising. These include: (i) For billboards, six words or less is ideal (2) Get noticed but don't make your billboards a huge distraction (3) This is not the time for direct response (4) Billboards should be smart but not too clever (5) The more billboards, the better (6) Don't say it, show it.

Ad news (2006) reported that "billboard advertising succeeds in bringing people to compare themselves and their situations with what is being presented on the billboard". The study reveals that physical attractiveness of models has tremendous effect on how men and women see, evaluate and purchase certain products.

In most advertisements, the models used are mainly beautiful women. Gustafson, Popovich and Thomson (1999) observe that physical attractiveness is a very sensitive issue for many women. Some research studies indicate that physical attractiveness is associated with female's global self esteem. Bers and Rodin (1986, p.772) found that the self-concepts of many female adolescents stem primarily from the sense of their physical attractiveness. In advertising, the use of attractive models is believed to be effective in increasing sales. However, this view is not always consistent with marketing literature. Bower and Stacy (2001, p.10) note the positive effects of employing attractive advertising spokesperson, resulting in advertising effectiveness. However, Bower (2001) notes that "attractive models could decrease advertising effectiveness because it deflates the self-image of potential customers when they compare themselves to these models". Richins (1991) reported that when sufficient negative effect is generated as a consequence of comparison with beautiful models, evaluation of both the model as a spokesperson and the product may be affected adversely because of model derogation. The comparison with these beautiful models may lead to negative feelings such as frustration and anxiety (Richins, 1991). The author found in a study that half of the young female respondents reported that they compared themselves frequently with models in clothing, personal care, and cosmetics; and approximately one third reported that these advertisements made them feel dissatisfied with their appearance.

Wallace (2003) study suggests that billboard advertising can have adverse influence on driver's attention. According to the study, the use of attractive models in billboard advertising may be more distracting and can lead to stalling while driving, which results in disobeying traffic rules. On the basis of message delivery by outdoor (billboard), Wallace (2003) says that billboard messages are usually short and brief, and this, at times, does not allow for proper understanding of the message. Articulating views on disadvantages of billboard advertising, Ozoh (1998, p. 71) writes:

The greatest problem encountered by advertisers and their agencies with regards to billboard is site monitoring. Monitoring is usually difficult and so when posters get torn or washed out, it takes a while to discover and report. This is because the sites are usually scattered around very far geographical locations. The posters used on the billboards are usually tedious to print and post especially when the sites to be covered are too many.

In his contribution, Wells (2006) argues that because consumers pass on premise signs or outdoor board very quickly and are often distracted, the message could fail to be seen or have any impact. He further contends that outdoor advertising is a very passive medium, which means that if billboard is some distance away from the road, it can be very easy to miss.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research method. Survey research method focuses on people, the vital facts of people; their beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations and behaviour (Asemah,

Gujbawu, Ekhareafu and Okpanachi, 2013, p.109). The sample size for the study was 373 respondents purposively selected from Onitsha, the commercial nerve centre of Anambra State, Nigeria. The study used structured questionnaire as data gathering instrument. Data obtained was presented in frequency distribution tables. Analysis of research questions were done using simple percentages.

Presentation of Findings

Table 1: Return rate of questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Returned and found usable	363	97.3
Not usable	6	1.6
Not returned	4	1.1
Total distributed	373	100

Table one shows that the return rate is 97.3 (n = 363) while the mortality rate is 2.7% (n = 10). The return rate is higher than the mortality rate. The mortality rate of 2.7% does not affect the study because it is insignificant compared with the return rate of 97.3%. Thus the copies were considered good enough to represent the population. The presentation and analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire was based on the three hundred and sixty-three (363) copies that were returned and found usable.

Research Question One: Do models in billboard advertising attract more attention to themselves than product advertised?

Table 2: Provision of information on whether models attract more attention to themselves than product advertised

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	265	73
No	60	16.5
Don't know	38	10.5
Total	363	100

The table above reveals that 73% (n=265) of the respondents agreed that models attract more attention to themselves than the product advertised, 16.5% (n=60) respondents disagreed while 10.5% (n = 38) did not know whether models attract more attention to themselves or not. The import of data on table two is that respondents are of the view that models used in billboard advertising attract more attention to themselves than the product advertised.

Research Question Two: What arouses the interest of audience most in billboard advertising?

Table 3: Provision of information on what arouses interest of prospect in billboard advertising

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Models	149	41
Product	94	26
Colour	42	12
Message	78	21
Total	363	100

Table three shows that 41% (n=149) of the respondents were attracted to billboard because of models used, 26% (n=94) were interested in the product advertised, 12% (n=42) were attracted by the colour, while 21% (n=78) were interested in the advertising message. From the information above, there is discernible evidence that what arouses the interest of audience most in billboard advertising is the model used.

Research Question Three: What influences action of audience most in billboard advertising?

Table 4: Provision of information on what influence action of audience

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Attractive models used	84	23
Persuasive message	60	17
Product commendation	69	19
The entire advertisement	150	41
Total	363	100

The table above reveals the factors that influence audience action most in billboard Advertising. One hundred and fifty respondents (41%) were influenced by the whole advertisement in billboard, 69 respondents (or 19%) were influenced by product commendation (packaging), 60 respondents (17%) were influenced by billboard's persuasive message while 84 respondents (23%) were influenced by attractive models used. Data on table four clearly shows that the whole advertisement exerts more influence on the prospects than each of the elements used.

Research Question Four: Does audience recall models in billboard advertising more than the product advertised?

Table 5: Provision of information on whether the audience recall model in billboard advertising more than the product advertised

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	221	61
No	78	21
Don't know	64	18

Total	363	100
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Data on table five shows that 61% of the respondents (n=221) said yes, meaning that they recall the model used in billboard advertising more than the product advertised, 21% (n=78) respondents disagreed, saying that they recall the product more than the model used and 18% (n=64) respondents were undecided. Data on this table bears evidence that prospects recall more attractive models used in billboard advertising than they recall the product advertised. The inevitable conclusion is that models in billboard advertisement attract attention to themselves rather than to the product advertised.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study show that models used in billboard advertising attract more attention to themselves than the product advertised. Some people who expose themselves to billboard advertisement, sometimes only watch and admire the beautiful celebrities or models used. Some people, particularly women, go further by comparing the models used in billboard advertisement to themselves in terms of physical attractiveness, beauty etc. In line with this thinking, Bower (2001) states that attractive models could decrease advertising effectiveness because it deflated the self-image of potential customers when they compare themselves to these models. This finding also confirms Richin's (1991) study which investigated whether the negative effect stemming from comparisons with attractive models may have a negative impact on advertising effectiveness. He found that sufficient negative effect is generated as a consequence of comparison with beautiful models and that evaluation of both the model as a spokesperson and the product may be affected adversely because of model derogation. Richins (1991) study further reveals that half of the young female respondents studied reported that they compared themselves frequently with models in clothing, personal care, and cosmetics and approximately one third reported that these advertisements made them feel dissatisfied with their appearance. So, comparison with the beautiful models used in advertising may lead to negative feeling such as frustration and anxiety (Richins, 1991).

The study found that what arouse the interest of audience most in billboard advertisement is models used. This finding is in tandem with the basic argument of the uses and gratifications theory - media users have several uses into which they put media offerings and there are several gratifications they derive in doing so. The finding also confirms Blumler and Kate's assertion cited in Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) that there are as many reasons for using the media, as there are many users.

Findings of the study further showed that what influences action of the audience most in billboard advertisement is the entire advertisement put together. This finding reinforces the argument of the system theory – the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Although each of the elements in billboard advertisement model, product, message, colour, etc., could exert considerable influence on the audience, no doubt, these entire put together has greater potential to generate the required influence. The finding is in line with Blumely (2000) observation that one most important advantage of billboard over other advertising media is that it has the potential to capture the attention of the audience on the go.

One other important finding of the study is that audience recalls models in billboard advertisement more than the advertised product. Following the processes of recall, the finding is justified. One can only recall what he has paid attention to, and he can only pay attention to what he has perceived. Perception itself is a product of exposure. So, for somebody to recall media message, he has to be exposed to it, he has to perceive it, and he has to attend to it before recall takes place. Sine most of the audience who expose themselves to billboard

advertising perceive more of the attractive models used, pay more attention to them, they will obviously recall the models more, following the law of simple logic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main purpose of billboard advertising is to create awareness of the existence of products, services, etc, particularly newly introduced goods or products, and new brand(s) of existing products. Billboards influence consumers' decision and increase sales. When positioned in strategic locations, billboards can command very high vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Billboards, from the findings of this study, create attraction not to the products they advertise but to the models who endorse the products. Audience recalls the models more than the advertised product because the beautiful celebrities who often serve as models are the centre of attraction in billboard advertising. Therefore, the use of beautiful and attractive models in billboard advertising is a distraction to the product advertised. This inevitable conclusion does not rule out completely the use of models in product advertising. Companies and organizations using attractive models in their billboard advertising should think twice.

Based on the findings of the study, we put forward the following recommendations:

- i. Advertisers should de-emphasize heavy use of attractive models. This is to avoid distracting the attention of prospects from the product. Emphasis should be on moderate and naturally looking models.
- ii. Attractive female models should be sparingly used in advertisement that features masculine products. This is to ensure that the attention of the target consumers will be on the product, not on the model.
- iii. There is great need for improvement in quality of advertising copy to change the present trend of making the models much more conspicuous than the product advertised. The copy should be such that the advertised product should be very bold and better imbued graphically than the models.
- iv. The use of other types of endorsement should be explored by advertising agencies and billboard creators rather than constant use of beautiful and attractive models. Animation and similar types could be explored.

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