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Contents

1	Age at First-Birth and usage of Family Planning Methods: A Comparative Analysis of the Adolescent and Older Mothers in Osun State, Nigeria. John Lekan Oyefara	1-29
2	The Aftermath of Fuel Subsidy Removal and Conflict Management in Nigeria Anyim, Francis C. and Ekwoaba, Joy O.	30-51
3	Chattels of Their Families: Trafficking of Young Women as Gender Violence Franca Attah	52-66
4	Quality of Audience Participative Discourse in Online Newspapers in Nigeria: A case study of <i>Premium Times</i> Fatima I. Abubakre	67- 80
5	Motivation and Employees' Performance in the Public and Private Sectors in Nigeria Anyim, Chukwudi Francis, Chidi, Odogwu Christopher, & Badejo, Adedehinbo Ekundayo	81-95
6	Deceptive Advertising and Powerlessness of the Consumers: Analysis of <i>Omo</i> and Ariel Detergent Advertisements LambeKayode Mustapha, Aminat Sheriff Owolabi, & Maryam Lasisi Mustapha	96-115
7	Employees' Involvement in Strategic Planning Practices and Effect on Performance of Selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos, Nigeria Oladele, Patrick Olajide, Olayiwola, Peter Olatunji, & Arogundade, Kingsley Kayode	116-132
8	Development and Validation of Indigenous Cannabis use Disorder Scale in Lagos Nigeria Owoeye, Olugbenga Adekile, & Ayenibiowo, Kehinde. O.	133-146
9	Power Enacting Devices by Television Outfits: A Study of the First Suicide Bombing in Nigeria. Ugoala, Bibian	147-166
10	Factors Affecting Due Process Compliance in the Procurement of Public Goods in Federal Tertiary Institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria Solomon Bamidele Olusegun, Olusegun Emmanuel Akinsiku, & James Olalekan Akinbode	167-182
11	Effects of Examination Malpractice on Nigeria's Education Pius E. Adejoh, & Omobowale Ayokunle	183-201
12	Standardization of Theory of Mind Task Battery (TOMTB) in Lagos State Adedeji, Olufolakemi. Victoria, Ayenibiowo, Kehinde & Agiobu-kemmer, Ibinabo	202-215

DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING AND POWERLESSNESS OF THE CONSUMERS: ANALYSIS OF OMO AND ARIEL DETERGENT ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Advertising provides important marketing information that contributes to the survival of the economy globally. Since products and services' prospects often have limited knowledge about market offerings, advertising provides ample information that guides consumers in making informed and rational decisions. Being a form of commercial speech, advertising enjoys some degrees of liberty granted other forms of expressions. The neck-breaking competition that characterized contemporary market milieus, however, creates survival instincts that oftentimes make advertisers to transcend ethical boundary. Hence, deceptive advertising, which is antithesis of socially responsible marketing communication, remains a polemical issue among scholars, advertisers, consumers and regulatory agencies. Giving the functional equivalence of many products and seemingly hyperbolic nature of selling messages, this study, using simulation theory, examines the implications of perceived deception in Omo and Ariel detergents advertisements on consumers' purchase and use of the detergents. Findings reveal that consumers realise the existence of deceptive advertising, perceive it as a norm, but seemingly feel powerless about it.

Keywords: Deceptive advertising, Social responsibility, Simulation Theory, Omo, Ariel, Detergent

INTRODUCTION

Advertising, as an integral part of social and economic systems of every society, plays a significant role in the success of any business by promoting its offerings and helping to achieve commercial goals (Ali, Raza, Izhar, Shoaib, Amin, Adnan & Mehmood, 2011). While advertising help manufacturers to boost sales and increase profits (O'Donohoe, 1995), advertisers increasingly explore it to market their products as consumers rely on it for information to potentiate their buying decisions (Aren, 2004; Aren, Weigold & Arens, 2011; Mohan, 2001). The manufacturers' profit-maximization objectives and centrality of advertisements to consumers' buying decision prompt many advertisers to intentionally and unintentionally use deception of all kinds. The issue of competition among manufacturers also fuels the use of deception in all marketing and promotional activities. The functional equivalence of many competing brands in the face of blurring Unique Selling Proposition (USP) may also become important trigger fueling the use of deceptive techniques. Although deception has become a common phenomenon in all aspects of humans' life, the trust reposed on advertising messages by hordes of consumers make it a fundamental ethical and social responsibility issue (Chaouachi & Rached, 2012; Spurgeon, 2008).

Deception has been considered as one of the major ethical issues in advertising (Hyman, Tansey & Clarc, 1994), attracting attention of scholars, government, non-governmental organisations, etc., given the enormous negative effects on financial and health condition of the consumers as well as the social costs (Boush, Friestad & Wright, 2009). While deceptive advertising may pay-off in the short run through its pyrrhic positive impacts on sales volume (Chaouachi & Rached, 2012:1) the long term effects on the advertisers is always enormous. Besides, deceptive advertising wrought significant negative impact on the entirety of marketing communication system and by extension the health of the market system. Citing Ivan Preston, Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011:67) state that "if a product does not live up to its advertisement(s), dissatisfaction occurs and in the long term that is as harmful to the advertiser as to the buyer". In essence, deception jeopardises marketers' long run goal at the expense of short run benefits. Hence, trust, which is central to advertiser-consumer relationships, must be upheld at all time.

While there is consensus among scholars, advertisers, consumers and advertising regulators that deceptive advertising is illegal, unethical, deteriorating and unfair (Ali, Raza, Izhar, Shoaib, Amin, Adnan & Mehmood, 2011; Dominick, 2011; Mohan, 2001), it is still very rare to see any advertisement devoid of deception, particularly among food and cosmetics advertisements (Csorba, 2010;

Csorba&Petre, 2007, Kamran, 2010). The essence of this study is to find out the patterns of deception in selected detergent advertisements and examine their perceptions and effects on the consumers. Informed by limited, if not absence of, studies on the nexus between deceptive advertisement and consumers perceptions and responses, this study poses the following questions in order to contribute to discourses on phenomenon of deceptive advertising:

1. What are the patterns of deception in the advertisements of *Omo* and Ariel detergents?
2. Do consumers perceived deception in *Omo* and Ariel detergent advertisements?
3. Does deceptive advertising influence consumers' disposition toward the products?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this section is to present the state of affairs in deceptive advertising scholarship and research with a view to connect the current research to previous studies and establish the significance of this work. Therefore, this section aptly describes simulation theory, the theoretical perspective that undergirds deceptive advertising, and provide succinct explications of other important concepts such as advertising and reality, deceptive and misleading advertising, advertising and social responsibility, and ethical advertising.

Simulation Theory

Simulation theory was propounded by Jean Baudrillard. The theory states that what we see in the media today is exaggerated and false representation of reality. Using the concept of simulacra, this French critical theorist of note surmised that contemporary mediated reality is anchored on the principle of hyperreal model that produces a more-real-than-real representation (Baudrillard, 1994). While simulation theory addresses the entirety of mediated communication in the postmodern era, its significance to deceptive and misleading advertising cannot be overemphasized. Durham and Kellner (2006: 448), for instance, offer that "simulations in the postmodern world replace and become reality, so [much] that women undergo extensive cosmetic surgery to emulate the airbrushed and digitally manipulated models in the pages of magazines..."

Fit into the contemporary advertising texts of prints and electronic media, it is apparent that the manipulation of images, which has significant implications for audience perceptions is rooted in the triumph of the medium over the message, style over substance, and form over content (Durham & Kellner, 2006; Sullivan, 2007). Because this theory posits that most mediated texts, including

advertisements, are manipulative and exaggerated, it is safe to link technological manipulation of advertisement texts that produce deceptive messaging to the demand of postmodernity. While deceptive advertising is not a recent phenomenon, technological advancement of the postmodern era has offered it a platform that facilitate seamless interaction between the real and fantasy, fake and original.

A lot of the images and pictures we see in the media have been edited and are hyper-real. In his view, Baudrillard (1994) states that the media culture-television, radio, magazine, billboard, and the Internet- serves as the lens through which the society perceive the world. These media, being channels through which advertisements reach the consumers do not only relay information about products and services but also influence consumers to acquire goods and services not for their real needs but because of the desires that are increasingly defined by commercials and commercialized images, thus, moving consumers a step behind reality.

Advertising and Reality

Reality and the ways to comprehend it have been construed by researchers of differential communities and paradigms. However, media studies scholars distinguish between objective reality, which is the original world, and constructed reality, the one represented through media codes and texts (Baran& Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010; Miller, 2005). Being a part and parcel of mediated communication and culture industry, therefore, advertising is seen as potent industry and process of reproducing reality. Vlăduțescu and Teodorescu (2015: 99-100), for instance, posit that “advertising language, expressed in prints, performances and especially in advertising clips, proves to be a kind of concentrated story with the capacity to turn into a significant story. It constructs reality as 'a microcosm, in a similar way to that in which grand narratives used to construct reality as a macrocosm'”. This shows that advertisements connect people to the external world that is out of reach and out of touch to them.

The ever-evolutionary technological advancement and emergence of digital age offer advertising important platform in relation to construction of reality in the contemporary postmodern consciousness. Using *advertainment*, a construct developed from a marriage of reality television (entertainment) and advertisement, Derry (2004: 7) captures the power of advertising to exteriorize the interior and leap the audience to a realm hitherto unfathomable:

As much as advertising privatizes public space (from billboards to shopping malls) it also regularly make public and publicizes private

spaces. Its messages have accustomed us to the idea that we can daily view the intimate lives of strangers, lives that we would not have access to in unmediated experience or at least perhaps not ethically or legally.

More than ever before, images are today manipulated to create illusion and convey messages the exact way the manipulator intend (Sullivan, 2007). Manipulation, according to Sullivan, does not only misrepresent the truth, but also misguides consumers, particularly the uneducated ones, to perceive false statement as reality about the products thus courting injury and harms from a deceptive selling message. More poignantly, Baurdillard (1994) affirms that postmodernity demands critical assessment of reality in order to avoid the pitfall of taking artificiality for reality. In *Reality in Advertising*, a quintessential advertising practitioner, Rosser Reeves (1961), warned that irrespective of the spectacle afforded by technological plain on which advertising thrives, factuality remains the life blood of the enterprise. Describing the law of reality in advertising, this enigmatic advertising guru posits that:

Advertising stimulates sales of a good product and accelerate the destruction of a bad one. To make a claim which the product does not possess merely increases the frequency with which the consumer observes its absence...A campaign that stresses a minuscule differences, which consumer cannot observe, in actual practice, also accelerates the destruction of the product (1961: 54-55)

From the foregoing, it is essential for advertisers to be forthright, ethical and socially responsible in the selling communication. Therefore advertisers can expunge deception from the strategic communication lexicon by priming fact over persuasion, building their campaign on great idea, being contemporaneous in terms of their offerings and advertising strategy, being honest and truthful and standing out from the crowd.

Deceptive and Misleading Advertising

Advertising occupies important juncture in the purchasing decision of individuals, households and industrial concerns. An average individual is exposed to countless commercial messages on daily basis, persuading him/her to respectively buy or enjoy a product or a service. While the chief function of advertising is to inundate consumers with information about goods and services in the market (Callen, 2010; Sutherland, 2008; Vilanilam & Varghese, 2004), some are deceptive and misleading in performing the onerous task (Ali et al., 2011; Bureau of Consumer Protection, 2014). Deceptive advertising, in a nutshell, is the

passing off of good and services, usurpation of goodwill and selling by unfair means, which is actionable in law either initiated by the state or aggrieved by consumer. Besides the ethical incorrectness of deceptive advertising, the practice has serious implications for consumers' finances, lifestyle and, of course, their health as well as general market situations such as competition, increased cost of production and market transaction.

Literally, deceptive advertising is a deliberate and intentional means of creating false information about goods and services just to influence consumer's purchasing decision by persuading them to buy brand name products. The essence of this is obviously, to boost sales which in turn generate more returns for the advertisers. "In their constant quest to attract consumers and associate products with cool or luxurious and hedonistic lifestyles, some advertisers have consistently pushed the boundaries of what is ethically and socially acceptable" (Arens, Weigold & Arens, 2011: 69). In this sense, deceptive advertising is antithesis of ethical and socially responsible advertising.

Citing Gao (2008) Chaouachi and Rached (2012) though submit that deception in advertising is a problematic concept, they argue, through a synthesis of scholastic and jurisprudential perspectives, that deceptive advertising aims at misleading the consumer via false claims, creation of erroneous beliefs and blatant lying, all aimed at swaying the consumers to reasonably think they are making decision they would ordinarily not make if they have full information. Csorba (2010: 143) conceptualises deceptive advertising as "an unfair, misleading and un-truthful advertising. ...Advertisement that misleads or is capable of misleading the public and affects the public's financial capacity, or that harm or is capable to harm the competitors". Besides demonstrating the age-long nature of deceptive advertising, Ali et al.'s (2011) extensive literature review reveals the irresponsibility of deceptive advertising, labelling it as unethical, misleading, ridiculous and insulting to consumer intelligence. Simply put, deception in advertising is a condemnable action due to its violation of the true essence of fair competition. Condemning the use of deception in advertising, Astrachan (2006) asserts that "it is unlawful for an advertiser to make statements which are false or misleading about the nature, characteristics, qualities or geographic origins of it's or a competitor's goods, services or commercial activities".

Amidst the controversies over conceptualisation of deception in advertising, Chaouachi and Rached (2012: 3) offer two typologies of deceptive advertising (explicit, which is obvious from the gap between advert message and product's features, and implicit deception, which tasks consumers due to truthfulness of the

message which however creates erroneous impression). Hence, they proposed that deception in advertising could 1) be observed after exposure to an advertisement, 2) creates beliefs and interpretations about the product or service being advertised that are false. Astrachan (2006) also argues that deception in advertising can come in the form of literal falsehood or implicit falsehood. According to this scholar literal falsehood means that the claim on its face is untrue while a claim that is implicitly a false is literally true, but misleading in some way. The problematic of conceptualising and indexing deception in advertising has equally yielded a number of empirical efforts.

In a replacement of one-dimensional conceptualisation of deception, Chaouachi and Rached (2012) conducted a qualitative exploratory study to produce a multi-item scale to measure perceived deception in advertising. Following their analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted on 42 Tunisians of diversified demographic classifications, they developed a battery of items on a five point Likert scale, which eventually produced two-factor structure from an exploratory factor analysis, namely "perceived veracity" and "ethics", which respectively explained 52.8% and 14.4% variance in measurement of perceived deception in advertising. These measures yielded reliability levels that are in excess of .70 Cronbach's Alpha benchmark.

Ali et al (2011) also explore the relationship between deceptive advertising and purchase of beauty products among Pakistan undergraduate students. Working within 'claim-belief interaction' model of advertising and using correlation and simple linear regression statistics, these researchers found positive and significant correlation between deceptive advertising and buying behaviour. The regression model also found significant impact of deceptive advertising on purchase of beauty products among the students.

Aditya (2001) also develop a conceptual framework for understanding deception in advertising via a social perspective angle and defined deception in marketing as "any act, claim or message that (a) causes at least some consumers acting reasonably to make decisions that they would not otherwise make, (b) leads at least some consumers acting reasonably to believe something about the product, brand or manufacturer that is not verifiably true or (c) has the potential to foster distrust of any kind, general or specific, or in other ways causes an erosion of ethical values deemed desirable in society". These efforts do not only contribute significantly to empirical exploration of deception in advertising, but provide the indicators of socially responsible advertising.

Deception and puffery in advertising

Puffery is a non-evidential claims about a product by the seller, which in Chakraborty and Harbaugh's (2014: 382) words "pulls in some buyers who value product attributes that are talked up or emphasized..." According to Toncar and Fetscherin (2012: 58), puffery is "a term frequently used to denote the exaggerations reasonably to be expected of a seller as to the degree of quality of his product, the truth or falsity of which cannot be precisely determined". This means that puffery entails claims that are difficult, if not impossible, to verify. Puffery can be exemplified by the use of claims such as 'new', 'new and improved', 'great', 'fresh', 'better', 'best', which are acceptable in marketing communication and non-actionable in law (Haan&Berkey, 2006).

In an attempt to attract customers to their products, sellers use various strategies, including 'puffs' to win the *marketing war*. By making broad, vague, exaggerated and general statements that exclude obvious implications about the claims, sellers escape the accusation of deceptive and misleading communication. Fundamentally, what makes puffery seemingly acceptable is that the truth or falsity of the exaggerated claim cannot be precisely determined (Institute of Information Law and Policy, 2009). Being immaterial falsity and subject of *caveat emptor*, marketing communication laws believe that reasonable buyers should exercise due diligence of having product's basic knowledge that could aid their resistance to influence of puffery (Jackson, 2007; Institute of Information Law and Policy, 2009).

Scholars have devoted attention to examining the effects of puffery on product evaluation and use and found mixed results (Chakraborty & Harbaugh, 2014; Toncar&Fetscherin, 2012; Xu & Wyer, 2010). Exploring the influence of puffery on trust of seller, Haan and Berkey (2006), for instance, found that consumers do not trust salespeople who engage in puffery. Toncar and Fetscherin (2012) also examined the effects of visual puffery on product evaluation. They found that visual imagery can be effectively used to make unsubstantiated claims about features and benefits of a product. Chakraborty and Harbaugh's (2014) findings, however, revealed that puffery's effect is not unilateral. According to these scholars, "puffery makes buyers who value the talked-up or featured attribute(s) more willing to buy the product and make buyers who value the other attribute(s) less willing to buy the product" (Chakraborty and Harbaugh, 2014: 383). Xu and Wyer (2010) also submitted that some puffs enhance product evaluation while others diminish evaluation of product's effectiveness.

Being sellers' privilege, puffery allows for the use of exaggeration and

overstatement without incriminating the promoters of the message. Although puffery is not obviously intended to mislead the customers, it could make advertising to be "too appealing to resist resulting in overconsumption or even illegal consumption of the product" (Jackson, 2007: 1). While puffery is not considered deceptive, ethical responsible marketing and advertising are desirable to safeguard the integrity of the market and marketing communication enterprise.

Social responsibility and criticism of advertising

It is the responsibility of media organizations, media practitioners as well as media adjuncts (advertising and public relations agencies) to protect public interest and operate with the larger interest of the society. Being a powerful means of communication that performs other important roles in the social and economic system, the life blood of the media system, a profession providing means of livelihood and a form of art, advertising has important social responsibility to its clients as well as the larger society (Dhar, 2011; Mohan, 2001). According to Aren (2004: 71) "social responsibility means doing what society views as best for the welfare of the people in general or for a specific community of people". It is therefore mandatory for advertising to holistically conduct the business in a way that add values to the entire stakeholders. Rather than solely focusing on the visibility and purchase of the product or service being advertised, advertising should meet the social obligation of satisfying the client as well as those who will be acting according to the dictates of the selling messages.

Viewed from the prism of social responsibility theory, which say that all media entities and practices are expected to perform identified responsibilities in the society, including accepting and fulfilling certain obligations to society (Baran & Davis, 2012; McQuail, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009), advertising fulfills social obligation by creating awareness, educating the target audience, promote businesses, and serve the economic system by mediating the relationship between the buyers and the seller (Arens, 2004; Folarin, 2006; Sutherland, 2008). While scholars agreed that advertising plays key role in the economic, social political and cultural lives of the society, there is also a consensus that, like a double-edge sword, the enterprise can also be dysfunctional. Most of the functional and dysfunctional roles of advertising are always the topic of discussion in many advertising texts under social-cultural and economic impacts of advertising and deception in advertising usually stand out as a fundamental dysfunction (see for example Arens, 2004; Mohan, 2001; Spurgeon, 2008). The abhorrence of deception by advertising regulators world over thus informs the inclusion of dedicated section to deceptive advertising in the advertising codes globally.

While the advertising and most consumers protection codes always demand that marketers and advertisers be truthful and fair in their marketing communications, consumers are equally being warned to carry out due diligence in their response to selling messages. In view of the potential for implicit deception in advertising resulting from various advertising strategies such as oral, written and pictorial misrepresentations, unavailable sale items, bait and switch, 'on sale' advertising, guarantees and warranties, etc., the Bureau of Consumer Protection (2014) advises consumers to conduct due diligence by being extremely careful. To buttress this belief, the Bureau avers that:

Even with the law behind you, the ultimate responsibility to fight dishonest advertising is yours. Do not be swayed by eye-catching statements such as 'fantastic savings', 'prices slashed', or 'lowest prices in town'. There are many grey areas where advertising may exaggerate a product's quality without actually violating the law. In these cases, the only protection is to be a careful consumer.

Since advertising exists to ensure that people are aware of range of products and services in the market, certain standard must be legally and ethically satisfied, particularly giving possible consumers' ignorance about possible exaggerations and frauds (Csorba, 2010). The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (2014) also warned consumers to keep their eyes wide open to protect themselves from phony advertisement claims that come via disguises in prints, bait and switch, credit and financing, among others. It, therefore, behoves advertising regulators to insist on compliance with the code thus forcing advertising practitioners and advertisers to comply with the dictates of socially responsible and ethical advertising.

Ethical Advertising

According to Arens (2004: 71), "ethical advertising means doing what the advertiser and the advertiser's peers believe is morally right in a given situation". Ethical advertising seeks to confer integrity on commercial communication, protect fair competition in the spirit and interest of a free and efficient market and a part and parcel of corporate social responsibility (Graham, 2005). The fact that advertising is not only welcomed in the society but believed to be playing functional role makes adherence to ethical conduct an imperative. In a world that is filled with competing product and services, marketers should not expect advertising to provide the magic wand by neglecting the other elements of the marketing mix. Doing so would only leave advertising to no alternative than resorting to the usage of deceptive techniques. Heeding the words of Reeves (1961) which cautioned advertisers should not think of unique selling proposition

(USP) as what they are putting into an advertisement, but what consumers takes out of an advertisement is a way to staying true to ethical demands of advertising.

The need to hold advertisers and advertising practitioners accountable on honesty of commercials and avoidance of deceptive, misleading and dishonest advertising inform the regulation of advertising. Hence, the codes of practice mandate advertisement to be honest, truthful, decent, and respect the laws and norms of the society (Beaumont, 2005; Callen, 2010; Sutherland, 2008). In Nigeria, the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) is saddled with the responsibility of enforcing standard in the industry. Conscious of the possibility of deceptive and manipulative intents, the council has drawn up codes of ethics with the hope of regulating and disciplining the professions. The Nigerian advertising code provides the following sub-themes as deterrent to the use of deceptive advertisement (APCON, 2012):

- **Honesty:** All advertisement should be so framed as not to abuse the trust of consumers or exploit their lack of experience or knowledge.
- **Product Hype:** Announcers, writers and other editorial personnel shall not engage in product hype or any form of product promotion which employs superlative, unsubstantiated or misleading claims, testimonials or description.
- **Presentation for Approval:** All advertisement except those for public service announcement, goodwill messages, obituaries and vacancies shall be presented for vetting and approval by the Advertising Standards Panel (ASP) before exposure.

Quoting Ivan Preston, Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011) state that the essence of a marketplace lies in the willingness of buyers and sellers to enter commercial transactions. Anything that detracts from the satisfaction of the transaction produces a loss of activity that ultimately hurts both parties.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study was designed to be qualitative in nature using in-depth interview method of data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted on 20 married women within Ilorin metropolis. Respondents in this study are between the age of 21 years old and 48 years old. To ensure that respondents are familiar with the advertisements and also purchase the two detergents, purposively sampling technique was used. Ilorin was selected because of the diverse cultural and ethnic orientations of the people that co-exist in the town. Married women, being deciders in the purchase of most household products, particularly consumables, are mostly the only target of the two detergents' advertisements.

This explains the focusing of this study only on married women. For data collection, the researchers went to two famous markets in Ilorin (Yoruba Road in the GwRA and *OjaTuntun* in the suburb) where varieties of detergents are sold. At the point of purchase, 10 respondents were selected from each of the two markets.

Prior each interview, respondents were briefed on the objectives of the study, the need to be truthful and the fact that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality. These afforded the respondents the opportunity to speak their minds on the subject matter of the study. Besides the preliminary questions that explore frequency and channel of exposure to the selected detergent advertisements, other questions were asked to unmask the relationship between the detergents' advertisements and consumers' perception and usage. At the end, data collected were thematically analysed to establish convergence of viewpoints, which eventually helped in answering the research questions posed.

FINDINGS

Deception in Omo and Ariel Detergent Advertisements

This section succinctly captures the theme of the messages being used in the commercials of the two detergents under investigation. Generally, the common theme in the commercials of the two detergents was 'magical wash' - The notion that the detergents remove dirt and stains with minimal, if any, effort. Each of the detergents, however, used different plots to pass the 'magical wash' messages across. This overview thus provides the basis for answering the research question one, which queries the patterns of deception in the detergents' advertisements.

The *Omo* Advertisements

There are two popular *Omo* detergent advertisements: *It's Her First Garden* and *I will Get It*. In *It's Her First Garden*, a little girl had a garden she nurtured with a view to use the flowers therein as decoration on her mum's upcoming birthday. In the process of nurturing the planted flowers, she always have her hands soaked in the soil and very dirty, and then rubbed the hands on her white garment. Upon sighting the dirty garment the mother, rather than scold her, gently washed the dirt straight away with *Omo* detergent. The garment comes out refreshingly cleaned like a newly bought one, even with mild wash and gentle scrubbing. The absence of a single stain in a heavily dirty garment is a testimony to the 'power' of *Omo* for a great, cleaner wash.

The second advertisement, *I Will Get It*, was that of four young boys playing football. While playing, the ball fell into a pit full of mud. Three out of the first boys refused to get the ball out of fear that their mum will scold them if their

clothes get dirty, but the last boy offered to bring the ball out by jumping into the mud to pick the ball. The Mum was initially furious on sighting his son in dirty clothes. But as she remembered *Omo* detergent, she smiled with the hope to get the dirt off without much scrubbing. The slogan of the two advertisements is *Dirt is good*.

Ariel Advertisements:

The first one was that of a restaurant where people eat without consciousness and have the white table clothes thoroughly stained. The instantaneous removal of the stains and resulting better-fragranced table cloth attract more customer to the restaurant, thanks to Ariel detergent.

The second advertisement was that of competitions among married women. A very long white piece of cloth was seriously messed up with different dirt. The cloth was cut into five pieces and shared among five women to wash. Four of the women were given unnamed detergents while one woman was given Ariel detergent. With a very hard scrubbing and stressed facial expression, all aimed at having the stains removed from the cloth, the stains remain. On the contrary, the woman with Ariel detergent, smiling graciously, gently and effortlessly scrubbed off the stains to a perfectly clean one.

Findings from the Interviews

Since the respondents are purposively selected based on their exposure to the two advertisements and their experience in the consumption of the products, straight forward questions were asked with the opportunity for the participants to respond exactly how they feel.

Exposure to Advertisements

In terms of frequency of exposure to *Omo* and Ariel advertisements, 12 watched the advertisements very often, five often and three once in a while. This shows that the informants are familiar with the advertisements of the two selected detergents. With regards to channels of exposure to the detergents' commercials, 16 informants claimed to have knowledge of the products through various forms of mediated communication, particularly television, while four informants claimed they got the awareness through interpersonal communication, particularly from those who have mediated knowledge of the detergents under study. This reveals that marketing messages of the detergents could be instrumental to consumers' buying behaviour.

Relationship between Advertisements and Product Reality

While most advertisements promised 'magical wash', informants offered that the

detergents, in reality, are far from what is being promised. According to the respondents, the detergents cannot be used alone to get the results that are claimed in the advertisements. Other washing products like *Jik* and *Hypo* are needed. Similarly, it was revealed that without soaking and thorough scrubbing as against 'gentle stroke' featured in the advertisement, the actual and desired results will not be achieved. Although both detergents were perceived as having the potential for cleaner wash, substantial majority of the informants believes that none can return extremely dirty linen to a state of newness usually promised by advertisements. However, *Omo* advertisements were said to be more close to reality than that of Ariel. This may have been the reason why 12 of the informants prefer *Omo* to Ariel detergent.

When questioned on their usage of the two detergents, 17 informants claimed to have used both detergents interchangeably. Two informants however claimed that they are absolutely loyal to *Omo* while only one informant is absolutely loyal to Ariel. In terms of absolute preference, 12 informants preferred *Omo* to Ariel as 5 others prefer Ariel to *Omo*.

Variation in Features and Consumers' Choice

Informants are less keen about variations in features promoted in the advertisement and 'real life' features of the products. According to most of the informants, all products fall foul of exaggerating the actual performance in the advertisements and detergent advertisements cannot be exception to what has seemingly assumed the status of the rule. Hence, their choice of the detergent is basically influenced by the following factors in hierarchical order: availability, reliability, effectiveness, advertisement and offer of promo.

When asked why price was not an important consideration, majority of the informants believe that the price variation of the two brand is insignificant. Hence, price is not always a major factor in their choice of detergent to purchase. Besides both detergents packaged economic sizes that fit the pockets of consumers of different socio-economic classes. This shows that the entire elements of the marketing mix holistically contribute to success of any product in the market.

Detergent Advertisements and Social Responsibility

Informants in this study are dichotomized in terms of their perceptions of ethical and socially responsible advertisements, with special reference to the detergents selected in this study. According to 11 informants, the advertisements in question are doing what they ought to do- call attention to the product. It is left for the consumers to go a step further to confirm the authenticity of the claims. Other nine

informant, however, differ in their judgment of the advertisements along ethical and social responsibility continuum. According to them, advertisements need not to explore people's ignorance. To them, advertisements should be able to make altruism a cornerstone in order to promote the integrity of marketing communication

DISCUSSION

This study explored the effects of deceptive advertising on consumers' perception and use of two detergents- *Omo* and *Ariel*, with specific interest on how televised advertisements of the two detergents alter the believability of the claims, choice of the detergents and consideration of social responsibility stance of the advertisements. Using purposive sampling technique and interview method, the study elicited data from 20 informants at the points of purchase of the detergents in two Ilorin metropolitan markets.

From the findings, substantial number of the informants had great exposure to the advertisements of the selected detergents that claimed 'magical wash' potential. Noteworthy is informants' belief that most advertisements inject some degree/elements of deception into their claims. The belief that advertisements are hardly free of deception informs their decisions to choose a product with minimal deceptive and misleading claims. In essence, informants believe that a product with minimal variation or disparity between advertised features and real features will succeed than a product with hyperbolic advertised physical and functional features that glaringly differ with its real features.

Besides advertising variable, this study confirmed the importance of other variables in the marketing mix, particularly the product and place components. Little attention is placed on the price consideration. This is not to say that price does not matter, but it means that price will be insignificant, particularly if the differential is minimal among competing products. The production of economy sizes that allow every segment of the market to partake of the purchase according to their socio-economic level may also be an important factor why price consideration was downplayed.

Informants, however, differ in their perceptions of ethical and socially responsible stance of deceptive advertising, claiming, on the one hand, that 'buyer beware' concept be heeded. Other respondents, however, believe that advertisement should live up to the expectation of fair trade and healthy market competition which should be based on altruism. In all, deceptive advertising is perceived negatively by informants in this study, even if they still purchase the products in question. Informants claim that the products with the least deceptive advertising

will carry the day- a case of the best devil among the devils.

CONCLUSION

Advertising as a marketing communication tool does not only aim at creating awareness but to also attract new consumers, maintain the existing ones and sustain them all. In the process, the creative departments in charge of creating novel advertisements use different strategies sometimes, with little consideration of advertising laws and ethics. The violation of these laws and ethics does not only affect the advertisers, but also the consumers to a large extent.

This study reveal consumers' consciousness about deception in advertising and, to some extent, powerlessness in the face of misleading advertising. This makes it impossible to avoid buying a product with misleading marketing communication, with serious implications for fairness, objectivity and truthfulness expected of commercial communication as with other forms of expression. In addition, it was found that marketers need to be ethical and socially responsible in their commercial communication, since a horde of uninformed citizenry relies on professional marketing communication hue like advertising. The limited effort invested in processing imagery communication calls for caution on the part of advertisers as it requires cognitive complexity to decipher between the real and hyperreal.

Since sincerity is tangentially connected to believability of commercial communication, all the stakeholders in the advertising system need to play gatekeeping role in order to prevent 'tyranny of the advertisers', a situation where the advertisers exploit the powerlessness of the consumers through deceptive, manipulative and misleading advertising. Therefore, advertising regulators need to enforce the codes to the letter to ensure strict adherence of advertisement to ethical and socially responsible dictates. Also, marketers generally need to conduct their affairs in accordance to the dictates of fair competition and free market system. Finally, consumers should imbibe the doctrine of *Caveat Emptor* to prevent being swayed by alluring but dubious offerings from commercial communications.

Although this study raises fundamental issues relating to the consequences of deceptive advertising, it suffers from some important considerations. First, the study addresses the phenomenon of deceptive advertising from a monolithic angle (detergent), a holistic evaluation of influence of deceptive advertising on the marketing system needs to be empirically documented. This will help provide an elaborate state of affairs that offers a broad social impacts of advertising and their implication for the market system as a whole.

Second, the restriction of the study to Ilorin, the capital city of a civil-service state of Kwara, where economic activity is moderate, may have informed informants' perceptions of and powerlessness about deceptive advertising. Extending a study of this nature to economic hubs such as Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Enugu, among others, where consumers are likely to be cognitively complex, may offer different insights. Similarly, extending the demographics of respondents, by bringing in respondents with divergent backgrounds as well as increasing the number of the informants interviewed, can also contribute to a bigger picture of deceptive advertising phenomenon.

Third, while the qualitative design and in-depth interview method of data collection are suitable for exploratory study of this nature, they restrict external validity of the findings. Further studies could use triangulation design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods which will provide robust data that can facilitate extensive generalization of the findings. In addition, in-depth interview of staffers regulatory agencies such as APCON, NAFDAC, Consumer Protection Council, etc. as well as staffers of advertising agencies that prepare the advertisements could help crystallise the creative strategies used and the position of law on the advertisements. Irrespective of the limitations of this study, an important outcome is that consumers though perceive deception in advertising, they seemingly see it as inconsequential to the extent that it is not too bogus. The greatest implication of this is the institutionalization of 'tyranny of advertisers', which has a long-term deleterious consequence for responsible marketing communications and, by extension, the entirety of free market enterprise.

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