

# A Thematic Analysis of Advertisement in the Telecommunication Industry

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## ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research was to determine the types of appeals used in telecommunication advertisement, explain how the themes and appeals used in the advertisement were presented, and see how it could attract subscribers despite the challenges in the industry. Qualitative content analysis method was used to provide a thematic analysis of the messages contained in numbers of selected advertisements shown on YouTube, social media, and television stations in Nigeria. The findings show that the advertisements adopt emotional (love, celebrity appearance, music, comedy, humor, drama) and rational appeal to persuade the subscribers. Moreover, the themes of the advertisements focus on accomplishment and improve service regarding call charges, network coverage, network quality, and customer service. It further shows that these strategies employed by the telecommunication industry are capable of influencing the choice of the subscribers in the Nigerian market. The research recommends and concludes that companies should consistently engage the appeals used with more emphasis on the emotional appeal to retain their size of the market.

**Keywords:** themes, appeals, advertisement, telecommunication

## INTRODUCTION

With the exclusion of one of the big fours in the Nigeria telecommunication business environment, eyes and ears are all alerts especially among the tides of a low economy which is currently sponging the news of heavy need to survive the economic downturn. They believe there is a need to make continuous relevance. Mehmood and Masood (2016) pointed out that advertisement was derived from the Latin word “*advertere*” which meant to turn the mind towards. Advertising practices in Nigeria have taken a different tide, from the early days of using town criers to inform the market about goods and services to a fast-growing industry by employing television, radio, and social media to disseminate information to the market

(Bardi, 2010). Advertising emanates a lot of benefits in different industries which cannot be overemphasized and in the telecommunication industry. Adi (2015) stated that the importance of telecommunication went well beyond facilitating business activities and interaction to making a substantial contribution to the national incomes, as well as engendering many diverse and novel job opportunities. He further emphasized that the telecommunication industry was a key area where the level of competition was critical to the overall development of the industry as well as its contributions to national wellbeing. This suggests that advertising has a strong influence in the decision-making process.

According to Internet World Stats (2017), 49,6% of the world population have access to the internet.

27,7% of people in Africa have approximately 9,3% of internet users. This shows that the industry is uprising and needs consistent reminders about the product to ensure patronage. This can be adhered majorly through advertisement. In addition, support to this sector from government and customers must be continuous in all ramifications because it is evident that there are contribution and impact from the operators in this sector (Olugbenro, 2014).

Bardi (2010) buttressed that although advertising had grown over the years, it was still faced with challenges. One of the challenges faced by the advertising industry in Nigeria is the poor economy. It reflects in the magnitude of advertisement, but it has a low response to the usage as the customers tend to claim the hike in price to solve the problems they have. This is done with the insight that low protonates will increase the company publicity, but with the aid of other checked variables, it cannot be realized.

According to NAN (2014), the operators' feedback as the continuation of poor services as social problems such as willful damage to telecommunication infrastructure and epileptic power supply are still lingering in the country. An example can be related during the recent economic crisis in Nigeria, where most of the mobile networks experience challenges in service delivery. This makes advertising fairly ineffective and misleading because the services portrayed in the advertisements do not align with what the customers experience. Hence, on this premise, due to the challenges faced by the industries, this research seeks to analyze previous advertisements and how it affects the target audience to determine if that method of delivering company's message is effective or ineffective, and to see which appeal and theme are more effective.

The research examines the various themes and types of appeals employed in some selected advertisements. It is to ascertain whether they help in consumers' choice and usage of the network. The research provides answers to these specific research questions. First, it is to find out what the types of appeals are used in telecommunication advertisements. Second, it is to see what the dominant themes are drawn from the selected advertisements. Last, it is to explain how the themes and appeals are used in the selected advertisements.

It is believed that advertising is as old as a man. This is why it has been an important institution of the society. Broadbent (2001) as cited in Olalekan, Babatunde, and Ishola (2015) defined advertising as a paid communication to more than one person and was intended to inform or change behavior. According to Nwankwo, Aboh, Obi, Agu, and Sydney-Agbor (2013), companies often hope that their advertisement which delivers a message about company's product and services, people will purchase it. It is usually the case because the advertisement is a kind of persuasive communication.

Similarly, Terkan (2014) indicated that advertising was to inform and remind consumers of

products or services, and persuasion was its second most important function. This means that advertising takes two forms, namely informative and persuasive through mass or new media to convince consumers to make a purchase decision. This is why Mary Hepner as cited in Chand (2013) points out that advertisement stimulates competition.

According to Nichifor (2014), advertising is based on a range of theories and explanatory models. He further stated that these models and theories explained how advertising messages were developed, how it affected the consumers' behavior and provided new directions and perspectives of development of the advertising practice. To this effect, there are various theories of advertising. Those are AIDA model, DAGMAR model, and Lavidge & Steiners Hierarchy of Effects model.

According to Karlsson (2007), the creation of the DAGMAR model can be traced back to Rusell Colley who prepared a report for the Association of National Advertisers which was titled "defining advertising goals for measured advertising". It explained the name of DAGMAR (Belch & Belch, 1995) and in 1969, it became a book title (Mackay, 2005).

Smith and Taylor (2002) in Karlsson (2007) suggested that DAGMAR was created to encourage measurable objectives for each stage of the communication and did not deal purely with the message. They also stated that focus of DAGMAR was on the levels of understanding that a customer had to possess for the organization and how the outcomes of an advertising campaign could be measured (Belch & Belch, 1995).

Next, Bhasin (2016) agreed that DAGMAR was a concept used in advertising to set goals and objectives. He explained the necessity of setting the goals and objectives to show how return on investment could be achieved with advertising alone. The DAGMAR model was expressed in the four stages as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 DAGMAR MODEL

First, in awareness, the communication tasks involve ensuring that the prospect/consumer to be aware of the organizations' product or brand. The communication has to be specific and measurable. Second, in comprehension, the consumer is aided in understanding the attributes and features of the product and the benefits that will be derived from the product or brand. Third, in conviction, it is based on the consumers' awareness of the product and understanding what the product and what it can do for them. A mental acceptance influences the decision to purchase. Fourth, in action, the consumers have stirred themselves to purchase the product or brand.

It is emphasized that the model can be used for designing an advert, monitoring, and evaluating promotion campaign which is carried out in four steps. Firstly, it is ensuring to do a market survey of the target audience before advertising. It is to ascertain the present levels of target audience's awareness, comprehension, and conviction. Secondly, it is setting SMART objectives for each stage to be achieved by advertising. For example, awareness stage should increase from 30% to 85% when the campaign ends. Thirdly, it is undergoing a follow-up survey to ensure effectiveness in running the campaign by comparing the present level of the stages with the previous level. Last, it is evaluating survey results to see if advertising objectives are met. This can be achieved by asking pertinent questions such as 'are there more sales requests?', 'have sales improved?', 'is the target market aware of the product or brand?', 'what is the demand for the product?'

Certain criticisms are associated with the DAGMAR model according to Belch and Belch (1995). The criticisms are DAGMAR's reliance on the hierarchy of effects model by Lavidge and Steiner with AIDA model. This is because the models describe that consumers operate in a not linear way passing through the stages which are not always the case. Moreover, another criticism made is that the model focuses a lot on strategies. It is noted that the model is overly concerned with a quantitative measurement which discourages advertisers from engaging it.

Moreover, in today's challenging market economy, advertising has become an important element of the society (Francis, 2015). However, Hayko (2010) opined that there were two major polarities concerning advertising. One side believed that advertising did not negatively affect society, the other side believed that advertising was harmful to society.

There are several benefits of advertising. First, it is the increased patronage of company's product or service. It stimulates buying. For example, advertising encourages impulse buying because it registers the product in the minds of the consumers and people apply it later in the future subconsciously by purchasing a product unplanned for. Second, it is the improved or increased customer base. The prospects continue to see the advertisement and slowly become consumers because eventually, they want an experience of the product or service. The continuous reminder of

what they can benefit from the company eventually makes the prospects for consumers increase. Third, it increases brand recognition. Fourth, it encourages feedback from customers. Usually, advertisements contain contact details at the end. Such contact personnel can be called to give feedback on a product or for more clarifications. Fifth, it introduces the new product into the market. Sixth, it creates awareness of company's product or service to a large audience.

Despite the importance of advertising as listed previously, negativities cannot be ignored because the business world keeps evolving. Marketers need to develop steeper strategies that ensure consumer retention. Thus, making advertising becomes more persuasive and aggressive because everyone wants to win.

In this case, there are criticisms and controversy concerning advertising. Some advertisements are unethical and have adverse negative effects on consumers and the society at large. Francis (2015) linked much of the controversy to the fact that advertising was used more as a persuasive communication tool thereby creating a serious impact on the tastes, values and lifestyles of society. According to Chand (2013), despite many benefits derived from advertising, there are criticisms of the society concerning its aims and goals. There are six criticisms. First, advertising increases the cost of the product as the expenses on it form the part of the total cost of the product. Second, it creates artificial demand for the product inducing people to buy the products on impulse. This means that due to the repetition of adverts, the product is stored in the subconscious of the consumer causing a purchase decision. Third, it could be deceptive by devising all means to sell out the product or service. Fourth, advertising sometimes leads to a monopoly in a particular brand of product. For instance, in 2015, MTN was seen to be the dominant player having close to 50% of the subscriber's market in Nigeria (Oladunmoye, 2015). It could have been derived through adequate advertising. Fifth, advertising can be seen to be unethical and objectionable by employing the use of indecent language and pictures to attract customers. It is called as social values. Sixth, advertising wastes natural resources. For example, before a product reaches the end of its life, another product springs out. Thereby, it discards the former when it is still useful.

Moreover, Nwankwo *et al.* (2013) pointed out that advertising appeal was one of the main communicators that a firm used to expose consumers to its products. They added that advertising appeal aimed to influence consumers' view of themselves and how the purchase of the advertised product could be beneficial to them. Moreover, advertising appeal was the driving power to arouse the consumers' desires.

Kotler (2003) in Nwankwo *et al.* (2013) believed that advertising appeal was divided into rational and emotional appeal. Then, Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) in Lin (2011) defined advertising appeal as an application of psychologically motivating power

by the supplier to arouse consumers' desire and action for buying while sending broadcasting signals to change the receivers' concept of the product.

According to Lin (2011), rational appeal focuses on informing the benefit that the consumers gain from the product or service. Meanwhile, emotional appeal focuses on stimulating purchase intention by arousing emotions of the consumer which can be positive such as love, humor, and happiness or negative like fear, and sense of guilt. According to Nwankwo *et al.* (2013), there are various forms of emotional appeals. First, humor appeal is used in an advertisement to achieve instant recall. For example, the benefits of the products are displayed through a joke, and the consumers can still get the message. Second, sex appeal encourages high patronage from consumers because it raises the curiosity of audience to gather more information or make a purchase by ensuring that the product looks interesting and inviting. Third, romance appeal advertises how the use of the product or service can affect the opposite sex and how it would improve the audience's love life and romance. Fourth, adventure appeal gives the consumer an impression that the use of the product will ensure fun and adventure. Fifth, endorsement appeal is a very popular tool used especially in the telecommunication industry where celebrities and well-known personalities represent the company's product. Hence, it increases sales beginning with their fans. Last, play on words refers to the use of catchphrases to convey the message to the target audience.

In revising the advertisement in the telecommunication industry, telecommunication offerings in Nigeria are becoming a commodity. Consumers struggle to perceive a difference between competing offerings. Therefore, communication remains one of the strongest ways for companies to differentiate and break parity (Alade, 2016). Alade (2016) posited that the best way to judge the effectiveness of advertising was to adopt the Kellogg School of Management assessment coined as "ADPLAN". It meant attention, distinction, positioning, linkage, amplification, and net equity.

In Olalekan *et al.* (2015), Russo and Chaxel (2010) believed that the impact of advertising on consumer choice offered two significant advantages. It allowed access to a large selection of naturally occurring stimuli. Next, it offered a natural and observable consequence of successful persuasion namely the advertised product.

Rishante (2014) said that the younger age groups were more influenced by watching television advertisements compared to the older age group. Since young people followed recent trends, telecommunication companies in Nigeria should keep up with the modern trend in television advertising to encourage involvement in product selection form both young and old age group. He emphasized that consumers could be appealed to company's product and switch products when the advertising message was persuasive and reminder-oriented.

Moreover, Saul (2006) suggested that advertisements' had an adverse effect on the consumption pattern of children, especially when these advertisements' contained certain rational and emotional appeals such as celebrity, music, adventure, and bandwagon. The children could relate the product to happiness, a song they liked, a celebrity they admired, and this improved taste and other thematic approaches. Additionally, Okujeni (2009) found the similar situation in the telecommunication industry. He explained that although subscribers were influenced by the advertising messages from the telecommunication industry, there were other factors that determined their choice of product. These factors represented themes and appeals that stimulated purchase intentions. Those were free midnight call or lower tariffs, bonus for recharge, free airtime, promotional offers, discount for calling family and friends, wide network coverage area, and more affordable data plans. He also suggested that for improving performance and continuous patronage from consumers, those factors should be combined perfectly with advertising. Moreover, Olalekan *et al.* (2015) confirmed that the choice of telecommunication services in Nigeria was dependent on the self-service charge, service quality and advertisement in a product. Investment in the advertisement was encouraged to ensure that clear, consistent, and professional information about company's product was delivered to consumers to stimulate purchase decision.

There are three kinds of appeals that an advertisement message can contain. These appeals are a rational, emotional, and moral appeal. According to Mehmood and Masood (2016), emotional appeal specifically, humor significantly influences consumer purchase intention towards Ufone network in Pakistan. This evidently implies that in the telecommunication industry, the use of humor in their advertisements stimulates consumers to make a purchase decision of their products. From their research, results show that there exists a positive relationship between humor in advertising on consumer purchase intention. This is apparent in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria, whereby most advertisements engage the humor appeal with appearances by various celebrities to influence consumers' decision to choose and subsequently make a purchase.

Nwankwo *et al.* (2013) examined the influence of advertising appeals and personality on telecoms consumption preference in Nigeria. They agreed with the findings of Bardi (2010) by showing that there was a positive relationship between emotional responses and consumer buying behavior. It means consumers' purchase behavior is a factor of emotional response. Thereby, showing the use of advertising appeals with more emphasis on the emotional appeal advertising strongly affects consumers' preference of which telecoms to use. Bardi (2010) agreed that popular hypotheses that emotional appeal was more effective than rational appeal. Thus, it explains why most Nigerian telecommunication advertisements engage celebrities and use humor to attract prospective users

and users of the product.

Concerning advertising, Samuel and Olatokun (2014) emphasized that service providers did not accurately provide information about service availability which negated the benefits of advertising and as Saul (2006) pointed out. Accurate information built trust and loyalty of the consumer and saved resources. Their findings explained the other side of advertising where advertising was seen as a deceptive and misleading tool.

According to Ugwu (2014), the successful use of advertising helps to bridge the gap between the various social classes (rich and poor) in the Nigerian society regarding Nigerian Telecommunication Limited (NITEL). Furthermore, it shows that there are influences in the purchasing habit of subscribers when engagement in advertisement is evidently increasing sales. Moreover, personality and gender have a role to play in stimulating purchase behavior as the findings of Bolatito (2012). The result shows that both male and female in different age groups are influenced equally due to the fascinating advertisements in telecommunications. It also emphasizes that when the advertisement is 42,62% which is close to half; the advertisement is preferred and encourages sales volume.

## METHODS

In this research, the qualitative content analysis method is used to examine the messages contained in selected advertisements in the telecommunication industry. This technique is chosen because of its the ability to preserve the knowledge in the analysis by developing communication science using qualitative-interpretative steps of analysis. The researchers visit YouTube channels of the various mobile networks to download the video clips of the adverts to ensure better analysis. These advertisements have been on air for over 11 years (2005, 2011, 2016, and 2017). Some are often shown on Nigerian television stations and social media. The appeals and themes apparent in these selected advertisements are examined. The advertisements are analyzed for type of product, the themes of the adverts, used appeals, and the mode of presentation. Eleven years are chosen because it is believed that at that time, the big telecommunication have already attained noticeable shares in the industry.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The advertisements' analyzed are on various four firms in the telecommunication industry. It will be denoted as Firm A, Firm B, Firm C, and Firm D for better understanding.

### Firm A

Pay off line: Sunrise, Together in Love

Theme: Network Quality, Network Coverage

Creative strategy analysis: this is an analysis of two

selected advertisements from Firm A tagged "Sunrise" and "Together in Love".

"Sunrise" uses romantic appeal by showing two individuals, a man and a woman, in love with each other. The advertisement can be seen in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVNNrIlNBy0>. It depicts that a network has a good service with wide coverage. Although they are far from each other, they can still connect and express their love. As stated by Okujeni (2009), Firm A is shown as a friend, partner, and helper in building relationships even they are separated by distance.

"Together in Love" as seen in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYtxRxcVEZA> utilizes several appeals to attract their target audience. Those are emotional, music, and adventure appeal. There is joy at the birth of a baby with both mother and baby alive. This changes the atmosphere at the hospital. Thus, it affects other friends in other states (Abuja or Kano) through the same music played at the hospital headquarters. This shows that no matter the distance issue, Firm A offers service you can rely on again. This is because the target audience can be in touch with family, friends, and loved ones every time.

### Firm B

Pay off line: Firm B Formula, Firm B Hamma

Theme: Improved Service

Creative strategy analysis: this is an analysis of two selected advertisements from Firm B.

"Firm B Formula" is an advertisement in a drama form in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-q9SsvgTGY>. It makes use of endorsement appeal by having two major celebrities. It also employs humor appeal when it discovers that for every 100-naira plate of food, you are given four plates more. It is like four extra times of every amount of credit purchased. With this, Firm B is seen to offer a more improved service for the target audience's money.

"Firm B Hamma" stars Funke Akindele who is popularly known as Jenifa. It can be seen in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h36FiuP-TM4>. It is a blend of Pidgin English and Yoruba language to attract the target audience. It focuses more on the benefits that the product offers which is a rational appeal. The use of a Nigerian based language creates a perception of a network "for us, by us". Firm B is seen to offer better services compared to its competitors.

### Firm C

Pay off line: Life without Data

Theme: Network Coverage

The advertisement employs endorsement appeal starring celebrity, Gabriel Afolayan, who is stranded on an island as seen in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QOKJ0FGk90>. He tries all different methods to get back to civilization but all fail. He has to start living on the island until he stumbles on

civilization in his quest for food. Alade (2016) rated the advertisement 8.4 over 10. It depicts a good advertisement because it recalls, and conveys the message about data. Moreover, it is distinct and well accepted by the public. Alade (2016) also emphasized that it was the most interesting advertisement in years presented by Firm C. The advertisement portrays that with Firm C, the target audience is assured that they have a “data that works” because without data there is no life.

#### **Firm D**

Pay off line: Cliqlite World

Theme: Easy Learning

The Cliqlite World shows an improved way of the target audience engaging in the studies as shown in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V6uDNhECtE>. It gives information of how to use the website using a lady’s voice which easily connects with the audience. This is an emotional set to attract subscribers to listen and find out what the service is about. Product D depicts that learning can be fun by offering all information and entertainment in one platform which is major way to gain attention from children. As influencers in the family, they can “pull” their parents to subscribe this telecommunication network. Studying is good but carrying all the books can be cumbersome. That is what Cliqlite World manages. It also uses rational appeal by informing the audience about the benefits of the products, especially to youngsters. The presentations adopting the appeals and themes are found in the advertisements by portraying persuasion.

The six advertisements analyzed in the four firms persuade the target audience in similar ways. Explaining the presentations of one firm at a time; Firm A in the two advertisements present a happy mood. In the first advertisement, a couple expresses how much they love each other. Then, in the second advertisement, there are happiness and celebration because of the successful delivery. The best way to celebrate is for everyone to dance together and good music. This emphasizes that love has no bounds and that is how far the Firm network can reach. With that network, there are no boundaries to the network coverage. With this, the target audiences are influenced to choose and use this network.

Advertisements in Firm B depict drama and the use of celebrities to persuade the target audience. The first one presents a group of workers by praising another worker for getting them the best meal at an affordable rate. Then, the scene moves to another employee in the mechanic shop who has four times what they have to eat. This is used to emphasize that the recharge of any amount will be quadrupled (4x). The second one focuses more on the benefits of the Firm’s product and uses a code given by the Firm to win a certain amount.

Advertisement in Firm C emphasizes the phrase “life without data,” and “data that works” in the product presentation. Being lost on the island, the actor has no

life until he finds civilization in an ongoing party he stumbles on. Likewise, with the firm’s product, life will be okay.

Product in Firm D depicts a girl who loves to study and learn but the traditional method makes it hard. It is because books are many, heavy, and difficult. The Cliqlite World is accentuated to be a better solution.

The advertisements analyzed use the common appeals even in other industries. According to Ambekar (2009), rational and emotional appeals consisting of music, celebrity, adventure, and romance form the majority of appeals found in the advertisements analyzed. These appeals are very effective for the youths and children. Meanwhile, for adults and the elderly, rational appeal is more effective, because most adults want to know what they gain. The analysis does not portray which target audience they intend to attract. With the intention to attract a target audience, it ensures sales volume.

The themes used in the advertisement messages show how the advertisers intend to persuade the target audience into making a purchase decision. From the advertisements, terms such as life without data, love, bonus, and others show a connection of the network service providers with quality service, good network coverage, and good call charges. Although, presenting quality service through the advertisements do not guarantee that when the customer uses the particular network service providers, they will experience the same. Some consumers often complain that in some locations, they do not get service to either call out or be called. This is one of the critics of advertising of deception and creating artificial demand to stimulate purchase decision. For instance, claiming that downloading an application for learning will improve education or children’s studies is a wide guess that could be true and untrue until it is rightly verified. Additionally, music is used to present a mood of joy and unity by establishing a connection between the product, happiness, and unity. This implies that with the network service providers, their network quality ensures happiness and it is not attributed to the product in just one firm. This can better explain Pavlov’s learning model that reinforcement makes association stronger, which means that reinforced advertisements by using the appeals and themes as mentioned earlier influence consumer choice.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The researchers examine the advertising appeals and themes found in the telecommunication industry on Nigerian television stations. The themes vary from improved service regarding network quality, network coverage, and call charges. The advertisements employed both emotional and rational appeals to convey the message. These themes and appeals are capable of influencing consumer’s choice of network service provider. The findings show that although

advertising can be deceptive, it has a huge impact on the selection of a network. This is because advertisements inform consumers about the product and the benefits to derive. Besides, companies are encouraged not to be driven by sales volume to curb deceptive advertising. They should understand the target audience so the proper strategy can be developed. For instance, from analyzing the advert, the researchers notice that the consistent use of emotional appeals such as celebrity endorsement, humor, comedy, and love to rational appeals. This shows that the use of emotional appeals in advertising is a good marketing strategy to be adopted in creating a message for the target audience. Research has shown that people will recall and respond to advertisements that portray relatable moods and their favorite celebrities or role models (Nwankwo *et al.*, 2013). In the end, the ideas of the employees should be harnessed to get the required information in making such future advertisement as the need to be committed to the work calls for a connecting cord between the organization and the society (Ibidunni, Salau, Falola, Ayeni, & Obunabor, 2017). Therefore, while there exists the negative side of advertising, companies should consistently engage the used appeals with more emphasis on the emotional appeal to retain their size of the market.

A lot of has been written on consumer's choice and preference and how it is affected by advertisement in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. However, it is less on analyzing the advertisements' and the negative effects on consumers and the society. In addition, there is no a consideration of the type of advertisement expected to be used alongside the current economic trend occurring in the society. A good advertisement could show an option to liberate the current testify. It seems the economic stress has a link on the emotional distress displayed by consumers which the researchers think it will perform. There is a need to inform the consumers about the benefits and dangers of advertisement in the telecommunication industry and companies also so that better actions can be carried out to create more effective advertisements that will increase sales volume.

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