

## **An Evaluation of Dramatic Elements in Selected Television Advertisements in Nigerian Media Space**

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### **Abstract**

This study evaluates the dramatic elements in selected advertisements in Nigerian television media space between April and July, 2022. It has been noticed that a lot of advertisements in Nigerian television media space make use of drama to project their messages. The research methods that were employed in this study are mainly content analysis, observation and literary analysis. The study discovers that almost all advertisements are dramatic, because they make use of one dramatic element or the other to project the advert messages. It is concluded that Nigerian advertising agencies are adepts in the use of dramatic elements in advertisements. All the advertisements studied show that there is none of them that the dramatic elements over-shadowed the advert messages. They laid emphasis on the messages instead of the drama; the drama is just a means to an end. It is recommended that advertisement agencies in Nigeria should continue with the use of dramatic advertisements; because Nigerians love drama and they are naturally dramatic. As such, they are always attracted to any advert that is dramatic. However, on no condition should the drama in the advert over-shadow the advert messages.

**Keywords:** Nigerian advertising agencies, Dramatic elements, Nigerian television media space.

### **Introduction**

A critical view of the Nigerian television media space will expose the fact that advertisement is a common phenomenon. The purposes of these

advertisement are mostly to attract, inspire and persuade the viewers to take action by considering and patronizing the advertised products and services. Due to the intense competition amongst goods and services, there is need for massive publicity and marketing. Television advertisements have been viewed as veritable tools for reaching the audience effectively because of its combination of sound and vision. (Bardi & Shalom-Israel, 2015). Consequently, many advertisements compete for attention in television media space, especially products and services that have known competition. For instance, in the Nigerian media, you notice that the various telecommunication companies struggle to outwit each other with advertisements constantly. As such, advertisers and their advertising agencies continuously seek for veritable means of reaching the audience in order to attract their attention and persuade them to patronize the advertised products and services. One of such techniques used is drama. Drama can simply be viewed as an imitation of an action. Drama is made up of certain elements which can be used to achieve a dramatic experience. Such elements include - music, plot, theme, diction (language), dance, characterization and spectacle.

From previous research (Bardi & Shalom-Israel, 2015), dramatic advertisements have been found to be a reliable means of communication, especially to Nigerian audience that are very dramatic and have great likeness for drama. Nevertheless, dramatic techniques can be misplaced when the drama becomes the main attraction of the advertisement instead of the products and services being showcased. This entails a situation where the audience enjoy the drama, but unfortunately relegates the major advertising message. To avoid this ugly situation, dramatic concept advertisements need to be handled by expert script writers and film directors. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the usage of dramatic elements in the Nigerian media space, between April and July, 2022. The paper studies the advertisements and analyse the effective usage of the various dramatic elements. The study employs the literary, content analysis and observation methods in the collection and analysis of data. Three television stations will be surveyed. They include - Arise News, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA International) and Channels Television, all in Nigeria.

### **Elements of Drama and Dramatic Genres**

According to Nwabueze (2011, p.15): "Drama is a work of art which delineates human life and activities through the presentation of actions by means of dialogue between group of characters". (p.15) He further asserts

that the word drama originated from a Greek word “dran”, meaning “to do” or “to act”. Nwabueze (2011) concludes that: “Drama is usually composed in prose, tells its story by means of action dialogue, and portrays life through characters, with the aim of entertainment and edification” (p.17). Drama is viewed as life. It is an imitation of action of men and women in life. An action will no longer be dramatic if it is not imitating and representing the possible actions of men (Bardi and Shalom-Israel, 2015). Considering the fact that advertisements are mainly developed by humans, imitating their actions through the use of drama and subtly encouraging them through it to patronize the advertised products or services can be effective, because they tend to identify with actions that are related to them.

Aristotle postulates that the parts of drama are - plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle (Brockett & Ball, 2011). Plot, according to Brockett & Ball (2011), refers not only to “the summary of a play’s incidents, but it is the overall structure of a play” (44). Also, Ogbonna (2022) asserts that: “plot is therefore the sequential arrangement of a play in such a way that the action is organized” (128). She went further to state that plot can be classified into two types - simple (single) and complex (double) plots. Every plot, no matter how short, must have a beginning, a middle and an end. The characters are the main source from which plots are formed. This is because actions are developed through the speech and behaviour of the characters. It is through the characters that the advertising messages are conveyed. It can be through words or action (Bardi and Shalom-Israel, 2015). Furthermore, Nwabueze (2011) posits that: “thought is concerned with two aspects of dramatic literature: the reasoning of the characters and the play’s theme” (p.75). Thought also known as theme is the intellectual content of drama. Thought communicates the themes, ideas and perceptions of the playwright that relates to the human experience he intends to portray.

Diction or language is the words that the character speaks. According to Arnold (2011): “Language defines the character and gives them authenticity and credibility ... dramatic language must somehow appeal to the audience’s imagination and contribute to the sensory appeal of the play”. (p. 268). Language is a very essential communicative tool in drama; its use engenders understanding in dramatic performances. It is mainly through language that the messages of the play are delivered. Music is a very important dramatic element. It is widely used in advertisements because it is very attractive, entertaining and can be laden

with the messages. Nwabueze (2011) asserts that: "Music refers to all aspects of spoken words. Words in the play is dialogue, the sound effects and other auditory material in the play" (p. 78). He further posits that there is an element of music in every play. The actors' footsteps, the sighs, the shots, the ringing of the telephone, off-stage sounds, vocal tones, constitute elements of music.

Spectacle encompasses everything from acting style and the blocking or movement of the actors to the breath-taking scenic and special effects (Arnold, 2001). Nwabueze from his perspective describes spectacle as important. Spectacles in theatre are to create the atmosphere, service the needs of the actor, and contribute to the impact of the play as theatre. (Nwabueze, 2011). These dramatic elements combine to bring out the aesthetic quality of any dramatic piece. They are also combined in various degrees to effectively communicate an advertising message on television (Bardi & Shalom-Israel, 2015).

### **Dramatic Genres**

In furtherance of this study, Wilson (2001) propounds that: "Plays that share a particular point of view are frequently considered as forming a group, referred to as a genre, after a French word, meaning "category" or "type" (p.157). He further opines that dramatic genres are largely divided into tragedy and comedy. From a similar, but a bit different perspective, Arnold (2001) proposes that: "Genre refers to a specific division or classification of drama. The most frequently used classifications, or genres of drama are tragedy, melodrama, tragicomedy or farce" (p.328). Although, Arnold mentioned that types of drama; but in agreement with Wilson, he states that drama is mainly classified as either tragedy or comedy.

Tragedy is viewed as a drama that ends sadly. Tragedy frequently ends in disaster (Arnold, 2001). Some philosophers view tragedy as being spiritual, because it deals with the inner workings of man. It deals with his ordeals, struggles, disasters and sometimes victory that usually comes with a price. Furthermore, Arnold (2001) asserts that on the contrary: "Comedy exists to make us laugh. But the brilliance of comedy lies in its ability to take on the most serious subjects, while, evoking the deepest laughter" (p.330). Comedy makes us to relax and also transmits cogent messages to us in our state of relaxation. Most dramatic comedies end happily. Due to these characteristics, most dramatic advertisements make use of comedy to attract their audience, entertain them and sell the products or services (Bardi & Shalom-Israel, 2015).

Drama has numerous functions. The major functions of drama are to educate, inform and entertain. Drama can also be used for social mobilization. Drama can be used to inform the audience through the plot and thought (theme); that is, through the subject matter than is treated by the play. It can also educate the viewers to make them better members of the society. Above all, drama entertains the audience and make them happy and relaxed. Consequently, advertising practitioners see drama as a veritable tool to reach the audience. They use it to entertain, inform, educate and most importantly persuade the audience to patronize their goods and services. It must be noted that almost all advertisements are dramatic, because they make use of one dramatic element or the other; even on-air announcement by only one character. The difference is that some are more dramatic than others.

### **Advertising Techniques in Broadcast Commercials**

Advertisement, according to the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), which is now known as referred to as Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) (2012), is: "A communication in the media, paid for by an identified sponsor and directed at a target audience, with the aim of imparting correct information about a product, service, idea or opinion" (p. 6). Arens (2004) asserts that advertisement is: "The structured and composed non-personal communication usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media" (p.7). Also, Asemah, Kente and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2021) posit that: "Advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them" (p.15).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that advertising has certain characteristics which include the following - (a) it must be paid for - advertisement is not free, it must be paid for (b) it must have an identified sponsor - the sponsor of every advertisement must be identified, it is not anonymous. (c) It is persuasive in nature - every advertisement persuades the audience to act in a certain manner and majorly to patronize the advertised and services. (d) It must be addressed to a particular audience - Every advertisement has a target audience. (e) Lastly, all advertisements must be communicated through the media. Osunbiyi (1999) posits that there are five major approaches to composing the broadcast commercial and they include: monologue, dialogue, dramatization, humour, musical (p. 224). He further asserts that monologue approach is achieved when it is only one single voice that is featured in the commercial (p. 224). The

dialogue style must have two or more voices. The voices can either be male or female, as the case may be.

In furtherance of this study, dramatization approach is a way of putting life into the commercial by engaging in some acts that are related to the product/services being advertised (Osunbiyi, 1999). Again, Osunbiyi (1999) states that: "Humour is much related to the dramatization. A commercial could be dramatic without being humorous. Humour is to get the consumer closer to the product or service being advertised" (p.224). Lastly, he opines that a commercial can use music all through a voice over. The use of dramatic humour has been particularly viewed as an effective advertising technique. This is because it uses drama and humour to attract the attention of the audience, before delivering the messages.

From Okwerchime's perspective: "Two formats that are peculiar to television are: (1) Song and dance, (2) Demonstration technique (2009, p.125). Despite the above postulation, he later opines that: "outside these two, which are peculiar to television, all other six formats used for radio, that is - straight sell, educational, testimonial, humour, musical and dramatization are also employed for television". (Okwechime, 2009, p.125). From a similar, but a bit different perspective, Jewler and Drewniary (2001) outlined some formats for television commercials which include - demonstration, product as star, speaker in an interesting location, vignette, slice of life, presenters, testimonials and stories.

### **An Evaluation of Dramatic Elements in Selected Television Advertisements in Nigerian Media Space**

In this section of the study, this researcher appraises various advertisements as televised in three television stations in Nigeria, between April and July, 2022.

#### **1. Arise News Channel:**

##### **Glo NIN Registration Advertisement**

- **Plot:** The advert starts with a young man coming out from the corridor, meets a friend and wants to use his phone because his line has been blocked because of lack of National Identification Number (NIN) registration. His friend tells him that Glo NIN Registration is the simplest. That he should just dial \*109#; the man is still inquisitive and he explains that if he finds it difficult, he should go to any Glo World office nationwide that it will be done. The young man then asks for his phone to make call first

and he explains that he has abundant credit, that when you register your NIN on Glo, you are given N20,000.00 free air time. At this juncture, the neighbours upstairs who have been eavesdropping rush out to go and register their Glo line. The young man throws the phone to the informant and acrobatically and dramatically jumps over the rail and runs to Glo office to register his NIN. Despite the use of drama, the ad is effective because they mentioned the advertised service severally and laid emphasis on it. They did not allow the drama to over shadow the ad message. They also used compio-graphics to write out the services offered. As such, the advert is physically challenged friendly; the deaf can also identify with it, by reading the graphics on the screen.

- **Language and Characterisation:** The language used is mainly Nigerian Pidgin English, which makes the communication very easy to comprehend by all and sundry in Nigeria. In terms of characters, the major characters are two young men, one who has registered his Glo line and the other one yet to link his Glo line with his National Identification Number. The latter is played by the popular Nigerian comedian and actor, Broda Shaggy. The other characters that appear in the ad are the eavesdropping neighbours upstairs, who run off to Glo office to do their registration.
- **Spectacle:** There is use of spectacle when the guy throws the phone to the man who has registered and jumps over the rail. The running out of the eavesdropping co-tenants is also a spectacle.
- **Music:** Music is used at the background throughout the advert. The music is not prominent, just complimentary.
- **Theme:** The theme of the ad is the Glo NIN Registration and the N20,000.00 bonanza if you register at any Glo world office nationwide.

In summary, the Glo NIN Registration ad is successful from the perspective of this study. The ad effectively combined all the dramatic elements to produce a decent advertisement that communicates the planned message without the drama over shadowing the ad message.

### **Dangote Salt Advert:**

- **Plot:** The ad opens with a shot of some rotten tomatoes put in a blender. Then it shows a lady in the kitchen with fresh tomatoes and she says – “this is more like it”; she cuts the tomatoes and says that we care about our other food ingredients, but care less about our salt. She says that she cares about her salt, hence she uses Dangote Salt. She says that Dangote Salt is healthy and iodized. At the end she says the pay-off which is – “it’s time to care about your salt”.
- **Language and Character:** The language that is used in the ad is the Standard English language. There is only one female character in the ad. It is more like a monologue and testimonial. Though a monologue, but the ad is very communicative and expressive.
- **Music:** There is no expressive use of music in the advert, though there is sound at times.
- **Spectacle:** The spectacle in the ad is when the rotten tomatoes is placed in the blender dramatically and grinded.
- **Theme:** The message of the ad is that we should care about our salt the way we care about our other cooking ingredients like tomatoes. The ad projects that we should use Dangote Salt because it is healthy and iodized. The ad is quite communicative and the drama did not swallow the ad message.

## **2. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA International):**

### **Malaria Treatment Advertisement:**

- **Plot:** The ad opens with a man and the wife in their business premise. The woman asks about their daughter and the man says that she was feeling hot, but he used cloth and water to clean her body and that she is now playing. The wife looks on disdainfully. As the man talks, the generating set goes off and the man shouts and wants to call the engineer to repair the generator. The wife now interjects and ridiculously advises him to use water and cloth and clean the generator as he cleaned the daughter’s body. The man now realizes himself and calls her “Sense Mama”. He now tells her to call the engineer to look at the generator, while he takes their daughter to the hospital. The voice over then comes up and advises that when you feel symptoms of malaria, visit a doctor, do a test and take your medications completely. The ad is sponsored



by Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

- **Language and Characterization:** The language that is used in the advert is the Nigerian Pidgin English. This makes the message of the ad quite clear and it can be well received by both the educated and uneducated.

The main characters in the ad are the husband and wife. It is mainly a dialogue between the two characters that conveyed the message. However, there is a voice over at the end of the advert; so technically, you can say that there are two active characters and one unseen character. Compio-graphics is also used to display messages on the screen.

- **Spectacle:** There is spectacle in the ad when light goes off suddenly and the man shouts.
- **Music:** There is little sound at the background throughout the advert.
- **Theme:** The theme of the advert is advocating for proper treatment of malaria. It is an advocacy advert. It is not selling any product or service but propagating an idea. The purpose of the ad is well articulated, the message is clear enough.

#### **Covid 19 Vaccination Advertisement:**

- **Plot:** The ad opens with two characters (animations, caricatures). One of them sneezes and the other one covers his face and says – “I dodge it”. The man that sneezed calls him – “Obi the dodger” and ask him if he has taken his Covid 19 vaccination, but he says no. He tells him that he has taken his vaccine and he is still strong. Obi now ask why he is still wearing mask and he says to protect himself and others. He advises Obi to go and take the Covid 19 vaccine, that it is very safe and available in designated Health Centres nationwide. The advert is sponsored by National Primary Health Care Development Agency and Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria.
- **Language and Characterization:** The language used is the simple Nigerian Pidgin English which is quite understandable by the generality of the Nigerian public who are the target audience. In terms of characters, there are only two animated male characters in the advert. The advert also made use of compio-graphics on screen to communicate.

- **Music:** There is little music at the background of the advert throughout.
- **Spectacle:** There is spectacle in the ad when the other man sneezes and Obi the dodger" shifts away and covers his nose.
- **Theme:** The theme of the advert is Covid 19 vaccination. People are persuaded to take the vaccine, that it is safe and available. The message is well delivered, no ambiguity. The drama did not overshadow the message. The type of advert is advocacy advertisement. It did not advertise any product, but to mass mobilize the masses to take their Covid 19 vaccine.

### **Channels Television:**

#### **Coleman Wires and Cables Advertisement:**

- **Plot:** The advert opens in Coleman Wires and Cables factory. The workers are seen working and singing. Then the factory workers add dancing to the singing. Some of them tumbling from the cable in a choreographed dance. The factory supervisor sees them from his office and he is shocked. He rushes out to admonish them; but discovers that they are singing about the durability of Coleman Wires and Cables. Surprisingly, he joins the dance and wants to choreograph a dance step with the workers who are scared; but he encourages them and they all dance and sing to the durability of Coleman Wires and Cable.
- **Language and Characterization:** The advertisement is a musical. There is no use of dialogue, but music, dance and mime. The language of the song is correct English language not Pidgin English. As regards characterization, there are many characters that took part in the advert. They are the factory workers and the factory supervisor. Compio-graphics was also used to convey information in the advert.
- **Music:** The advertisement is a musical advert. It is made up of songs, dance and mime. There is no dialogue. The song is quite expressive, it is well rendered. The words were clearly heard.
- **Spectacle:** There was a lot of spectacles in the advert. The rolling of the machine for the production of cable, the somersaulting of the factory worker when dancing, the dance movements and so on are all spectacles in the advert. These spectacles brought more aesthetics to the advert.

- **Theme:** The theme of the advert is the durability of Coleman Wires and Cables. The advert portrays Coleman as producer of durable and reliable wires and cables that can be used for various purposes. The advert, though a musical without dialogue, was able to transfer the messages intended. The music did not over-shadow the message of the advert; neither did the dances and spectacle.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

After a critical appraisal of the dramatic elements in selected advertisements in Nigerian television media space, it is concluded that Nigerian advertisement agencies have become adept in the use of dramatic advertisements. All the adverts studied show that none of them have their messages blurred due to the dramatic elements; as such, it is right to deduce that the dramatic elements in the ads were manipulated to support the advert messages. From observation, it is also concluded that all advertisements make use of drama. This is because of the various elements of drama that are used in any advert. There is no advert that does not use an element of drama; hence, they are all dramatic. Drama is not only when there is dialogue; but it involves music, dance, mime, dialogue, spectacle and so on. Consequently, it is recommended that due to the fact that Nigerians are naturally dramatic and they love the use of drama. Advertisement agencies in Nigeria should continue to make use of dramatic elements in adverts. They should master the art of dramatic copywriting and film directing and make sure that the dramatic performance in the advert does not swallow the underlining messages. The drama should be a means to an end and not the end. The message of the advert should be the 'king' of the advert. That is, it should be the main focus. As the audience laugh because of the drama, they should be persuaded to patronize the advertised product as well.

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