

Influence of Covid-19 on Advertising Practice in South East, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated how Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic influenced advertising practice in South East, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design and focus group discussion. A sample size of 287 was drawn from the entire population using the Taro Yamani formula. The study was anchored on the economic recovery theory and AIDA advertising model. Data were collected using structural questionnaire and focus group discussion, and were analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Findings show that COVID-19 negatively affected advertising practice in South-East Nigeria. It further recommends that advertising practitioners in South-East Nigeria should evolve more local contents approach in the packaging and dissemination of advertising messages in order to stimulate interest in advertising and overturn the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on advertising practice zone. Advertising practitioners and agencies in South East Nigeria should also adjust or reduce the cost of advertising to enable companies raise the level of advertising in the post-COVID-19 era.*

KEYWORDS: influence, COVID-19, advertising, practice, South-East Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The advertising business has, no doubt, evolved from a state of elementary craft to a sophisticated marketing communication force that is considered indispensable to modern commercialization and economic development. Okoro (2013) informs that advertising encompasses printed, written, spoken or pictured representation of a person, product, service or movement, openly sponsored by the advertiser and at his expense, for the purpose of influencing sales, use, votes or endorsement. It is defined as a non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media (Benson-Eluwa, 2005).

Prior to 1932, Bovee (1992) observes that the concept of advertising suffered from incomprehensive and disagreed form of definition and meaning due to its dynamic nature and function. Okoro (2013) reveals that advertising came of age when experts and practitioners like Thomas J Barratt who is known as the father of modern advertising came up with comprehensive and acceptable definitions and explanations of advertising. One of the commonest issues in defining advertising is that it is a non-personal communication of information usually paid for and

usually identified with a sponsor through the mass media. Thus, it is a means of communicating information with the users of a product or service.

The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) recently changed to Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) in its Code of Advertising Practice defines advertising as “a form of communication through the media about products, services or ideas paid for by an identified sponsor” (APCON, 2005, p.5). A critical assessment of the above definitions exposes the following that advertisement must be paid for by an identified sponsor and that the aim of advertising is to disseminate information, ideas, etc., about goods or services and to persuade people to take action by patronizing the goods and services advertised.

Sauer, (2020) describes Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel Coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan China in December, 2019 with very little information passed concerning the outbreak that killed a total of 2000 people in China by February 21, 2020 and on March 23 2020, Italy reported 602 new deaths, bringing the total to 6,077. There were other outbreaks of Corona Virus occurring as a result of different strains SARS-CoV in 2003, HCoV NL63 in 2004, HKU1 in 2005, MERS-CoV in 2012. In Nigeria, the entrance of Coronavirus was announced on Friday, 28 January 2020 and the confirmation led to activation of the country’s National Coronavirus Emergency Operation Centre. The Federal government of Nigeria via ministry of health in collaboration with the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has been in close action and communication with the World Health Organization (WHO) who is closely monitoring the situation globally. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission, between 2014 (when Nigeria had the Ebola disease outbreak) and December 2019, the number of active online and telecommunication channels in Nigeria increased by over 45 million.

With the increased access to information and communication dissemination channels, it is assumed that many Nigerians should be well informed about Coronavirus pandemic (Adepoju, 2020). The symptoms of the disease include fever (greater than 38.6°C), severe headache, weakness, diarrhea (rare cases), difficulty breathing (severe cases), lack of appetite, cough, sore throat, chest pain, difficulty in breathing, difficulty swallowing, impaired kidney, liver and Lung infection (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, 2020). However, the drastic and devastating effects of COVID-19 in various segments of the society cannot be undermined. For instance, in the advertising industry, Taylor (2020) reveals that COVIDS-19 pandemic has caused a considerable drop in the mode and level of advertising. Bolatito (2012) notes that as the Nigerian economy grows and the market matures, the spending on advertisement will only grow and vice versa but due ongoing effect of COVID-19, Nigeria has a serious concern to the critical role and contributions of advertising of industries, firms, organizations and institutions whose activities directly and indirectly contribute to the development and successful booming of the economy. The economic activities in major cities and locations in Nigeria are below standard due to due to covid-19.

It is expected that in a critical economic situation caused by COVID-19, advertising industries, agencies and practitioners are usually directly affected. It is therefore based on this background that the researcher investigated the influence of COVID-19 on advertising practice in South Eastern zone of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Advertising business in Nigeria contribute, undoubtedly, to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Aside the direct employment and taxes that these agencies provide, the advertising function also subsidizes the cost of the media and consequently enrich freedom of information, enhance standard of living by explaining in persuasive manner the intrinsic qualities of different brands and thus enriching or culture by romanticizing the best of values.

On the contrary, Anthony, Da'Morus and Benjamin (2020) reveal that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic has resulted in changes to advertising, marketing, promotional and media spends, forcing businesses and brands to reevaluate their thinking about current and future advertising and marketing campaigns to maintain a steady stream of income. While brands currently seek to strike the right tone during a global health emergency, the future portends market alteration, increased competition and a demand for creative and aggressive marketing practices. By implication, the prevalence of COVID-19 on the Nigerian economy seems to have brought about fluctuations in advertising business (Abhay, 2015).

In view of the prevailing negative cum damaging effects of COVID-19 in Nigeria, this study examined its influence on advertising which is one of the critical economic segments of the country. There is urgent need to address the issue scientifically. More so, the influence of COVID-19 in terms of creating fear and panic in human and industrial relationship coupled with its deadly nature is capable of turning down advertising practice in the country. There is logically scanty and empirically undocumented and there is no existing work that has actually addressed this problem especially in South Eastern part of Nigeria. Based on this premise, the quest to fill this gap in knowledge to examined the influence of COVID-19 on advertising in South East, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to ascertain the effect of COVID-19 on advertising practice in South East Nigeria.

1. To determine whether COVID-19 significantly affected the extent of advertising practice in South East Nigeria.
2. To find out ways of improving standard of advertising practice in the post COVID-19 era in South East Nigeria.

Research Questions

These forms the research questions of the study:

1. What are the effects of COVID-19 on advertising practice in South East Nigeria?
2. Did the COVID-19 significantly affect the extent of advertising practice in South East Nigeria?

Conceptual Review

The concept of advertising is as old as man. The word comes from the Latin word “advertere”, meaning to draw attention to”. In Nigeria, the earliest recorded activities that could be described as advertising in its crude form include the town criers early morning gong signals that alerted the village dweller of an impending announcement. To buttress the above assertion, Ogbodoh (1990) posits thus: Advertising in Nigeria is said to have begun naturally with one of the earliest forms of mass communication town crying. This traditional African medium performed the universal communication function of disseminating information about available goods, services, and ideas to the people.

Advertising is none-personal communication of information about products, services or ideas through the various media, and it is usually persuasive by nature and paid by identified sponsors (Bovee, 1992). From this it follows that advertising is usually a non-personalized form of communication, paid by an identified sponsor, implemented in a certain way through the media and other legal means and aimed to familiarize with some products and its further acquisition by possibly large audience of consumers. It is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them (APCON, 2019).

Advertising is the mass publicity of a product. It involves creating awareness of a product’s uses and benefits to others. Doing this makes a product available to those in need of them and this satisfies the needs of the advertiser; increasing sales. According to Cohen, advertising is a business activity that employs creative techniques to design persuasive communication in mass media that promote ideas, goods, and services in a manner consistent with the achievement of the advertiser’s objective, the delivery of consumer satisfaction and the development of social and economic welfare (Cohen, 1988).

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) is a disease caused by a new strain of Coronavirus. ‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus, and ‘D’ for disease. The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold (WHO, 2020). The Coronavirus belongs to a family of viruses that may cause various symptoms such as pneumonia, fever, breathing difficulty, and lung infection. These viruses are common in animals worldwide, but very few cases have been known to affect humans. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) used the term 2019 novel Coronavirus to refer to a Coronavirus that affected the lower respiratory tract of patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, China on 29 December 2019.

Gina (2020) states that COVID-19 has forced many businesses such as advertising to close or provide limited services to their customers. Many businesses are reevaluating their marketing and media spend and have refocused their advertising and promotional efforts in an attempt to generate a sustained stream of consumer interest and spending, while maintaining sufficient returns on media spends.

Affecting nearly all industries, Guttman (2021) reveals that the Coronavirus pandemic has also had a major impact on the marketing industry as well as on global advertising. The COVID-19 disease, which reportedly emerged from the Chinese city of Wuhan rapidly spread all over the world in early 2020 and continues to impact nearly all aspects of life. In attempts to contain the spread of the virus, countries started to implement measures such as social distancing, work from home, or total lockdowns. This led to a significant change in how or when consumers are exposed to advertising and therefore to reduced media spending.

Guttman (2021) further notes that all regions worldwide saw a decrease in media budgets in 2020, for example by 46 percent in the LATAM region. However, the pandemic especially showed its effect in the first half of 2020, with the average allocated money being cut drastically. Many advertising departments according to Multon (2020) will be up to the challenge: thinking through creative and innovative marketing strategies and practices that will navigate the business through this new normal. For brands, this means dealing with market alteration because of the economic impact on all industry sectors; facing increased competition given consumers' and social "new normal"; addressing sustainability; evaluating operational options and challenges presented by strategic planning in an environment of uncertainty; analyzing brand reputation issues; identifying potential new products and services needed to meet consumers' needs and expectations; focusing on creative and strategic marketing campaigns and targeted advertising; and using social media effectively (Aaron and Leah (2020).

As a result of COVID-19, advertising spending is expected to decrease for some in 2020 as stores close and revenue decreases. For example, one online rental home booking company announced that it will suspend all marketing activities in 2020 in order to save hundreds of millions of dollars (Joshua and Munsif, 2020). Other businesses have refocused their spending to purpose-driven marketing, mission-based marketing and cause-related marketing to better satiate consumers' increased media consumption while working from home. For example, 45 percent of global consumers are devoting more time to social media, online video streaming has increased by 26 percent, online gaming traffic has increased exponentially on one telecommunication company's servers, and the number of consumers using online food delivery and essential goods delivery has risen dramatically (Jason, 2020).As a result, many brands may look to optimize their marketing practices to better reflect the increase in online transactions, communications and face time with consumers.

Coronavirus is said to have forced a rethink in the advertising industry. The pandemic has led to an immediate drop in advertising spending. First quarter data from Public showed that year-on-year revenue in China was down 15%. Countries in Europe saw an average reduction of 9%; Germany and France fell 7% and 12% respectively (Li and Hall, 2020). This may be similar to the Nigerian economy. Advertisers have adapted by following consumers, which means prioritizing digital advertising. The online environment is favourable for "direct response" campaigns – those encouraging quick purchases by consumers – an attractive proposition for brands spending cautiously and looking to drive sales. The pandemic is likely to shape the advertising industry in the long-term.

However, Li and Hall (2020) hold that businesses are prioritizing survival for now, but in the future will have to find new ways of brand-building. The change in people's media and consumption habits will force a rethink of how best to do so. As Brian Wieser describes in Li and Hall (2020), "Companies will find that there's never been a better time to pitch ideas that involve real transformation. People will be more open-minded and we're going to see businesses find ways to push transformation even faster. For corporate decision-makers this is going to be radically cheaper than it was a few months ago."

Empirical Review

In line with research objective one which was designed to ascertain the effect of COVID-19 on advertising practice in South East Nigeria, Andrea and Miroslava (2021) conducted a study on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Changing the Content of Social Media Advertising. The main purpose of this study is to find out how social media, especially advertising, changed its content during the COVID-19 pandemic. A questionnaire was distributed among respondents by means of social media. This way we included representatives of each age category trying to resemble, as closely as possible, the Slovak market. From among the randomly selected participants (social media users), 135 respondents completed the questionnaire. As for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of advertising, we found out that there had been a certain change. According to the answers of our respondents, the changes related to the content of advertisements, the motives used, their narratives, offered products or services, or the combination of all the above. Consumers noticed an increased amount of COVID-19 related products such as face masks, disinfectants, etc.

Kayode and Adewale (2013) in their study on "Economic Influence of Billboard Advertisements as Communication Infrastructure on Lagos Landscapes", the paper argues that billboards are street furniture as well as communication infrastructure for economic vitality of businesses. The objective of the study is to determine the economic influence of billboard advertisement in Lagos State. Two research questions were set to guide the study while one hypothesis was formulated to find out if there is significant relationship between billboard advertisements and the economy of people of Lagos State. As a survey research, 62 registered advertisers and 362 consumers in Lagos were selected purposively as sample sizes. Data was collected with the aid of questionnaire and analyzed with percentage frequency count and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. It was then tested at significant level of 0.05. The correlation method revealed the significant relationship between variables being studied. Findings of the study revealed that billboard advertisements have significant influence on the economy of the citizens of Lagos State. While alcoholic beverages are the most patronized product in Lagos State, the study also shows that automobiles are the least patronized.

With respect to research objective two which was designed to examine the extent of advertising practice during the COVID-19 in South East Nigeria, Park, Kim, Lee, Kim, Voyer, Kim, Sung, Gonzalez-Jimenez and Fastoso (2021) in their study on the impact of COVID-19 on consumer evaluation of authentic advertising messages, investigated the relationship between the COVID-19 threat and consumer evaluation of a product with authenticity appeals in advertisements. They

examined whether childhood socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between threat and consumer evaluation of authenticity in advertisements. First, secondary data from Google Trends provided empirical support for our predictions. In additional experimental studies, participants evaluated different target products in four studies that either manipulated (Studies 2 and 3) or measured (Studies 4 and 5) COVID-19 threat.

Their results provide converging evidence that consumers positively evaluate products with authentic advertising messages under the COVID-19 threat. The results showed that authentic advertising messages might increase positive attitudes toward brands and products, especially in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when consumers sense a substantial threat. Consumers' motivation to lower their uncertainty underlies the effect of COVID-19 threat on their evaluation of authentic messages (Study 3). This attempt to reduce uncertainty is more likely to occur for consumers with relatively higher childhood socioeconomic status (Studies 4 and 5). These findings suggest that using authenticity appeals during a pandemic could effectively reduce consumers' perceived uncertainty and generate positive consumer evaluations.

Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, and Dangiwa, (2020), in their study assessed knowledge and perceptions about COVID-19 among the general public in Nigeria during the initial week of the pandemic lockdown in the country. From March 28 to April 4, 2020, this cross-sectional survey used an anonymous online questionnaire to collect data from respondents within Nigeria. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit 1357 respondents, aged 15-70 years, from 180 cities and towns within Nigeria. Study data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that Nigerians have relatively high knowledge, mostly derived from traditional media, about COVID-19. Their perceptions of COVID-19 bear implications across public health initiatives, compliance with precautionary behavior as well as bilateral relations with foreign nations. Evidence-based campaign should be intensified to remove misconceptions and promote precautionary measures.

Research question three was made to find out ways of improving standard of advertising practice in the post COVID-19 era in South East Nigeria. In line with this, a study carried out by

A study on advertising business during economic recession: a survey of selected advertising agencies in Lagos State, Nigeria was carried out by Abahand Samaila(2015). The study stated that the economic meltdown that resurged in the United States at the twilight of the first decade of the twenty-first century provoked a global whirlwind that dislocated many Western economies and plunged others into a state of flux. The after-shocks, echoed in developing economy like Nigeria, precipitated instability in the financial and stock-exchange markets. To ascertain the possible 'domino effect' of this recession on the advertising industry, in order to examine the postulate that advertising was always the first casualty of any economic showdown, these researchers designed qualitative in-sixteen advertising practitioners drawn from four randomly selected advertising agencies. Findings showed that recession has affected how advertising is practiced and forced practitioners in advertising agencies to adopt belt-tightening but creative and ethical measures to weather the storm.

Essien and Yusuf (2020) carried out a study on a re-appraisal of media campaign for eradication of corona virus in Nigeria. Campaigns through the mass media serve as reliable means of inducing people to act in certain ways. Thus, government and other relevant agencies often engage in various media campaigns geared towards protecting and improving public health and general wellbeing of the people. As a matter of fact, such campaigns, due to a variety of factors, often record success or failure. While most of these campaigns reach the populace via a combination of two or more channels, the focus of the study is on television, radio, traditional media and newspapers channels of disseminating campaign messages. Having closely studied past public health campaigns in Nigeria, the researchers explored strategies that can be implemented for optimal utilization of the powers of media in the production and effective dissemination of information for public health campaigns to curb the menace of corona Virus and other tropical diseases in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the researcher adopted the Theory of Economic Recovery and, Attention, Interest, Desire and Action (AIDA) model in advertising. The theory of Economic recovery Economic recovery refers to the process by which businesses and local economies return to conditions of stability following a disaster. This is a new theory proposed by Arnold (2010) and has received several research attentions by other economic scholars such as Chang and Adam (2012) and Melissa (2016). They are of the view that systematic data collection is needed to establish patterns and variations on how well and how quickly local economies recover from disasters. This theory is established by economists

Economic recovery is the business cycle stage following a recession that is characterized by a sustained period of improving business activity (Eric, 2020). Normally, during an economic recovery, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grows, incomes rise, and unemployment falls and as the economy rebounds. During a recovery, the economy undergoes a process of economic adaptation and adjustment to new conditions, including the factors that triggered the recession in the first place and the new policies and rules rolled out by governments and central banks in response to the recession. Eric (2020) holds that labour, capital goods, and other productive resources that were tied up in business that failed and went under during the recession are re-employed in new activities as unemployed workers find new jobs and failed firms are bought up or divided up by others. A recovery is the economy healing itself from the damage done, and it sets the stage for a new expansion.

On the other hand, the AIDA model, it is a concept developed by America businessman, Elias St. Elmo Lewis in an attempt to explain how personal selling works. Lewis was an advertising advocate who wrote and spoke often about advertising's potentials. This model describes a series of steps or stages that customers follow when purchasing decisions. The model laid out a sequence that describes the process a salesperson must lead a potential customer through in order to achieve a sale. The stages, Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, form a linear hierarchy. It is a process used to sell a product or service, which involves getting a customer's attention, making them interested in it, making them want it, and then making them buy it (Okoro, 2013). The final step

in the AIDA marketing model is getting the user to take action. The goal of the AIDA marketing formula is to do the following: Grab the attention of readers and hook them in like a fish. It is a model used in marketing that describes the steps customer goes through in the process of purchasing a product. The acronym AIDA is a sequential model showing the states of mind that a person may go through while deciding what to buy.

This model is related to this study on the ground that advertising passes through the AIDA process or stage to work out its purpose. Every good and well packaged advertisement should arrest the attention, arouse interest, cause a desire and then make the prospective consumer or customer to take action. When advertisements achieve this core target in marketing and promoting of various goods, ideas, messages and services of individual and corporate companies and organizations, it will directly contribute to the promotion, growth and development of the economy of the society. It is on this basis that this theory will be adopted for this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research design. The researcher used mixed method by using questionnaire and focus group guide to collect data from the respondents. This method was used to collect data from advertising practitioners on the influence of COVID-19 on their advertising practice in South East Nigeria. Based on the above design, quantitative data were gathered through the administration of questionnaire while qualitative data were gathered through the use of Focus Group Discussion guide.

The population of this study was drawn from the advertising practitioners in South East, Nigeria who are in active practice as at the time of this study. According to the Register of Advertising Practitioner 2019, the total number of advertising practitioners in Nigeria is 6,182 (APCON 2019). The breakdown of this figure/number reveals that Associate Members as 1,261, Fellow Members are 53, Full Members are 275, Defaulting Fellow Members are 24, Defaulting Associate Members are 4,167 and Defaulting Full Members are 402. These figures put together gave a total of 6,184 advertising practitioners. The report also shows that the population of advertising practitioners in South East Nigeria is 1,300 active members who are in the field from various advertising agencies either through offline or online advertising services. This figure formed the population of this study.

In determining the sample size, Taro Yamani's formula was used. The formula is expressed as: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$. 306 were adopted as the sample size of this study. The researcher used purposive sampling approach to allocate or share the sample size to the selected advertising agencies. This is to enable him have simple and unified way of selecting respondents from each of the selected advertising agencies in each state of South East.

Multi-stage sampling technique was used in deciding who should be included in the sample. In the first stage, cluster sampling technique was used to select five urban areas, cities or metropolis in each of the five states under study-Aba in Abia state, Onitsha in Anambra state, Abakaliki in

Ebonyi State, Enugu urban in Enugu State and Owerri in Imo State. Secondly, from the above five urban areas or cities selected five advertising agencies were selected using simple random sampling technique. This means that 25 advertising agencies were selected. Proportional representation was further used to determine how copies of questionnaire were accruable to each selected advertising agency as shown above. To determine the number of questionnaire distributed to each of the selected advertising agencies, the researcher used purposive or judgmental sampling method so as to select key and relevant respondents.

For qualitative data gathering, Focus Group Discussion guide was used. Five groups of six participants from each state were purposively selected from the main respondents and used. This means that every selected state had a group that is made up of six discussants. Discussants from Aba in Abia state formed group A, that of Onitsha in Anambra state formed group B, group in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State formed group C, Enugu urban in Enugu State formed group D and Owerri in Imo State formed group E.

The researcher used questionnaire and focus group discussion as the measuring instruments for this research. The questionnaire was structured and used to elicit quantitative data from the respondents (registered advertisers) regarding their demographic, psychographic disposition, attitudes and challenges of Coronavirus pandemics. The researcher used focus group discussion to generate some qualitative data from the respondents to supplement data collected through questionnaire. The focus group discussion guide contained a number of open-ended questions that were addressed during the discussion exercise. Six discussants were engaged in each State. This exercise was used to explore their knowledge on the influence of COVID-19 on advertising practice in South East zone of Nigeria.

The structured questionnaire and focus group discussion guide were subjected to face and content validation. In determining the reliability of the study's instrument, a pilot test of internal consistency was conducted at locations with characteristics similar to the areas of study to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument (questionnaire).

The reliability test was carried out using Pearson correlation. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 was also used to analyze the data from the two tests and then the result presented. The Pearson correlation coefficient showed a reliability coefficient of 0.76.

All 306 copies of the questionnaire were administered in line with the sample size of the study. Descriptive statistical method of analysis was used in this study. The statistical tools that were used in analyzing data collected from the field work were frequency table, bar charts, weighted mean, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). F-statistics from the ANOVA test used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level of significance.

The qualitative data generated through focus group discussion were discursively presented in prose-like manner. The result of the focus group discussion was used to complement and support that of the quantitative data generated using the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1: Data for the item ‘Ways in which COVID-19 influenced advertising practice in the South East: The level of advertising by companies, industries, and organisations was reduced during the period of COVID-19 in South-East Nigeria’

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Undecided	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
Disagree	11	3.8	3.8	4.9
Valid Agree	172	59.9	59.9	64.8
Strongly Agree	101	35.2	35.2	100.0
Total	287	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2022)

The data in Table 1 show that 3 persons (1%) were undecided, 11 persons (3.8%) disagreed with the statement under review, 172 persons (60%) agreed with the statement, and 101 persons (35%) strongly agreed. This means that 95% of the 287 valid respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the level of advertising by companies, industries, and organisations reduced during the COVID-19 period in South East Nigeria. In Item 2, the participants were asked to indicate their thought as to whether public and private organisations in South East Nigeria lost interest in advertising due to the adverse effect of COVID-19 on their socio-economic activities. The data obtained are presented as follows.

Table 2: Data for the Item ‘The level of advertising during the COVID-19 era was low’

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	7	2.4	2.4	2.4
Valid Agree	105	36.6	36.6	39.0
Strongly Agree	175	61.0	61.0	100.0
Total	287	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2022)

The data in Table 2 show that 7 persons (2.4%) disagreed with the opinion expressed, whereas 105 persons (36.6%) agreed, and 175 persons (61%) strongly agreed with the point under review. This means that a cumulative sum of about 98% of the 287 valid respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the level of advertising in South East Nigeria was low during the COVID-19 period.

In Item 4 of the second set, the participants were asked to indicate their thought on the opinion that there was poor or low patronage to advertising agencies in South East due to COVID-19. The data obtained are presented as follows.

Table 3: Data for the Item ‘Advertising practitioners and agencies in South East Nigeria should adjust or reduce the cost of advertising to enable companies stay afloat

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Undecided	25	8.7	8.7	8.7
Strongly Disagree	4	1.4	1.4	10.1
Disagree	34	11.8	11.8	22.0
Agree	137	47.7	47.7	69.7
Strongly Agree	87	30.3	30.3	100.0
Total	287	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2022)

The data in Table 3 show that 25 persons (8.7%) are undecided regarding the statement under consideration, 4 persons (1.4%) strongly disagreed with the statement, 34 persons (11.8%) disagreed, 137 persons (47.7%) agreed with the statement, and 87 persons (30.3%) strongly agreed. In other words, 78% of the 287 valid respondents agreed or strongly agreed that advertising practitioners and agencies in South East Nigeria should adjust or reduce cost of advertising to enable them stay afloat.

In Item 2 of the third set, the participants were asked to indicate their opinion with respect to whether there was need to evolve local content approach in the packaging and dissemination of advertisement messages. The data obtained are presented as follows.

Table 4: Data for the Item ‘There is need to evolve more local content approach in the packaging and dissemination of advertising messages’

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Undecided	4	1.4	1.4	1.4
Strongly Disagree	2	.7	.7	2.1
Disagree	25	8.7	8.7	10.8
Agree	191	66.6	66.6	77.4
Strongly Agree	65	22.6	22.6	100.0
Total	287	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2022)

The data in Table 4 show that 4 persons (1.4%) are undecided regarding the statement under consideration, 2 persons (0.7%) strongly disagreed, 25 persons (8.7%) disagreed, 191 persons (67%) agreed with the statement, and 65 persons (23%) strongly agreed with it. Thus, about 89% of the 287 valid respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was need for advertising agencies or companies to evolve local content approach in the packaging and dissemination of advertisement messages.

In Item 3 of the third set, the participants were asked to state their opinion regarding whether firms should adopt regularised and periodic multimedia system or channel of advertising to attract more patronage. The data obtained are presented as follows.

Table 5: Data for the Item ‘Companies or advertising agencies should adopt economic revival cum recovery method of advertising with a view to meeting local and international best practices’

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Undecided	10	3.5	3.5	3.5
Strongly Disagree	4	1.4	1.4	4.9
Disagree	4	1.4	1.4	6.3
Agree	230	80.1	80.1	86.4
Strongly Agree	39	13.6	13.6	100.0
Total	287	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2022)

The data in Table 5 show that 10 persons (3.5%) are undecided regarding the statement under review, 4 persons (1.4%) strongly disagreed, another 4 persons (1.4%) merely disagreed, 230 persons (80%) agreed with the statement, and the rest 39 persons (13.6%) strongly agreed with the said statement under review. Thus, a cumulative 94% of the 287 valid respondents agreed or strongly agreed that with the stated opinion that companies or advertising agencies should adopt economic revival cum recovery method of advertising with a view to meeting local and international best practices.

In Item 5 of the third set, the participants were asked whether the standard of advertising practice in the South-East sub-region in Nigeria could be improved by rebuilding advertising education and training of practitioners through Advertising Practitioners’ Council of Nigeria (APCON) and other related agencies to overcome the challenges of COVID-19 on advertising. The data obtained are presented as follows.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the influence of COVID-19 on advertising practice in South East Nigeria and reported three major findings that have answered the research questions which defined the course of the study. The objectives of the study have also been satisfied through the results of data analysis. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic drastically affected advertising by advertising practitioners in South East Nigeria and so stringent measures have to be taken to equip the practitioners to be able to deal with such challenges brought by the pandemic as well as to carry on with quality advertising going forward.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows:

1. Advertising practitioners in South East Nigeria should evolve local content approach in the packaging and dissemination of advertising messages in order to stimulate interest in advertising and thus overturn the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on advertising practices in the sub-region.
2. Advertising practitioners and agencies in South East Nigeria should adjust or reduce the cost of advertising to enable companies engage them more frequently and thus raise the level of advertising in the post-COVID-19 era.
3. Rebuilding advertising education and training of practitioners through Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) and other related agencies is strongly recommended so as to overcome the challenges to advertising occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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