

## **When and how will advertising curricula ever catch up with industry practice?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This theoretical paper discusses influences of digitalisation and digital media on advertising curricula, pedagogy and industry practice. It argues that the advertising theory and practice are shaped by globalisation, economic fluidity, political environment and media technological convolutions. Using documentary evidences from curricula of select universities and related tertiary institutions, the paper maintains that advertising curricula often remains a step behind industry practices because of the breath-taking disruptions brought about by changing media technologies. It appreciates the recent efforts of the National Universities' Commission (NUC), Nigeria leading to the unbundling of the Mass Communication curricula across universities in Nigeria. This effort has led to adoption of Advertising as a distinct degree programme, in addition to other seven new distinct degree programmes in the sub-areas of Communication and Media Studies. The paper submits that, in view of current and future cataclysm of technological disruption in advertising practice, no amount of far sightedness on the part of designers of advertising curricula can respond adequately well ahead of future technological changes. Hence, the paper recommends that the advertising curricula need to keep taps of industry development by exposing the student not only to current theories, trends and technological innovations in advertising, the industry, simultaneously needs to partner with academic institutions to provide industry-relevant manpower.

### **Introduction**

The Iron Age blacksmith certainly began his craft before the Renaissance Man took interest in the study of metallurgy, just so the advertising craft took off before the Wharton School of Business of the University of Pennsylvania incorporated advertising courses in its Journalism curriculum in 1893; or even before the University of Missouri developed a stand-alone degree programme in advertising in 1908 (Applegate, 2008)). Advertising practice may have commenced before its formal teaching in almost all known societies. Any surprise that professional practices often outpace the school curricula?

It was in 2019 that the National Universities Commission (NUC) announced the unbundling of the Bachelor's degree programme in Mass Communication across the Nigerian university system, to seven degree programmes, and later to eight distinct degrees. But nearly four years after, none of the eight degree programmes in Communication Studies, including Advertising has taken off in the existing universities. Experts recognise the need for periodic (4-5 year) review of academic curricula. It is now nearly four years since the Mass Communication programme was unbundled. But will the proposed advertising curriculum be abreast of industry and global requirements, if and when it eventually takes off?

Relatedly, President Muhammad Buhari recently assented to the bill which repealed the erstwhile Advertising Practitioners' (Registration, Etc.) Act, Cap. A7 laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2004). This now brings into existence the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) Act 2022. Thus, ARCON has now effectively replaced the erstwhile Advertising practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON). This is as it should be because, APCON, during its existence, did not practice, but regulated advertising in all its ramifications. The dimension introduced by this name change resonates well with the focus of this paper which recognises the fluidity of the advertising ecology both at the national and the global context. The ARCON Act throws up the

challenge of regulating the practice of advertising in a digitised global ecology.

In this article, I will examine the extent to which the bachelor's degree in Advertising curriculum recently announced by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) is responsive to minimum global standards, national developmental aspirations and advertising industry needs. I will then conclude with strategies and tactics for achieving Town-Gown relationships in the teaching and practice of advertising in Nigeria.

### **Historical Overview of Advertising curriculum and pedagogy in Nigeria**

Formal education in Mass Communication related disciplines, particularly Journalism began in Nigeria in 1954 with the hosting of a two-week vocational course held at the University of Ibadan for working journalists. In 1962, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka established the Jackson College of Journalism, laced with rich courses in advertising and public relations, among other areas of Mass Communication. At University of Lagos, the Institute of Mass Communication was established in 1966, just as the first military coup in Nigeria was staged. Chief Olusegun Osoba, CON, formerly Executive Governor of Ogun State, was a pioneer student and graduate of the Institute in 1966. The likes of Prince Tony Momoh, former Minister of Information and Culture, and Dr. Chris Doghudje, former Managing Director of Lintas International, Nigeria later became pioneer students for the Bachelor of Science degree (Mass Communication), upon their deployment from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Jackson College of Journalism, as a result of the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War at the time.

The first attempt at the establishment of a Bachelor's degree in any Nigerian university came in the year 2000 with the establishment of School of Communication at the Lagos State University along with six other academic departments, including Public Relations & Advertising, Journalism, Broadcasting, Human Communication, Communication Technology and Book Publishing. Thus a bachelor degree in Public Relations and Advertising became distinctive for the first time in Nigeria. The Covenant University in 2002 and other private universities also introduced Public Relations and Advertising as distinct degree programme in Nigeria, at various times. However, the NUC soon reversed the trend by compelling universities to adopt a single nomenclature of Mass Communication degree or other suitable names as may be adopted by the Senate of each university.

### **Unbundling of B. Sc. Mass Communication Degree in Nigeria**

It was against the above background that stakeholders in 2019 welcomed the unbundling by the NUC of the Mass Communication degree into eight distinct degree programmes. These are Advertising, Public Relations, Strategic Communication, Journalism, Broadcasting, Film & Multimedia Studies, Information & Media Studies and Development Communication. Mass Communication (with highly improved course content) is only retained for institutions that are not yet prepared to embrace the innovation.

The phenomena contributions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) the Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), McArthur Foundation, as well as the singular contributions of Professor Umaru Pate, then of the Bayero University, Kano, and now Vice- Chancellor, Federal University, Kashere towards the success of the unbundling of the Mass Communication into eight distinct degrees are well documented and acknowledged (2, 3).

#### **B.Sc. (Hons.) Advertising Course Structure- A Review**

The draft document released by the NUC stated in part that the Mass Communication was unbundled because it is now considered outmoded in view of the global changes taking place in communication technologies and the marketplace. These changes, it observes, offer new

opportunities and challenges that call for synergy between communication training institutions and professionals. Consequently, the stated Philosophy of the bachelor's degree programme in Advertising is to produce graduates imbued with the ability to understand and make contributions to the development of Nigeria and the global community through the production of highly knowledgeable, skilful, socially responsible, and self-reliant graduates, who are equipped with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in advertising to enhance development.

The bachelor's degree programme (Advertising) as contained in the draft document of the NUC appears revolutionary. This is not surprising because of the multi-sectorial composition of the expert groups involved in the initial drafts and subsequent revisions, including the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON), now called the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON), sequel to the coming into being of ARCON Act of 2022) advertising industry professionals, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Nigerian Press Council (NPC), UNESCO, McArthur Foundation, Federal Ministry of Information & Culture, the NUC and professors in in different areas of Media and Communication Studies drawn from within and outside the industry.

A look at the array of core advertising courses at the foundational level as highlighted in the NUC draft curriculum are: Introduction to Advertising & Marketing Communication; Introduction to Strategic Planning; Advertising, Marketing & Society; and Advertising Development in Marketing Communications. As the student climbs up the ladder, she is introduced to such other core advertising courses as: Fundamentals of Integrated Marketing Communication; Digital Marketing; Copy Writing & Media Planning; Brand Development; Consumer Insights; Creative Content Marketing for Advertising; and Business Writing & Presentation Skills.

At the penultimate level, the student is exposed to courses that include: Advertising & Market Research; Advertising Production Techniques (Multimedia/Interactive); Media Planning, Buying & Execution; Brands and Brand Building; Creative Content Development & Product Launch in Advertising; Art Direction and Design; Advertising Campaign & Execution Workshop; Sales Promotion and Sponsorship; Power, Personal Influence & Advertising; Quantitative Thinking in Advertising; Entrepreneurship in Advertising; and Internship. During the graduating class, knowledge and skills are imparted in the area of: Critical Issues in Advertising; Organisation and Management of Advertising Agency; Advertising Laws and Ethics; Social Marketing; Seminar in Advertising; Case Studies in advertising; and Advertising Research Project. Of course, the above courses are the barest minimum to be included in the Advertising curriculum because the NUC empowers each university to include other innovative theoretical and practical advertising courses as may be desired by each university.

In addition to all the core courses in advertising listed above, there are of course university-wide courses that are classified as General Nigerian Studies, including Entrepreneurial courses, as well as core communication courses such as Communication Theories, Research methods, Development Communication, Media Law and Ethics, just to mention these few ones.

Benchmarked against the omnibus B.Sc. Mass Communication degree programme, the content of the B.Sc. (Honors) Advertising degree programme as contained in the NUC draft appears revolutionary in terms of the requirements of scholarship and industry relevance. It largely addresses the requirements of theory and practice of advertising within the context of orthodox and contemporary media ecology. The curriculum compares most favourably with known curricula of universities in most other countries of the world, based on available data.



### **Global cases in advertising curricula**

Data from the Web (2) show that about 2075 global universities and colleges award bachelor's degree courses in advertising, either as single or combine honours degree. It is interesting to note that these universities and colleges feature a blend of theoretical and practical courses in advertising and integrated marketing communications, just like the Advertising programme recently announced by the NUC.

A follow up Online search that I conducted after the NUC announcement of the unbundled Mass Communication programme reveals that a potential advertising graduate at Keystone Bachelor's Studies (Greece) and some Europe and Asia-based universities undergoes the degree in three years (post-secondary education), unlike the four-year model in Nigeria. The core courses in advertising in the named example (Keystone University) are Introduction to advertising (I & II) Introduction to Digital Imaging; Visual Communication; Design Theory 1; and Introduction to Motion Graphics at the preliminary level. The advertising core courses at the penultimate level are Integrated Campaigns; Branding Identity; The Book; Graphic Communication; Design Theory 2; and Motion Graphics 2. At the third and final year, available courses are: Creative Team Campaigns; Design Research Project; The Book; and Final Major Project (4).

The example from The University of Texas at Austin, College of Communication, and Department of Advertising is also striking (5). The Bachelor of Science (Advertising degree) runs for four years, (just as the NUC example) with a minimum of 120 credit units before students eventually graduate. The courses are as rich and diversified as the NUC newly announced Bachelor's degree in Advertising. They include theoretical and practical courses as: Introduction to advertising; Consumer Insight and Account Planning; Fundamentals of Creative Development; and Advertising management. There are also courses in Professional Presentations; Media Strategies; Portfolio Development; Art Direction; Creative Video Development; Interactive marketing Strategies; Brand Experience marketing; Advertising Copywriting and Advanced Design Strategy. The others are Seminars in Advertising; Entertainment marketing; and Final year Research project.

### **The Missing Link**

In another desk research I carried out while writing this article, it is revealing that digitalisation of the media and other macro-environmental global trends, more than curricula contents, are most significantly altering the practice of advertising in the post-COVID-19 new norm (6, 7,8). Just as in the realm of journalism and news media practice, the line between advertising message producers and consumers has petered into insignificance, if not finally obliterated. In addition, advertisers have been empowered through digitalisation, to bypass both the traditional agencies and legacy media owners, thereby directly connecting with advertising prospects.

The influence of digitalisation of advertising practice is phenomena. For example, there is the use of Quick Response Code (QR Code), a two-dimensional symbol that elicits a digital action whenever scanned by a QR Code reader or a smart phone. This interactive tool enables the consumer to scan the Code to access additional information about the product from the website of the advertiser. This code also enables the consumer to place a direct telephone call to the advertiser, or send short messages to the advertiser to request additional product information. This goes beyond the one-way communication flow of the traditional advertising practice. In this way, digitalisation has now empowered the advertiser to connect directly to the consumer, thus bypassing the traditional advertising agencies, media buying agencies and the legacy media platform owners.

Moreover, Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Machine Learning (ML) has facilitated programmatic

advertising. This involves leveraging on AI and ML to purchase and sell digital advertising space. Again, this process enables the advertiser, using multiple data-driven platforms, to reach heterogeneous audience in real-time. Not only this, there is growing popularity of short and interactive videos that package interactive advertisements and disseminate the same through social media and entertainment platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, using user generated contents (UGC) some of which may fall below the ethical requirements of advertising regulatory bodies. Advertisers often exploit such platforms to initiate interactions with consumers, build brand awareness and establish emotional connections with advertising prospects.

Also to be noted is the introduction of Metaverse, a digital space where both virtual and augmented realities are fused to create a universal experience as well as marketer-consumer interactions. Similarly, the emergence of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) uses raffle as a sales promotional tool, which (a push strategy) to batter the product to the direct consciousness of the consumer.

Above all, marketing has entered the phase of high-level personalization. The digitised media ecology has enhanced personalisation of products, advertising contents, mails and the like. Geofencing, a location-based marketing strategy, has added a new dimension to personalisation. The application uses radio frequency identification (RFID), including GPS, Wi-Fi and cellular data to facilitate targeted marketing, including advertising media selection, purchasing and monitoring. The emergence and growing relevance of influencer marketing and micro-influencers deserve the attention of advertisers, agencies and media channel owners.

Resultantly, the above-mentioned breath-taking, disruptive innovations may never be taught in the classroom, however far sighted the developers of advertising curricula may be. Technological innovations, particularly digitalisation is a game changer, not only for advertising curricula and pedagogy, digitalisation dictates the pace for advertising industry practice at the end of the day. In effect, traditional advertising agencies and professionals who are unprepared to adapt to these digital innovations may be at the stage of extinction. This is one of the lessons to learn from the historical development of advertising theory and practice. Another outtake here is that a majority of players in the advertising industry today, such as those involved in digital marketing, influencer marketing, celebrity endorsement, designers of animation schemes, and so on, may not have originally received bachelor degrees in advertising or related disciplines; others may never have had prior professional exposures in advertising. Digitalisation seems to facilitate the inroads of individuals from diverse backgrounds into an enclave perceived to be traditionally reserved for graduates and professionals in the different aspects of marketing communication. Therefore, effectiveness and efficiency in the advertising industry today go beyond the curricula and traditional industry experience.

Advertising practice had its humble beginning in the era of sign or oral advertising. But it has made remarkable progress ever since. Without organised body of knowledge, skills and values that formal education and curricula offer, advertising will remain in the realm of craftsmanship. However, it is through practice that knowledge authenticity and relevance are established. Therefore, although theory is foundational to advertising practice, it is through practice that knowledge becomes relevant. In between, media technology is that powerful shaper of both theory and practice of advertising. The Kansas State University (US) in its 2015/2016 Bachelor degree in *Advertising Curriculum Guide* (2) submits that any advertising curriculum should combine “a strong theoretical foundation with hands-on practical applications leading up to an integrated advertising campaign, capstone experience in which students work with clients (and produce) innovative thinking and a go-getter attitude that will help develop communication strategies that are original, on-target, brand consistent and fun”. In the face of the changing environment of advertising teaching and practice, perhaps we should reverse our anchor question to read: How, not when, will advertising curriculum in Nigeria synchronise with advertising industry practice?

### **Towards Classroom-Industry Partnership**

The newly (NUC) announced bachelor's degree programme in advertising appears to be in tandem with global standards. In addition to the theoretical oriented courses in the Nigerian advertising curriculum, there are also industry-oriented courses. Notwithstanding, there is the need to initiate and implement strategies and tactics to make academic curricula respond to as well as synchronise with industry changes that are occasioned by digitalisation. I will now proceed to illustrate the point about Gown-Town relationships with to case studies.

### **A Case for the establishment of Advertising Academies in Nigeria**

There is the need for a solid partnership between the classroom and the advertising industry in providing the bridge between theory and practice of advertising. This can come through establishment and sustenance of viable advertising academies that empowers the Nigerian youth for industry and societal relevance. There are two cases in point here. These are *The Oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) Academy* and *Alphabet Media Academy*, two leading academies managed by advertising professionals to offer professional programmes to young graduates and new entrants into the advertising industry in different aspects of advertising message design, production and media management in Nigeria. At this juncture, I suggest that the current ARCON leadership should renew its partnership the Association of Advertising Agencies in Nigeria (AAAN) to fast-track the accomplishment of the Nigerian Advertising Academy. Such academies, and others not included here, need to also partner with academic institutions, on a pro bono basis, to bring professional benefits and exposure to university and college faculties and students of advertising discipline. This will be akin to the professional exposure provided to Law graduates who also attend the Law School before being called to the Nigerian Bar. Meanwhile, the Nigerian advertising industry should continue to provide opportunities for Internship in advertising agencies and media organisations to potential graduates of advertising and allied disciplines.

### **A Case for Sustainable Technology-Enabled Learning Infrastructure**

The second level of synergy is in the area of provision of sustainable technology-powered learning infrastructure and logistics. When I was Dean, School of Communication, Lagos State University, I secured the Erasmus+ grant that enabled the School to benefit from Inter-University Staff-Student Exchange programme. The School of Media, Birmingham City University (BCU), United Kingdom was our partnering institution. During the visit to BCU, our team observed that all the advertising media and film production equipment in use at BUC had not yet been formally introduced into the market by the various manufacturers at the time of our visit. Thus in other climes, universities access new media technologies ahead of the industry. Our colleagues in Birmingham informed us that BCU has an agreement with all the media technology production and innovation companies to use the University as a launching pad for technological innovations. Even some global news organisations, on a commercial basis, hire university media studios for news production. Equally, advertising agencies, film makers and media production companies often hire the University's studios on commercial basis. But the reverse is the case in Nigeria where obsolete media production equipment litter the training studios of departments where advertising, among other Communication and Media Studies programmes.

### **Conclusion**

Technological innovations, particularly digitalisation of the media ecology and the macro-economy of the advertising industry are the game changers. This holds true for the classroom as well as the advertising industry. No amount of far sightedness on the part of designers of

advertising curricula can respond ahead of future technological changes. The academia need to keep taps of industry development and expose the student to current theories, trends and technological innovations in advertising, while the industry needs to partner with academic institutions to provide industry-relevant manpower. In this connection, manufacturers and companies trading in information communication technologies (ICTs)/ media production equipment need to render critical logistic support to our tertiary institutions to bring the classroom at par with the industry as far as technological innovations are concerned. This of course does not ignore the role of proprietors of our educational institution in making adequate funding available for the acquisition of up to date media training equipment. This done, even if the classroom is not ahead, it will be at par with the advertising and related industries in delivering advertising education that speak to the needs of the society.

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