# Advertising Creatives and the Digital Media Revolution in the Reshaping of Advertising Practice in Nigeria

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**Abstract**
*The digitization of the world has had a tremendous impact on advertising strategy, the advertising business and relationships in advertising generally. Creativity, which used to be one of the most sought after currency in the industry is gradually giving way to digitalization and technology-driven strategy. Advertising campaigns are no longer just running on television, radio, print or outdoor but more inclusively on an integrated multimedia efforts that require the hiring of social media influencers and bloggers as the case may be. Given this scenario, the study sought to find answers to the following questions: what understanding and insights do we have concerning creatives' roles and role identities in response to the growing importance of social media? How does the industry's stakeholders perceive and address the challenges of the digital revolution? What are the stakeholders' views within the advertising industry as to what issues are facing digital advertisers? The study adopted a qualitative research method using in-depth interviews as the data collection method involving ten (10) Lagos- based advertising agencies from a total registered AAAN membership of one hundred and twenty (120) agencies. Using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques, a sample size of 30 creative advertising agency staff, drawn from 10 officially registered agencies in Nigeria , participated in the study. Findings of the study indicated that digitalization in the advertising industry has brought great pressure to bear on careers of advertising practitioners, a move towards increased levels of interactivity and the development of performance-based metrics. Also, traditional agency creatives are fast losing their roles to the digital agency creatives who are more engaged in content creation and storytelling as their creative strategy for digital advertisers.*

*Key words: Digital advertising, creativity, advertising agencies and multimedia*

**Introduction**
It is no news that the digital revolution in the media landscape, like a tsunami, has taken captive any form of media expressions that exist currently to such an extent that its impact is felt across all media platforms either deliberately or otherwise. In the same manner, the digitalization revolution has also had its fair share of influence in the advertising world,

and the growth in digital advertising finds its correlation with the increase in digital media consumption. Okazaki (2006) asserts that the content and consumption trends make digital media the most promising format for advertising growth over the next decade as advertiser's attention shifts from traditional media to the digital

Taking a cue from this trend, authors like Benjamin & Wizard (1995), and Deighton (1996), predicted in their earlier studies that the new interactive media would have fundamental strategic implications for all business. In specific terms, Heath & Bryant (2000) and Lewis (2010) stated categorically that the growth of the internet and mobile technologies has had significant implications for media and communication and for advertising.  It has contributed to such occurrences as media concentration, fragmenting media audiences and the further development of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC.)

Exploring the narrative further, Garfield (2005), and Jaffe (2000) pointed out that the interactive and interpersonal characteristics of digital communication have also allowed marketers to have closer and more direct relationships with their consumers, thus giving consumers more involvement in the role of contributing ideas about brand building and promotional activities.

The implication of this phenomenon is two-fold in the sense that the new media usage now provides both opportunities and challenges for advertisers. Taylor (2009) asserts that the new media interactive technologies permit advertisers to deliver an enhanced brand experience to consumers by offering online games, instant feedback, and content exchange resulting in improved impacts on consumer's behavior. With increasing empowerment, the consumer can decide which content to access or not to access. The implication of this scenario as pointed out by the UK based Institute of Practitioners  in Advertising (IPA) is that consumers are now increasingly mediating messages between brands and other consumers in the social media arena using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Such Change in both technologies and consumer behavior have had significant implications for the advertising industry, giving rise to the need for marketers and advertising agencies to revisit advertising strategies and develop new ways of engaging consumers during the communication process.

Hawkes & Gibbon, (2008) asserts that the essence of social media is about content, sharing, conversation, openness and interaction. Through social media, users produce, design, publish and edit content. Thus, consumers are no longer passive, but participate actively in shaping and sharing the media regardless of time or geographical boundaries. They have become creators, publishers and producers. Lewis, (2010), and Alexander, (2006) submit that creatives are encouraged to contribute their creations and access any content whenever and wherever they want, across a range of social networking sites Boyd & Ellison, (2008), Utz, (2010), and Walke  (2009) put forward the thoughts that the features of the social media appeal to human nature, since individuals want to feel a part of something bigger, and to feel important. In other words, audiences want to feel that they, as individuals,  have voices to be heard and contributions  to make.

## Statement of the Problem

Engaging with consumers in marketing and advertising activities has opened up the possibilities for co-creation with consumers, which has brought challenges to advertising agencies. These challenges have impacted on the creatives' roles and the identities of who they are in the creative process. Also affected by the challenges is the relationship between the advertiser and the advertising agency owner. Given the interactive nature of the social media, and of the consumer to create his or her own messages about a brand, today's

advertiser finds it easy to ignore the advertising agencies who used to be their strategic partners in the past.

The industry is experiencing a transformation from a passive audience-receiving generation to a digital culture generation, where the target audience is also involved in message construction and delivery. Even advertisers are trying their hardest efforts to promote their messages in new ways, and the heat from the adaptation does not come from this single side only but also from the fact that consumers respond less to traditional forms of advertising, clients demand better results from their advertising expenses and lean but creative ad agencies plunder away revenue. The question that this study seeks to answer is how do the professionals working in the advertising industry cope with these changes? Did they adapt their organisations to better serve the needs and wants of consumers? How did and/or do they keep track of rapidly growing technologies to promote their messages to a more internet-based population without losing their roles and identities in the advertising scene?

### Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to: ascertain the available advertising stakeholders' insights into creatives' roles and role identities in response to digital revolution of the advertising industry.

1. investigate advertising industry stakeholders' perception of the likely challenges of digital revolution to the advertising industry
2. examine the possible way(s) advertising stakeholders could possibly address the challenges of the digital revolution to the advertising industry.
3. ascertain the available advertising stakeholders' insights into creatives' roles and role identities in response to digital revolution of the advertising industry.

### Research Questions

1. What do the advertising stakeholders perceive as the likely challenges of digital revolution to the advertising industry?
2. What possible ways could the advertising stakeholders employ in addressing the challenges of the digital revolution to the advertising industry?
3. What insights do advertising stakeholders have concerning creatives' roles and role identities in response to digitalization of the advertising industry?

### Review of Related Literature

### Digital Advertising and Advertising Creatives

Defining advertising is often a herculean task not necessarily because it is difficult but because of the many definitions that is often proposed by advertising scholars. While Advertising is defined by Belch & Michael (2009) as "any paid form of non-personal communication about an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor" (p.18). The American Marketing Association defines advertising as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of goods, services, and ideas by an identified sponsor."

Berman, Battino, Shipnuck, & Neus, (2007) see online advertising as deliberate messages placed on third-party web sites including search engines and directories available through Internet access. Today online attracts around 12% of advertising budgets in many developed economies and is forecast to grow at between 20 to 40% per year over the foreseeable future. The growth of new media options supplementing traditional ones has led to a fragmentation of audiences whose attention has become far more difficult to capture.

According to Playground Inc. Creative Agencies focus on design and often use outside partners like advertising  marketing consultants to fully deploy their work. Most of the time, Creative Agencies offer print design services. Good Creative Agencies are typically "branding experts" and are great at marketing and product design. Specifically, they are known for designing great logos, letterheads, business cards, and achieving a cohesive overall branding feel. According to Upanup,(2019),  a Digital Agency is defined as a company that gives the creative, strategic,  and  technical development of screen-based products and services. A full digital agency can offer clients search engine marketing, online advertising, web design and development, and e-commerce consulting. Thus the product of the digital agency, which is brought up as digital creatives are often in digital format that can be stored, retrieved, and delivered online in forms like hypertext, HTML  files, GIF image files, MPEG video and even Youtube videos.

In discussing the concept of advertising creatives, one must consider the interplay between the advertising brief and the other briefs that originate in the course of formulating creative as a response to the advertiser`s brief. Creatives speak of both the output and the people behind the output. By output, we mean all messages that are generated to sell a product, service or ideas showcasing the headlines, body copy and illustrations either photos or drawings developed in response to the agency`s creative brief. The creative team on the other hand consist of people at an ad agency who collaborate on the creative concept for an advertising  campaign. Typically,  this  includes copywriters, art  directors,  or  designers, account planners and the visualiser.

The Account planners convey the needs and the interests of the clients to the ad designers so they understand the objectives before and during the creative process. Copy writers provide the text or verbal copy for the ad, while the ad director provides the visual elements, such as illustrations and designs.  However, it is important that the copy and visual elements  be in sync for a successful ad campaign.

**Social Media and Digitalization**

For the purpose of concept clarification, the social media are socio – communication software that employs the web and mobile–based technologies to facilitate interconnectivity between and among people within a specified proximity and or interspersed by distance. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) see social media as a group of internet based applications that builds on the ideological, multifaceted and technological foundations of Web2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.   Social media now encompass a wide range of communication forms, including blogs, chat rooms, social networking sites, fora and discussion boards.   According to Nedelka (2008), the aforementioned can be grouped into three categories: content syndication, content sharing, and community building. Examples of content syndication are blogs, podcasts and videocasts; examples of content sharing are user-generated content, wikis and widgets; and social networks; and online communities are the examples of community building.

The essence of social media is about content, sharing, conversation, openness and interaction. Through social media, users produce, design, publish and edit content. Thus, consumers are no longer passive, but participate actively in shaping and sharing the media regardless of time or geographical boundaries. They have become creators, publishers and producers and are encouraged to contribute their creations and access any content whenever and wherever they want, across a range of social networking sites. These features of social media appeal to human nature, since individuals want to feel a part of something bigger, and to feel important. In other words, audiences want to feel that they, as individuals, have voices to be heard and contributions  to make.

The social media have changed people`s social interactions and shaped their lives in different ways. The rise of digital media devices and platforms has given rise to a network society and to what Deutze (2006) describes as the "digital culture". Under the digital culture, people act and interact with one another using a new set of values, practices and expectations. In this digital culture, people are not passive receivers of messages from the mass media. Instead they have become active agents processing meaning as well as making and assembling their own sets of values and expectations through participation, remediation and construction.

In other words, the digital culture has brought a strong sense of individualism, engagement and reconstruction of meaning by consumers. For instance, bloggers have become media producers; they define what they do in their own voices and they add their own comments and perspectives to the news they share. Cooke (2009) suggested that the social media have democratised the Internet, thereby allowing individuals to express and share freely, thus, moving to a new era of sharing and collective creativity. However, there are in fact restrictions with respect to monitoring online users' information sharing, and a recent outcry over the monitoring of social media has brought negative repercussions for online users in information sharing.

There has been a prevalence of online communication-boosted, consumer-generated content in diverse online platforms; and consumers regularly initiate, create and circulate information and opinions about brands through social media channels. This scenario is even more significant when information shared on social media is considered by users to be a credible source and peer-to-peer conversations are trusted to influence purchasing decisions. These all create the potential for consumers to subvert, challenge and undermine brand stories and images circulated by marketers and advertisers, making it difficult for marketers to exert control over communications between consumers.

The question of how advertising agencies need to change in response to this changing environment has been discussed extensively. Sheehan and Morrison (2009) highlighted the creative challenges faced by the advertising industry in the evolving confluence culture. They suggested that confluence culture requires traditional advertising agencies to expand their ranges of services and to seek new ways to increase audience engagement in communication. They identified four major challenges to the advertising industry, in the areas of (a) message design, (b) consumer engagement, (c) integration of social media, and (d) the development of creatives' talents and skill-sets. Based on these challenges that advertising agencies have been facing, Sheehan and Morrison (2009) argued that agencies have to move beyond the model of the 'mass message' and to recognize the importance of one-to-one consumer communication and interactions.

**Social media challenges and opportunities for the advertising industry**
The increasing use of digital technologies and its relation to consumers' daily lives is no longer in doubt. Social media, incorporating social networking, peer media, digital media, public relations (PR), and Web 2.0, allow people to connect, interact, produce and share content. Thus, empowered with the connective and interactive features of social media, consumers no longer play as passive a role in receiving media messages as they did in the traditional media era. Therefore, social media have challenged the listening or passive consumer economy, where professionals' controlled mass communication and consumer feedback - in the form of comments from users - was virtually impossible to project to the world

Lessig (2008) suggests that unlike traditional mass communication, in which messages are generated and delivered from marketer or corporation to the consumer, the rise of social media has enabled consumers to play an active role in publishing, commenting and reviewing

content. This has enabled audiences take responsibility of what they say; how and when to watch programs and commercials. Consumers are more connected, informed and empowered than ever in the social media age and they take an active role in generating and sharing content that they find meaningful to themselves. Such a shift about User Generated Content has forced marketers to pay attention to what consumers say about their brands.

Social media open up diverse opportunities for the advertising industry and marketers. They enable consumers to exchange information about products and brands. From the marketers' perspective, they have a huge amount of natural information about consumers' consumption habits, tastes, opinions, lifestyles and attitudes available online and for free. Most importantly, they have social data: identity (who you are), contacts (who you know) and activities (what you do). Personal profiles on sites such as MySpace, Bebo and Facebook allow marketers access to preferences, allegiances, recommendations and conversations they could not have dreamt of, even five years ago. As there are communities for every niche, the same data richness can be found for every brand, sector or topic. It is always up to date, being added to spontaneously by consumers.

With the proliferation of social media users, marketers' attention is drawn to this form of 'earned media' that helps them to gain favourable publicity and promote their marketing efforts. However, advertisers and agencies are struggling to keep up with the fast pace of change in digital media and are failing to define social media strategies. Blake (2013) feels strongly that the challenge of most advertising agencies is their perception of the social media as a cultural fad and their concern about the potential risks in terms of business models, revenue impact and lack of talent in agencies when they adopt social media for advertising.

Social media also bring financial challenges for advertising industry business models. There have been many debates concerning the most appropriate methods for measuring success, and there also seems to be some confusion over what the Return on Investment (ROI) of social media should be. .

## Theoretical Framework

The concept of Technological Determinism propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1962 clearly explains the foundation of this study. Technological determinism theory states that a society's technology determines its cultural values, social structure, and history, and that man's feelings, actions and thoughts are shaped by evolving technologies. According to the theory, social progress follows an inevitable course that is driven by technological innovation. Technological determinism has two central concepts: (1) that technological development itself follows a predictable, traceable path that is beyond any cultural or political influence; and (2) that the technology in turn organizes society in a way to further develop itself. The communications theorist and media scholar Marshall McLuhan laid out one famous example of technological determinism in his book Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, wherein he asserted that "the medium is the message." This rejection of "content" in favor of the technological medium as an important consideration in media studies is only one facet of technological determinism, but in many ways it is the classic example.

In the context of this study, therefore this theory speaks of the growing influence of the social media as a technological tool that has changed social interactions and shaped consumer lives in different ways. The rise of diverse digital media devices and platforms has given rise to a network society.

## Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research method using in-depth interviews as the data collection method involving ten (10) Lagos- based advertising agencies from a total registered AAAN membership of 120 agencies. Using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques, a sample size of  30 creative advertising agency staff,  3 drawn from each of the 10 officially registered agencies  in Nigeria, participated in the study. The study employed the strategies of questioning, listening, observing and immersion   in the working world of advertising  among 10 Nigerian ad agencies as follows:

   i.    DDB Lagos
   ii.   Insight Communications
   iii.  Xtreme Media
   iv.   STB McCann
   v.    LTC JWT
   vi.   Blue Bird Communications
   vii.  Noah's Ark
   viii. Etu Odi Communications
   ix.   Verdant Zeal
   x.    TBWA \ Concept Unit

The researcher applied purposive sampling method in selecting the agencies and the respondents from the agencies based on their knowledge of the subject matter and their level of responsibility in the agencies. In this study, three senior creative managers per agency, (totaling 30) who are sufficiently knowledgeable about the creative process in the agencies, were selected. These respondents were deliberately chosen based on the number of years they have spent in the creative departments of agencies and in this case a minimum of ten years. They all successfully participated in the interviews. The interviews were audio – taped, transcribed and analysed using explanation building,  based on the research questions.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question One: What do the advertising stakeholders perceive as the likely challenges of digital revolution to the advertising industry?**

Data collected showed that 24 (80%) of the respondents indicated that the challenges outlined range from economic recession, professional breakaway toform one-man agency, the power of technology especially digital and interactive nature , consumer participation in message generation and organizational change. Two distinctive orientations in relation to the rise of social media were identified among the creatives interviewed in this study. In general, they saw the formal training and work experience of creatives specialising in digital platforms as different from those of the 'traditional' creative. For instance, the digital creatives mostly had multimedia or web-design study certificates, while the 'traditional' creatives had qualifications in art, visual communication or training in advertising design. In order to address such differences, new titles, such as interactive art/creative director, have been created and such titles or positions may be seen as a symbolic expression of creatives' identity, both within their individual agency and in relation to their industry peers. Divergent identities as 'traditional' or 'digital' creatives were evident throughout this study's interview data.

       Most digital creative personnel do not want to subject themselves to the agency formalities and rigors. Rather, they prefer to work as standalone in providing content and creative directions to client briefs. The implication here is that if they can work alone, then

the client can deal with them directly without going through the agency, thus resulting in a loss of revenue to the agency, and invariably a saving to the client.

This in turn appears to have required creatives to redefine their roles and identities. Some creatives seemed to be redefining themselves in relation to where their organisations sat in the shifting media landscape. For instance, the creatives working in digital agencies defined themselves as 'digital creatives' instead of using the title 'advertising creatives'. This act implies that digital creatives, no matter whether they are young creatives with total educational backgrounds in digital media, or those shifting their focus from traditional advertising to the digital dimension, are trying to distinguish themselves from the advertising creatives with traditional skills.

In the interviews, one of the serious challenges identified by 30(100%) of the respondents was their clients lack of understanding of how to use digital media. Creatives from both full service and digital agencies offered strong criticisms of clients for their ignorance of social media, making many disparaging remarks about their lack of knowledge. Another 21(70%) respondents believed that one of the strong reasons why most clients like to use social media is that it is 'free of charge'. Of course, while 'free of charge' would sound very positive to clients, the advertising creatives seemed to view this with reservation. This is because when social media are perceived as 'free of charge', clients believe that advertising this way can be done 'cheaply' by the advertising agencies, and therefore, clients should be able to reduce their advertising budgets. This perceived 'cause and effect' appeared to create some unspoken tensions in the relationships between clients and agencies.

These findings are in line with the submission of Sheehan & Morrison (2009) who identified four major challenges to the advertising industry, in the areas of (a) message design, (b) consumer engagement, (c) integration of social media, and (d) the development of creatives' talents and skill-sets. As mentioned above, the creatives tended to identify with one of two groups, namely 'traditional creatives' or 'digital creatives'.

**Research Question Two: What possible ways could advertising stakeholders employ to address the challenges of digital revolution to the advertising industry?**

Data from the interview showed that 23(76%) of the respondents outlined the following as survival strategies: (a) native advertising, (b) increase use of storytelling, (c) strategizing and reshaping of employees, (d) integration of digital tools and retraining, (e) price-based relationships and deliberate change in the nature and structure of the advertising industry.

However, 7(24%) of the respondents saw technological innovations in organisations as the option for survival. Martinez-Leon & Martinez-Garcia (2011) submitted that organisations will change in the course of time as a result of new conditions in and outside the organisation. Thus, advertising agencies must either recruit digital marketing executives or seek to retain digital creative executives in line with the central concepts of McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory thus: (1) that technological development itself follows a predictable, traceable path that is beyond any cultural or political influence; and (2) that the technology in turn organizes society. In the context of this study, therefore this theory supports the growing influence of the social media as a technological tool that has changed social interactions and shaped consumer lives in different ways. The rise of diverse digital media devices and platforms has given rise to a network society.

**Research Question Three: What insights do advertising stakeholders have concerning creatives' roles and role identities in the face of digital revolution?**

Twenty 22 (73%) of the respondents representing are of the opinion that consumers now play a much more important role in the creative process than ever before, and this has created a fundamental shift in the relationships between advertising creatives and consumers. Before the rise of social media, advertising messages were disseminated through mass media such as TV and print. Consumers were seen as passive receivers of advertising messages, which were created by advertising agencies and approved by clients.  However, todays creatives are now seen as capable of interacting with consumers directly and consumers are becoming contents creators of messages for brands they patronize.  Some other 8 (20% ) of the respondents saw consumers as being well connected on
diverse social media platforms, informing, exchanging and interacting with each other, and generally forming powerful social communities than was never possible. This meant that consumers were engaged actively in brand activities, and even in advertising planning and creative processes.
In the perspective of Thompson and Haytko (1997) advertising practitioners play the role of bridging the commercial and the culture worlds through their use of the symbolic capital of culture and society. In this sense, advertising practitioners, including creatives, who are believed to possess socio-cultural and education capital, are regarded as 'cultural intermediaries' who can use their skill to define the nature of who or what creatives should be.

**Summary of Findings**

  i.   The creatives were generally found to have divergent role identities linked to their identification with either traditional or digital communication approaches.
 ii.    The rise of social media led creatives to experience new tensions in their relationships with clients.
iii.   The role of advertising creatives seemed to be in the process of transcending the digital/traditional distinction across both traditional and digital advertising agencies. Creatives now seemed to be playing a hybrid role that involved switching between three identities: creative strategist, creative facilitator, and creative producer. Each of these role identities required skill sets beyond those of 'digital' and 'traditional' creatives, and these new skills appeared to be developed through a process of situated learning
 iv.   In the past, the structure of advertising included account managers, creative and strategy-orientated people. Nowadays the structure is different because digital media came into the playfield. This resulted in adding a digital element into the structure (digital creatives and digital strategist etc.).
  v.   The rise of social media is creating tensions in relationships: consumer-market relationship and the agency-client relationship.

**Conclusion**

Advertisers and advertising agencies must come to terms with the growing reality that the digital revolution is not just a fad but a media reality that will require readjustment in the skill set among both parties. The digital media, no matter how effective it is presently, will not succeed in driving away or replacing the traditional advertising model.  Rather, it will be more effective if seen as complementary rather than a standalone world of opportunity, as it is currently perceived by advertisers.

## Recommendations

1. In spite of the growing importance of the social media, creatives will have to work more closely with consumers and develop new media technologies for reaching their consumers.

2. Agency owners must retool and reskill their operations to be relevant in the digital age. For instance, advertising agencies can strengthen their creative competencies by introducing new creative roles in account teams, such as creative strategist; and new roles in production teams, such as creative producer. Each of these creative roles emphasises innovation and also plays a facilitating function in terms of negotiation with clients, consumers and creative content producers.

3. Advertisers need to embrace digitalization in order to maximize the potentials inherent in it.

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