

RE-VISITING THE PROGNOSTICATIONS OF QUEST & ASSOCIATES ON THE ADVERTISING OF THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

When a particular study makes predictions into the future, it is only proper that such predictions be judged by the future itself. Almost two decades after, this paper revisits the predictions of Quest & Associates of Atlanta, Georgia.

The paper attempts an in-depth study of the prognostications of Quest & Associates as published many years ago. It then advances further by juxtaposing the list against the realities of today. This traverses the international scene, and the local Nigerian scene.

Indeed, some of the predictions have come true. This is especially so as it concerns 'advertainment', higher quality of advertisements, shorter production time, and lower relative cost of production. Others are more interesting advertisements, sharper audience-targeting, tailoring message to media, as well as longer media advertisements. This is a non-numerical, historical study which employs both observational and experiential approaches. The content analysis technique has proved useful here. This work has once again proved the need to re-visit the past from the vantage point of the future. The study also demonstrates that certain studies have the capacity of not only projecting into the future, but actually presenting credible predictions about the future. This, it would appear, is what Quest & Associates have succeeded in accomplishing, to an appreciable degree.

1.0 Introduction

From its earliest days when it depended on the town cryer, and word-of-mouth, advertising went on to adopt the mural style. With the invention of printing, advertising took on a new, exciting patina. The coming of radio, film and television was instrumental in transforming advertising beyond the imagination. Blimps, inflatables and revolutionized billboards extended the horizon, as advertising continued to re-invent itself to suit the times.

In 1993, Quest and Associates of Atlanta, Georgia (a media and marketing consultancy), examined the history of advertising. They studied the ways in which it has changed or mutated from age to age. Consequently, they went ahead to predict that in the future, advertising will change in many specific ways. They committed themselves by availing the world of a preview of, what would appear at the time to be, tomorrow's advertising.

In this paper, we shall study and discuss the entire list of predictions, as presented by Quest and Associates in 1993. Twenty years after, one can safely say that we have come to the future. The paper shall gauge these predictions against today's reality, using the examples of giant advertisers, internationally and within the local Nigerian environment. Thereafter, this piece will be round-off with befitting concluding remarks.

2.0 The Future of Advertising According to Quest and Associates

Quest and Associates, having thoroughly convinced themselves that the period of their study was right on the threshold of extra-ordinary changes and transmogrification in advertising, state as follows:

Every so often, Advertising, like other industries, is forced to reinvent itself to meet the needs of its customers. Each of those, restructuring is invariably preceded by a period of criticism and soul-searching. We are in such a period right now, in which every aspect of advertising practice has been called into question and many of its most cherished precepts have been subjected to re-evaluation.

Quest & Associates (1993:5)

In their publication, *What is the future of Advertising?*, Quest and Associates Incorporated of Atlanta (1993), have examined the trends in advertising and they project that in the near future, advertising will "re-invent" itself due to certain problems and challenges. These include a building up of discontent with contemporary marketing theory and practice. In addition, business is tough, there is an ebbing demand, coupled with a global economy which is growing at anything but a respectable rate. Furthermore, strong brands are losing market share, while many previously blue-chip companies are cutting workforces, and re-engineering in a desperate effort to survive. Taking all the above into consideration, Quest and Associates (1993) are looking at new kinds of advertising.

Advertainment

This is a new kind of advertising which is driven by entertainment to create news. Advertainment may feature a product but neither the news it creates nor the entire package is about the product featured. While advertising celebrates the relationship between the product and the consumer, advertainment celebrates the relationship between the consumer and sheer entertainment. It is like having the product entertain the consumer rather than present itself for purchase. Also,

advertainment tends to differ, (from advertising) in style. It is show business first and advertising second. That tends to make it as intrusive as the most intrusive advertising, but because it is so entertaining the intrusion is far more welcome.

Quest & Associates (1993:8)

Another advantage over advertising is that advertainment opportunities extend way beyond traditional media. Concerts, rallies, fairs, exhibitions and indeed all kinds of events provide potent vehicles for advertainment.

Retainment

As Quest and Associates see it, the explosion of concrete information about purchase behaviour and product marketing; the eagerness of store management to compete directly with manufacturers' brands; and the evolution of the retail store into the place where most life-style choices are made, make the concept of Retainment inevitable. Retainment, therefore, is both a task and a discipline which the marketer must undertake in order to cope with the transformation of the store into a theatre. The task of Retainment is to "retain" the brand's importance at every outlet: "It means retaining the brand's appeal, momentum, and velocity with its ultimate consumers who are, after all, the store's customers as well".

In a way it is a co-cooperation between the manufacturer and the retailer to give the product its best presentation, so that it can take advantage of every purchase opportunity. In fact, it helps the customers to like the product the more and to buy more. This is Retainment as a task to the marketer. However, as a discipline, Retainment,

Means tight highly organized follow-thorough in the field to guarantee that the curtain goes up in time and that all the

elements of a successful performance are in place and functioning without hitches or glitches.

Quest & Associates (1993:13)

Quest and Associates are not saying that the emergence of Advertainment and Retainment will completely extinguish the fire of traditional advertising. Far from it, they insist that the "the virtues of advertising are too significant to permit it to be discarded". However, in order that these "virtues" might be retained, they put forward a number of imperatives, as a content analysis of their work would show.

For a long time, say Quest and Associates, advertising¹ was content with merely informing both real and potential audiences about a product or service offering. Therefore, awareness was the primary intent of advertising, with the hope of persuasion. In the future, say our gurus, advertising will be created and deployed to solve specific tactical, as well as strategic problems. This will certainly demand more from advertising beyond sheer awareness.

In the decades ahead, advertising will necessarily have to show much higher quality than what presently obtains. According to Quest and Associates (1993), as the audience becomes more sophisticated, they will expect to see greater excellence brought into the creation and production of advertisements. Ideally, they add, the advertising of the future will, of necessity, become more interesting, more involving, more focused, more idiosyncratic, and more meaningful.

The way advertising is planned, scheduled and bought will not continue to remain as it is presently. The advertising of the future, they insist, will target not the entire potential market, but only those audiences with greater propensity for action or response. In other words, tomorrow's advertising must be exposed to those who are most likely to buy, rather all who fit into the audience profile. Under this dispensation, therefore, cost per impression should give way to cost per response; this is so because the size of the audience will become far less important than the number of sales.

Advertising of the future will do well to build in one form of feedback mechanism or the other. Advertisers will need to have quick and reliable responses from those who consume their advertisements. Quest and Associates argue that advertising has proved to work best when it is a dialogue, not a monologue. Hence, the need to get the audience involved by asking for information, whilst making it convenient for him to do so.

Quest and Associates also insist that the advertiser of the future will need to see the audience, read the audience, and target the audience appropriately. Advertisers and advertising agencies will become more like investigative journalists in trying to find out more, and so get to know much more about the audience.

More than ever before, audience lifestyles, attitudes, preferences, dispositions, tastes likes and dislikes will make a tremendous input into the creation and exposure of advertisements. They also say that properly planned advertising will need to interact with news, grapevines and "buzz spots" in order to boost the total effect and impact of advertising.

Poor planning on the part of the advertising agency, coupled with late decision by the advertiser, add up to increase the cost of advertising. This is both unnecessary and preventable. The way Quest and Associates see it, challenges in the future will bring a lot of pressure to bear on company budgets. The advertiser will then be forced to severely rationalize cost, leading both agency and client to show better financial discipline. This is especially so, as the future will compel advertising to compete fiercely with other essentials for a fair share of the budget. If advertising fails under this dispensation, to be cost-efficient in a competitive way, it may lose out to other departments and units which have exhibited better financial and cost management.

Advertising will take less time to produce. Quest and Associates further posit that time will become a more precious commodity in the future. Instead of being wasted and disdained, time would be taken more seriously; this is especially as it concerns advertising. They say that the dynamics of the market place will call for quicker action and swifter response from the advertiser and the advertising agency.

If advertising is to be used as a tool or weapon of action or response to precipitous developments in the market place, then it must be created and produced within the shortest time possible. Unnecessary delays can only come at a great cost; and neither client nor agency would be glad to face the dire consequences.

Every advertising should have a clear and measurable objective. In the future, no piece of advertisement would be deployed except to tackle a specific challenge. The specific objective of any advertising should be spelt out so that the creation, production and exposure of same will incorporate this. After the exposure of any advertising material, it should be possible to tell whether it has been specifically effective or not.

Advertisers will produce fewer pieces of advertising at once. The practice of producing a set of advertisements for a year, either to save cost or to facilitate planning, will cease. The market of the future may require that advertising materials be produced as and when necessary. In the future, the advertising produced in January for use in September may become irrelevant, and completely overtaken by event as early as April. So, it will become wiser to produce the advertising materials meant for September in the middle of August, for example.

Advertisers will run more advertising for shorter periods and then will spend less on each one. Localized problems will lead to media fragmentation which will call for different adverts for different areas. Once an advertising material has proved effective in its area, it will be rested or withdrawn.

Advertising will become more and more interesting. The more interesting the advertising, the more interested people will become in it. The loss of the once captive audience will mean "compelling" them through interesting materials. Once the consumer's life-style is captured creatively, an interesting advert will be the result.

Advertising, promotion and public relations, really, will be planned together. If properly planned and conceived, advertising can stimulate publicity. Publicity can multiply the value of advertising, and both can merchandise and expand the value of promotion.

Major advertisers will do more direct selling. It would be best for the advertiser to talk to those who are in need of his product, as they are more likely to buy it, instead of talking to everyone and hoping to win some prospects. This will just be like firing a shot in the dark. Direct selling is, in addition, easier to execute and much cheaper.

Supermarket rotos will become much more sophisticated. Quest and Associates see in-store advertising becoming more aggressive, and more sophisticated in the future. Roto listings of weekly specials will have to be even more effective in keeping the customer informed and prepared, especially in supermarket chainstores.

Advertising will be tailored more and more to the medium in which it is ^ placed. Contrary to a situation where the same advertising material is produced for Sports channels, News channels, Entertainment channels, as well as Documentary channels, for example, the advertising of the future will be created to suit the character and style of individual media stations. Additionally, the practice of running the audio of a television commercial on radio, or smartly transposing it from television to radio will cease. Future advertisements according to Quest and Associates will be medium-specific in order to be effective, as well as competitive.

Advert duration will get longer again. With preferred television and radio stations fighting to handle a cluster of advertisements ranging from 10 seconds to 60 seconds, there has to be a way out in the future. A cluster of short advertising materials make little or no impact on the consumer, Quest and Associates assert. They say that the future will solve this problem by reverting to longer television and radio commercials which will show relevant details and hold the attention of the consumer.

The line between consumer advertising and corporate advertising will get thinner. Most big advertisers are used to producing and deploying different materials for corporate advertising and

another set of different materials for consumer advertising. However, in the future, due to budgetary pressures and the need to have a unified voice, such advertisers will settle for a set of materials which are crafted to play the dual role interestingly and effectively. It will become more advantageous to show a good product coming from a good company, Quest and Associates, argue on.

3.0 The Broader Picture:

Some of the issues raised by Quest and Associates of Atlanta, Georgia, have been visited by a number of studies. Let us, if we may, briefly discuss and review a few of these perspectives before progressing to the realities of today in juxtaposition with the prognostications of Quest and Associates.

On "Advertainment", a group known as Amicus Brand Dimensions of the United States of America, aver that "Emotional targeting across an exponential, multi-channel, multi-visual and multi-lingual space demands that brands create their own attention". They say today's world is disobedient, an active fraction of which is made up of Generation X and Generation Y. These consumers do not believe in the old tradition of hard work and sweat. Rather, they are active in a smart way. They will always seek shortcuts that bring ease, convenience and more fulfillments to their lives. Amicus further states that the above scenario has naturally led to the emergence of the advertainment. The portmanteau word which combines advertisement and entertainment is able to break through the resentment of the X and Y generations. This it does by offering them entertainment, which is a vibrant part of their lifestyles, as well as indirectly presenting advertising. Advertainment as a concept can operate in virtual reality or in full reality, or indeed a combination of both. This will, of course, depend on the advertiser's plan and preferences.

On the website www.advertising.about.com, we find an article which agrees with Quest and Associates (1993), that the advertising of the future will be much more interesting. This site, however, asserts that one of the most effective ways of making advertising interesting is through Personal Advertising. This is achievable by presenting advertisements from the first person's perspective. Additionally, advertising becomes more personal and, therefore, more interesting through the use of "contractions", such as I'm, You'll, We'll, and so on. According to this site, breaking certain rules of grammar also helps to create more interesting advertisements. For example, sentences can be started with words like And, But, and Because. Finally the article is of the opinion that all interesting advertisements should be devoid of the usual pressures. Advertisements should be friendly, down-to-earth, and matter-of-fact pieces of communication. After all, the consumer or prospect is not a foe, but a friend.

In another on-line article, Dean Rieck (1995), predicted that technology will greatly change the advertising of the future. His emphasis was on concept creation and concept development. According to him, technology will re-create the way advertising is created. This will, in turn, engender better and more creative pieces of advertisements.

Clutter, is one of the major challenges which Quest and Associates said would cause the advertising of the future to change. This change will also produce a solution to the problem of clutter. Peter Webb (1979) defines clutter as the amount of advertisement present in a particular medium. He proceeds to assert that clutter is another critical dimension of the media environment. The media environment theory was spearheaded by Marshal McLuhan (1964), and it states in essence, that the context or environment of exposure can influence the reception and interpretation of an advertising message.

Alex Wallau (2000), informs that due to the problem of clutter, there is a grave concern by advertisers. This concern stems from the fact that clutter annoys the consumer, thereby making it difficult for the advertising message to communicate effectively. Cluck Ross (1999), however observes that any wonderful piece of advertisement would stand out, clutter or not. He recommends that such outstanding advertisements are possible through the use of humour, celebrity spokespersons, as well as the use of novel and more creative approaches.

4.0 Looking Back from the Future:

It is now two decades since Quest and Associates of Atlanta, Georgia published their predictions on the advertising of the future. As we look back at these, it is apparent that some of their predictions have indeed come to pass. Today, the "Advertainment" has become one of the more strategic approaches by big multi-national advertisers. Internationally, Nike has taken the advantage of this new approach. The Nike brand has created and managed a number of highly-interactive advertainments on websites to target sports, cultural and global affinities and affiliations. Such videos, animations, games and webisodes have proved quite effective in engaging, retaining and building long-term relationships with the target audience. Their packages include "Air Insurgent", "Vertigo", "KOA Surf Hustler", and many more. It is pertinent to point out that Nike has opted for the virtual reality approach to advertainment.

In the Nigerian local environment, the biggest and most active advertisers are the so called big three in the telecommunications industry. These are MTN Nigeria, Globacom, and Etisalat Nigeria. Between the three of them, they spend about N50 billion yearly on advertisements and corporate communications. They have also embraced the new medium called advertainment, albeit opting for the full reality approach.

Today, MTN, Glo and Etisalat have taken the virtues and benefits of their brands to real and potential consumers, using entertainment as the umbrella. Tertiary institutions, city centres, parks and recreation centres have been targeted and utilized especially. Floats and road shows compliment the array of channels which are now being exploited by these local telecommunications giants.

It works by loading models, and stand-up comedians, disc jockeys into trucks. Both the trucks and the talents are heavily branded by the advertisers, while music blasts through huge loud speakers. Usually, the choice of music reflects the preferences of the target audience; therefore, hip-hop and urban appear to take the centre stage more often than not.

The trucks find a convenient place to park within the chosen area and the talents jump out and entertain openly. At these venues, jokes and dancing are freely offered, in addition to the intrusive and sometimes nauseating music. In some instances gifts are offered through a "lucky-dip", to the ever-increasing hoards of spectators. A few may even offer to purchase SIM packs and other offerings from the company. This, however, is not the objective; and such sales usually amount to little or nothing. The overriding intention is to relax and entertain the target audience, whilst indirectly presenting and registering the brand in their minds. This is nothing but advertainment at its best-live and direct!

True to the predictions of Quest and Associates, advertising materials are now of higher quality, they take lesser time to produce, they also cost relatively less to produce. In addition, there is a sharper targeting of audiences by advertisers, advertising messages are now more interesting, advertising is now being tailored to the medium more than ever before; and adverts are getting longer again through 'infomercials" and DRTV (Direct Response Television).

These developments are visible locally and globally. Most big advertisers who consider advertising strategic to the attainment of marketing goals and objectives have reflected these aspects in their programmes. The more serious advertisers have incorporated these modes of the advertising of the future into their mechanisms and systems.

5.0 Concluding Remarks

The Behavioural Learning Theories of Advertising assert, amongst other things, that audiences do not pay attention to advertisements. As a result, these audiences are uninvolved in whatever the

advertisement has to say or show. Although this position has been countered or proved wrong by the Active Learning Theories of Advertising and many other studies, the advertising of the future may prove more effective in allaying the fears of the Behavioural Learning theorists. We have seen the predictions of Quest and Associates (1993), and we have noted the ones that have come true. It is just possible that through the use of technology, and by injecting more creativity, interest and feedback mechanisms; coupled with sharper and more specific targeting of the consumer, the dreaded audience can become not only interested but also involved in advertisements. This should certainly make the adherents of the Behavioural Learning Theories of Advertising happier. It is the position of this author that the advertising of the future may have succeeded in doing just that.

As for those aspects of the prognostications of Quest and Associates of Atlanta, Georgia, which are yet to become a part of today's reality, only the following can be said. The future never really comes to an end. This paper has looked through time to Twenty years in the past. Perhaps in the years to come, more of their predictions will become reality; and another curious investigator may decide to take that on.

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