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Beyond the Product: How Storytelling Advertisements Shape Consumer Perception and Purchase Decisions

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Abstract

Background: In a digitally saturated market where consumers are overwhelmed with advertising content, organisations are challenged to find effective ways to connect with their target audience. Storytelling has emerged as a powerful advertising technique to bridge this gap by creating meaningful and memorable connections.

Objective: This study investigates consumer perceptions of storytelling as an advertising technique. Specifically, it examines the frequency of consumer exposure to storytelling advertisements, their influence on consumer purchase decisions, and the emotional and cognitive perceptions of consumers towards this form of advertising.

Methodology: A descriptive survey research design was employed, with data collected from a sample of 384 Nigerian consumers. The sample size was determined using the Cochran formula for infinite populations. A combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling was used to ensure adequate demographic representation and select individuals who frequently interact with storytelling advertisements. Data was collected over a 14-21 day period via a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms.

Results: Findings reveal that consumers are frequently exposed to storytelling advertisements, predominantly on social media and television. The majority of respondents (69.27%) reported being influenced by a captivating storytelling ad in their purchase decision. The most compelling aspects of these advertisements were identified as their unique and creative storylines and high-

quality visuals. Furthermore, the study found that storytelling advertisements primarily evoke emotions of inspiration, excitement, and nostalgia, indicating a strong emotional connection.

Conclusion: The study concludes that storytelling is a highly effective advertising technique with a significant, positive impact on consumer behaviour and perceptions. Brands should therefore leverage this technique to create authentic, emotionally resonant, and visually compelling narratives to build stronger connections and drive purchase decisions in the competitive digital landscape.

Keywords: Consumer Perception, Storytelling Advertisement, Advertising Technique

Introduction

In today's highly competitive market, brands must find the most effective ways to meet their advertising goals. With consumers overwhelmed by a constant flood of digital content, information, and choices, securing a spot in their hearts and minds is a significant challenge. Organisations need a strong way to connect with their target audience, and storytelling has become a powerful tool to bridge this gap. By helping brands establish and maintain impactful connections, storytelling creates a space for them in a noisy digital world.

Storytelling is not a new concept; it's a practice our ancestors used to inform, educate, and entertain. Our forefathers' stories instilled moral principles in younger generations and have captivated human attention for centuries. Stories resonate with people because they create visual, factual, and emotional memories, making them highly memorable. As Fog et al. (2005) noted, stories have a unique capacity to evoke emotions and create memorable experiences, which in turn helps consumers form a stronger attachment to a brand.

At its core, storytelling is the art of conveying a message, sharing an experience, or presenting information in a narrative format that engages and resonates with an audience. In marketing, it plays a pivotal role in fostering brand loyalty by creating narratives that consumers can identify with. When a brand tells a story that aligns with a customer's values or experiences, it transforms a simple transaction into a meaningful relationship. For a story to be successful, it must connect with the target audience's emotions, often by including a message or moral that resonates with their beliefs.

Although storytelling has been around for ages, it's now a refined technique that organizations use to create emotional connections. Advertisers, recognizing its inherent benefits, have increasingly leveraged it to their advantage. Storytelling taps into the power of human connection to help a brand sell its products. By consistently sharing an authentic story about your brand's vision, mission, and values—whether it's educational, inspirational, emotional, or humorous—you create a narrative that consumers can relate to. This narrative sets your brand apart and helps it stand out from the competition.

Numerous studies in marketing and psychology have explored the effectiveness of storytelling on consumer behavior and attitudes. For instance, research by Escalas (2007) highlighted that storytelling improves brand recall because the brain processes narratives differently than it does plain facts. Other research shows that companies with compelling brand stories are more likely to

build a base of loyal customers who feel a deep connection to the brand. Storytelling as an advertising technique helps organizations generate leads, build connections, and capture customer attention.

Brands like Nike have effectively used compelling brand stories. Their "Just Do It" campaign, for example, consistently highlights core values of perseverance and determination, inspiring and encouraging customers to reach their full potential. Similarly, Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign resonated with consumers' emotions, motivating them to share a Coke with loved ones and deepening their connection with the brand.

In today's fast-paced world, where attention spans are shorter (Decker, 2021), a strong and lasting impression is crucial. The impact of storytelling in advertising is evident in various contexts, including its effect on brand experiences, brand image, perceived quality, purchase intention, and consumer trust (Pan & Chen, 2019). This advertising approach appeals to consumers' emotions and can facilitate changes in customer experience, promote brand awareness, and build strong brand equity. Unlike traditional print ads, video storytelling uses digital platforms like TV, desktops, laptops, and mobile devices (Nilsen, 2022).

Digital storytelling is especially significant in today's interactive online landscape, where social media channels allow for immediate engagement and personalized connections. According to Adams (2012), social media has become a place where consumers connect and share personal stories that influence behavior and purchase decisions. Research shows that narrative storytelling reflects consumer values, perspectives, and challenges, which creates a sense of belonging and alignment with the brand, thereby building loyalty (Green et al., 2016).

While numerous studies confirm the impact of storytelling ads on purchase intention, few have explored what consumers think about this technique. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate consumer perception of storytelling as an advertising technique.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine consumer perception of storytelling as an advertising technique. The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out how often consumers encounter storytelling advertisements.
2. Ascertain the influence of storytelling ads on consumer purchase decisions.
3. Determine consumers' perception of storytelling as an advertising technique.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored in the Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT). Propounded by Richard Gerrig in 1993 and further developed by Melanie Green and Timothy Brock in 2000, NTT is a psychological theory that suggests reading or listening to a story can "transport" people into a state of emotional involvement and mental focus. This imaginative journey into the world of the story makes them more receptive to its message. This state of immersion—whether it's from a novel, a

podcast, a movie, or a video game—can influence and even change a person's beliefs and behaviour.

The theory proposes that the more a narrative transports a person, the more likely they are to accept its message, empathise with the characters, and form a deeper emotional connection to the brand. This empathy, in turn, can persuade them to make a purchase. Van Las et al. (2014) also noted that NTT posits consumers become so engrossed in a story that they experience a "suspension of disbelief," which allows them to connect with the brand on a deeper level. The Narrative Transportation Theory highlights three significant factors that influence the level of transportation: the story, the audience, and the context.

- *The story factor* refers to the features and quality of the narrative itself, such as its plot, language, and structure.
- *The audience factor* includes the characteristics of the viewer, reader, or listener, such as their motivation, interest, knowledge, and mood.
- *The context factor* involves external conditions and distractions that affect how the story is consumed, such as the medium, time, and environment.

These factors all work together to determine the effectiveness of the story and the level of transportation experienced.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate consumer perceptions of storytelling as an advertising technique. This approach was chosen for its effectiveness in collecting specific data from a large sample, which is essential for understanding consumer attitudes and behaviours. The research was anchored in the Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT), with the survey instrument designed to measure key concepts derived from the theoretical framework and research hypotheses.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised Nigerian consumers who engage with advertising content across various digital and traditional platforms. Due to the infinite size of this population, the Cochran formula for infinite populations was used to determine a minimum sample size of 384 respondents.

A stratified random sampling technique was initially used to ensure adequate representation across diverse demographic groups (e.g., age, gender, location). This was followed by a purposive sampling technique to select individuals who frequently interact with storytelling advertisements. Participants were screened at the beginning of the survey with a qualifying question to ensure they met this criterion. (Eg "How often do you watch or read advertisements that tell a story?") This was followed by response options like "Daily," "Weekly," "Monthly," etc. The criterion for inclusion was a minimum frequency, e.g., "At least once a week."

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed using Google Forms. The use of online data collection is further supported by recent studies showing its efficiency and comparative advantage over face-to-face methods (Gever, 2024; Dumbari Ndiinee & Gever, 2025). The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions, divided into three key sections. The first section focused on the frequency of exposure to storytelling advertisements and the primary platforms where respondents encountered them. The second section examined the impact of storytelling ads on purchasing decisions. The final section measured respondents' overall perceptions and attitudes toward storytelling as an advertising technique. Questions used a mix of direct response options, such as "Yes/No," and a 5-point Likert-style scale for assessing likelihood and effectiveness.

The survey link was distributed through various online channels, including social media and messaging platforms, over a period of 14 to 21 days. This method was efficient and reduced data collection costs.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the questionnaire was established through face validity. The instrument was scrutinised and evaluated by a subject-matter expert to ensure that the questions accurately measured the intended constructs. The questionnaire was deemed valid and approved for distribution after this expert review.

Reliability was assessed through a pilot study involving a small group of 20 respondents from the target population. The data from the pilot study were analysed to check for internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha. The instrument was deemed reliable, with a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.76, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study primarily used descriptive statistics, including summary tables, frequencies, and simple percentages, to answer the research questions. This approach allowed for the comprehensive description of the sample's characteristics and the clear presentation of consumer perceptions and behaviours regarding storytelling advertisements.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the data analysis based on the survey responses, along with a discussion of the findings in relation to the study's research objectives.

Table 1: Respondents' Frequency of Exposure to Storytelling Advertisements

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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	1 Have you ever come across advertisements that tell a story rather than just promoting a product?		
a.	Yes	331	86.2
b.	No	11	2.87
c.	Maybe	42	10.94
	Total	384	100
	2 How often do you come across storytelling advertisements?		
a.	Very frequently	111	28.91
b.	Frequently	66	17.19
c.	Occasionally	139	36.2
d.	Rarely	61	15.89
e.	Never	7	1.82
	Total	384	100
	3 Where do you mostly encounter storytelling advertisements?		
a.	Social media	201	52.34
b.	Television	137	35.68
c.	Websites	22	5.73
d.	Billboards	24	6.25
e.	Others (please specify)	0	0
	Total	384	100

The findings in Table 1 reveal that the majority of respondents (86.20%) have encountered advertisements that use a storytelling approach. A smaller percentage either had not (2.87%) or were unsure (10.94%). When asked about the frequency of exposure, most respondents (36.20%) reported seeing these advertisements occasionally, followed by those who see them very frequently (28.91%) and frequently (17.19%). Less than one-fifth of respondents rarely (15.89%) or never (1.82%) encounter them. Social media was identified as the primary platform for these advertisements, cited by 52.34% of respondents, followed by television (35.68%), billboards (6.25%), and websites (5.73%). This aligns with Adams' (2012) assertion that social media has become a key convergence point for sharing personal stories that influence consumer behaviour and purchase decisions.

Table 2: Respondents' Responses on the Influence of Storytelling on Purchase Decisions

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
4	Have you ever made a purchase because a story in an advertisement captivated you?		

a.	Yes	266	69.27
b.	No	70	18.23
c.	Not Sure	48	12.5
	Total	384	100
5 How likely are you to purchase a product after watching a storytelling advertisement?			
a.	Very Likely	75	19.53
b.	Likely	150	39.06
c.	Neutral	125	32.55
d.	Unlikely	24	6.25
e.	Very unlikely	10	2.6
	Total	384	100
6 What aspects of storytelling advertisements make them compelling to you?			
a.	Emotional Connection	34	8.85
b.	Relatable characters/situations	54	14.06
c.	Unique and Creative storyline	130	33.85
d.	High-quality visuals and production	110	28.65
e.	Clear brand messaging	56	14.58
	Total	384	100
7 Compared to direct product advertising, how influential do you find storytelling ads in your decision-making process?			
a.	More influential	214	55.73
b.	Equally influential	133	34.64
c.	Less influential	37	9.64
	Total	384	100

As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents (69.27%) confirmed that they had made a purchase decision because an advertisement's storytelling captivated them. A significant portion of respondents (39.06%) stated they are likely to purchase after watching a storytelling advertisement, with an additional 19.53% stating they are very likely to do so.

When asked what makes these advertisements compelling, a unique and creative storyline was the most popular response (33.85%), followed by high-quality visuals and production (28.65%). Clear brand messaging and relatable characters/situations also received notable responses (14.58% and 14.06%, respectively), while emotional connection was the least-cited factor (8.85%).

Furthermore, 55.73% of respondents found storytelling advertisements to be more influential than direct product advertising in their decision-making process. The Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT), which posits that emotional and imaginative immersion into a story makes individuals more receptive to its message, provides a strong theoretical basis for these results. This finding directly supports Hypothesis 3, which states that the vividness of the storytelling influences customer recall and brand awareness. As World Train (2024) posits, visual elements are highly effective at evoking emotions and conveying complex messages. The finding that storytelling ads are considered more influential than direct product advertising by over half the respondents further reinforces their effectiveness in the decision-making process.

Table 3: Respondents' Perception of Storytelling as an Advertising Technique

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
8	How would you rate storytelling as an advertising technique?		
a.	Extremely Effective	176	45.83
b.	Effective	169	44.01
c.	Neutral	39	10.16
d.	Ineffective	0	0
	Total	384	100
9	What emotions do storytelling advertisements evoke in you?		
a.	Happiness	55	14.32
b.	Nostalgia	78	20.31
c.	Inspiration	132	34.38
d.	Excitement	97	25.27
e.	Indifference	22	5.73
	Total	384	100
10	Do you believe storytelling advertisements build stronger brand connections with consumers?		
a.	Yes	266	69.27
b.	No	0	0
c.	Maybe	118	30.73
	Total	384	100
11	Would you prefer brands to use storytelling more in their advertisements?		
a.	Yes	315	82.03
b.	No	0	0

c.	Not sure	69	17.97
	Total	384	100

As per Table 3, respondents have an overwhelmingly positive perception of storytelling as an advertising technique. The vast majority rated it as either extremely effective (45.83%) or effective (44.01%), with no respondents rating it as ineffective. The most common emotions evoked by these advertisements were inspiration (34.38%) and excitement (25.27%), followed by nostalgia (20.31%) and happiness (14.32%). This directly validates Hypothesis 2, which posits that the degree of emotional connection has a significant influence on consumer purchase intention. This finding supports Lundquist et al.'s (2013) notion that consumers who feel emotionally connected to a brand become more loyal. The data also shows that a strong majority (69.27%) believe storytelling advertisements help build stronger brand connections, and an even higher majority (82.03%) would prefer brands to use this technique more often. This is consistent with Lee and Jahng (2020), who argue that stories impact a consumer's experience and a brand's perceived worth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that storytelling is a highly effective advertising technique that significantly influences consumer behaviour and decision-making in Nigeria. The study found that consumers frequently encounter these ads, primarily on social media, and that a substantial majority have been motivated to make a purchase due to a captivating storyline. The perception of storytelling as an effective and emotionally engaging technique is overwhelmingly positive, with consumers expressing a clear preference for this style of advertising.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- *Investment in High-Quality Content:* Brands should invest in producing high-quality visual storytelling advertisements with unique and creative storylines that convey authentic brand messages. This is crucial for creating compelling content that resonates with consumers.
- *Platform Optimisation:* Given that social media and television are the most dominant platforms for these ads, brands should optimise their content for each medium. Short-form storytelling should be adopted for social media, while television provides a suitable platform for longer-form narratives.
- *Personalised Storytelling:* Companies should leverage data to personalise their storytelling advertisements, creating experiences that address the specific interests and pain points of their target audience. This will solidify the emotional connection between consumers and the brand, fostering greater loyalty and engagement.

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