

A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN STRATEGIES IN SMALL FURNITURE ENTERPRISE ADVERTISING IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Graphic design (GD) plays a crucial role in visual advertising, serving as a tool to inform, educate, and persuade towards brand loyalty. Despite its significance, Small Furniture Enterprises (SFEs) in Kenya consider graphic design professionals, processes, and final products excessively costly, limiting its applicability in advertising. Instead, most enterprises rely on less effective marketing methods such as roadside exhibitions, word-of-mouth, and referrals, making them highly dependent on unsustainable roadside manufacturing and vulnerable to market competition. This research probes graphic design strategies in SFE advertising within Nairobi County, Kenya, objectively aiming to analyze the various graphic designs utilized in branding and advertising. Guided by (Brown, 1979) "Graphics Triangle Theory," encompassing explanation, persuasion, and identification values, which are also defined as tenets of the theory, this study targeted an accessible population of 940 SFEs, ultimately selecting a representative sample of 273 licensed SFEs with physical business premises. Employing systematic random sampling and further supplemented by snowballing seventeen welfare leaders, the research collected data through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The study's reliability and validity were guaranteed and confirmed by an 89.6% response rate, providing quantitative data that was analyzed descriptively through percentages and frequency distributions. At the same time, qualitative data (including narratives and photographs) were also meticulously coded and analyzed. Demographic findings indicate that SFE management is predominantly male-dominated, where most SFE managers possess KCSE and CPE education levels while others have entrepreneurial skills, which largely stem from apprenticeship programs. While SFEs principally acknowledge the role of graphic design in advertising, it is not their preferred choice due to its perceived high cost, time consumption, complexity, and low significance. Based on these diverse perceptions and challenges, the only graphic design practice found popular in most SFEs is photographs, often shared through social media, and some used in enterprise stationery, posters, and flyers. Most graphic designs used are either produced by enterprise owners, managers, and family members or sourced from non-graphic design professionals, hence a low communication value observed in most visual advertising products. The implication of the study is that, increased graphic design awareness, promotion, production, and application among small enterprises could largely enhance their advertising strategies, especially those that lean towards emerging e-businesses leveraging small enterprise market competitiveness. The study recommends individual small enterprises or those operating in clusters to explore graphic design professionals, processes, and products that are available, affordable, and sustainable as a strategy to address their advertising needs and achieve increased market competitiveness.

Keywords: Small and Medium Enterprise, Advertising, Branding, Graphic Design

INTRODUCTION

The study focuses on a critical design problem within small furniture enterprises (SFEs) concerning their inefficient utilization of visual advertising to market furniture products and services. Earlier research reveal that a paltry 15.6% of SFEs use basic branding tools such as flyers, brochures, contact cards, photo albums, and signage, primarily due to a lack of know-how on other options and limited resources (M'zungu et al., 2019; Odoom et al., 2017; Walker, 2017). Furthermore, SFEs rely to a great extent on informal roadside exhibitions, word-of-mouth, referrals and walk-ins, which do not sufficiently attract customers in the broader furniture market. The displays are often congested, disorderly, and lack product variety, impeding effective product promotion. Word-of-mouth marketing often elicits inconsistent, skewed, sometimes biased, contradictory, or negative messages about SFE products and services. Customer perception and, to some extent, competitor attacks resulting from such messaging harm overall consumer perception. The perception held by small furniture enterprise managers (SFEM) on the high costs associated with hiring designers and advertising often arises from hearsay and their limited exposure to the profession, hence restricting the utilization of visual advertising in the sector. Addressing these factors through graphic design and advertising strategy is a prerequisite for enhancing the scope of visual advertising, as well as its efficiency and effectiveness in the small enterprise sector.

Despite limited research on graphic design's significance in small enterprises' advertising, graphic design and

Advertising remain interconnected. graphic design plays a pivotal role by visually translating brand messages through typography, colour, imagery, and layout, capturing attention and reinforcing brand identity. At the same time, advertising forms the strategic communication process that utilizes various graphic design visuals across electronic, print, and digital media alongside other channels to promote products or services. This synergy ensures effective communication, memorable campaigns, sustained consumer engagement, and higher client conversion rates, ultimately contributing to the economic success of an enterprise.

Walker (2017) observes that the existing research on graphic design dwells more on the contributions of designers to the creative field, leading to a dearth of empirical data on the influence of graphic design in small enterprise promotions. Further, empirical studies conducted by M'zungu et al., (2019) and Odoom et al., (2017) reveal a consensus among researchers focusing on branding in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that graphic design, which is a professional discipline remains under-researched. To address this gap, this research adopted a comprehensive historical and contemporary empirical exploration to bridge the empirical void and provide a more robust understanding of graphic design's applications in small enterprise branding and advertising.

An analysis of various types of graphic design utilized in branding and advertising by small furniture enterprises is necessary to understand the diversity of its empirical data. Dzisi & Ofoosu (2014) highlight various advertising methods employed by SMEs in Ghana,

skewing them to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, banners and billboards, while additional techniques include exhibitions, door-to-door marketing, word-of-mouth, face-to-face interactions and discounted sales. Vidic, (2013) study also reveals a deficiency in graphic design application within SME advertising, primarily due to their managers' avoidance of multimedia advertising approaches. A mere 20% of SMEs use branded clothing, and only 15% incorporate logo signage within showrooms. However, (Manzini, 2015) urges small businesses to redefine their identity through design to remain competitive. This study, therefore, grounds (Martin, n.d.) view that graphic design can help enterprises establish a good image, earn goodwill in the market, attract clients and win business trust. Deploying good graphic design strategies in enterprises enhances innovative and effective visual advertising. (Mathenge, 2020), in a discussion on the evolving dynamics of the advertising landscape in selected advertising agencies in Kenya and its implications for advertising practices, pursue advertisers to embrace diverse, interactive, flexible, sustainable and cost-effective advertising methods to capture consumer attention. (Winston & Granat, 2014) advise SMEs to share the costs with individuals who operate similar businesses in nearby communities to mitigate advertising costs. This mode of advertising is commonly utilized by enterprises that are members of the same trade association or chamber of commerce. Given the ever-changing consumer preferences, the study underscores the importance of continuous engagement, staying updated on technological advancements and utilizing new media and interactive channels to cultivate consumer awareness through

innovative and engaging graphic design strategies.

Although Dzisi and Ofofu's study comprehensively explores various advertising media, it falls short in precisely addressing the types of graphic design, production processes and their utilization within multimedia contexts in support of small enterprise advertising. Hence, this study need to further on (Mathenge, 2020) proposed dynamism strategy and (Winston & Granat, 2014) collaborative approach to small enterprise advertising strategies.

THEORY

The history of graphic design spans forty thousand years, commencing with cave wall visuals in early civilizations and gaining momentum during the 18th-century Industrial Revolution as a tool for commercialization. While modern graphic design is deeply rooted in marketing and is key in today's social and economic activities Meggs & Purvis, (2016), its impact on Industrial Revolution 4.0 is domiciled in human-centred and emotional design within a complex digital social-economic ecosystem. Buchanan, (2001) further traces the evolution of graphic design from crafting symbols to intricate human-focused systems, hinging on graphic design as a versatile tool in print and electronic media. It is integral to corporate identity, publications, outdoor advertisements, and online social technologies. The design process across various spheres of the Industrial Revolution gravitates around universal elements and principles of design, such as line, form, texture, balance, unity, and colour, to create visual appeal (Reid, 2021). These principles extend beyond graphic design to products like furniture, contributing to a sophisticated visual system that can support small enterprises in production and advertising (Mughal, 2023).

Kenya's Small Furniture Enterprise (SFE) sector holds significant potential for poverty alleviation and economic contribution. These labour-intensive, resourceful businesses often rely on low technology to produce high-value furniture categorized into domestic, contract, and office segments. Samani, (2023) further categorizes furniture based on use, materials, style, and design, ideal in product differentiation on which graphic design thrives. However, the importance of graphic design in aligning production with market demand, fostering innovation, cost-effectiveness, and establishing brand identity is underexplored. Consumer fascination with trends and lifestyle orientations underscores the need for effective graphic designs in advertising. Despite challenges like poor physical presentation and market vulnerability, small enterprises can leverage graphic design to enhance visibility, credibility, and competitiveness. Strategic branding, advertising, and improved infrastructure are vital for overcoming marketing challenges, propelling the sector forward, and contributing to economic growth, poverty alleviation, and employment generation. In the era of economic globalization, the competitiveness of products on a global scale is increasingly achieved through effective and sustainable strategies for brand development (Li et al., 2022). Manufacturers of any product must actively define and periodically redefine their unique brands and identities to survive in the business realm (Manzini, 2015). In the present landscape, the prevalence of online consumerism underlines the importance of branding and advertising, particularly for small businesses, as highlighted by (Hakim, 2014).

According to Fabisiak et al., (2013), who investigated the role of corporate identity as a marketing tool, small enterprises rarely employ a multimedia advertising approach. They reveal that 75% of these enterprises utilize interior and web design, while 20%

opt for branded attire, and 15% use logo signage within showrooms. Common advertising methods for small enterprises in Ghana, for example, include television, radio, newspapers, magazines, banners, billboards, and branded items (Dzisi & Ofori, 2014). However, Dzisi & Ofori, (2014) lack comprehensive details regarding the specific graphic design forms used, the production process, the role of graphic design across various media, and the potential challenges faced. Further, Jeconia, (2017) observes that digital marketing, through digital publishing, online platforms, TV, and CD-ROMs, positively influences the sales and growth of SMEs in Nairobi, Kenya. In contrast, the studies by Sharu & Guyo, (2013), Fabisiak et al., (2013), and KAAA, (2017) primarily associate advertising challenges with financial constraints, overlooking graphic design-related hurdles in SFEs, thus highlighting a gap that this study aimed to address.

Various articles, such as Cann, (2022), Terry, (2020), Brooks, (2020), and Tomboc, (2023), explore diverse facets of graphic design, identifying types like visual identity, marketing, User Interface (UI) / User Experience (UX), and motion. They emphasize the need for specialized designers to address these styles. However, the discussions overlook technical influences on graphic design choices in small enterprises, creating a knowledge gap. Small businesses' perceptions of graphic design vary, challenging such broad generalizations. While highlighting diversity and demand, the articles neglect nuances in application, especially in small enterprise contexts, suggesting a need for further exploration in understanding the intricacies of graphic design in diverse small business settings.

As Winston & Granat, (2014) highlighted, print advertisements offer versatility by easily adapting to various mediums. Their structured sales message aligns with print style, capitalizing on adaptability, familiarity, budget flexibility, and a less

restrictive creative process. Video advertising, on the other hand, is increasingly crucial and boasts a 95% information retention rate compared to 10% for written content (Clarine, 2016). Positive user experiences with video ads enhance purchase intent by 97%, and brand association by 139%. Amazon and eBay note a 35% increase in the likelihood of a purchase when a video is included in a product description (Clarine, 2016).

Etuk & Emenyi, (2022) study on advertising's impact on SMEs in Uyo affirms that diverse advertising approaches significantly improve profitability, which is crucial for local, regional, and national market development. The research advocates for a balanced communication plan, integrating traditional and non-traditional channels like TV, newspapers, and social media. In comparison, TV offers extensive reach, but its high-cost limits small businesses. Conversely, internet marketing emerges as a cost-effective tool, allowing SMEs to utilize banners, pop-ups, emails, etc., for a broader audience reach. The study underscores the importance of innovative strategies in adapting to evolving advertising demands, fostering growth, sales, and overall profitability for small enterprises.

Nair, (2023) research highlights the significance of small businesses comprehending social media advertising on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. These platforms effectively enable engagement, relationship building, and customer understanding. Instagram has emerged as a suitable platform for the fashion, food, travel, design, and technology industries. While Varun & Lekshmi, (2016) urges small businesses to harness social media's potential for holistic marketing success, Varun's study is critiqued for its limited exploration of diverse graphic design forms for impactful market creation, highlighting a research gap.

The literature review explores graphic design in small furniture enterprise (SFE) advertising, emphasizing the adaptability and cost-effectiveness of print advertising for small enterprises. While acknowledging the effectiveness of video advertising, it underscores the growth contribution of online advertising, particularly on social media platforms. However, the review falls short of establishing a clear link between graphic design and online advertising. It briefly mentions the role of graphic design in supporting SFEs amid globalization challenges but lacks specific details. Empirical research highlights graphic design's integral role in attracting diverse consumers. However, it lacks an in-depth exploration of its specific contributions in print, electronic, or online advertising trajectories that suit the small enterprise sector.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive research design process, which enabled the quick collection and collation of large amounts of data from a population comprising small furniture enterprises in the expansive study area of Nairobi County in Kenya. The capital city was preferred for the study because of its large number of small furniture enterprises, a substantial industrial and commercial hub with a stable supply of raw materials, and a vast pool of graphic design professionals. Nairobi County is on latitude - 1.286389 and longitude 36.817223. GPS coordinates of 1° 17' 11.0004" S and 36° 49' 2.0028" E. The county has approximately 696.1 km², with a population projection of 4,750,056 people and a population density of 6,748/km² by 2023. The population of this study entailed all Small Furniture Enterprises operating in Nairobi County. The accessible population was 1540 SFEs derived from NCG (2019) with physical production or exhibition sites in Nairobi County. The target population consisted of 940 licensed Small Furniture Enterprises in Nairobi manufacturing or exhibition sites. The study

also targeted 17 welfare group leaders coordinating SFE participation in national trade fairs, exhibitions, and other commercial publicities (KAAA, 2017). A systematic random sampling method selected 273 SFE managers. The study also used 13 SFE welfare leaders drawn from sub-county selected through snowballing.

The questionnaire, Interview Schedule, and Observation were research methods applied to data collection. The questionnaire contained structured questions to collect data from SFE managers and SFE Welfare Leaders about graphic design used in SFEs. Two hundred and seventy-three (273) filled questionnaires (89.6%) out of 242 were returned and considered adequate for further analysis, reporting, and publication, according to (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Thirteen SFEWL accounting (67%) out of nine were interviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

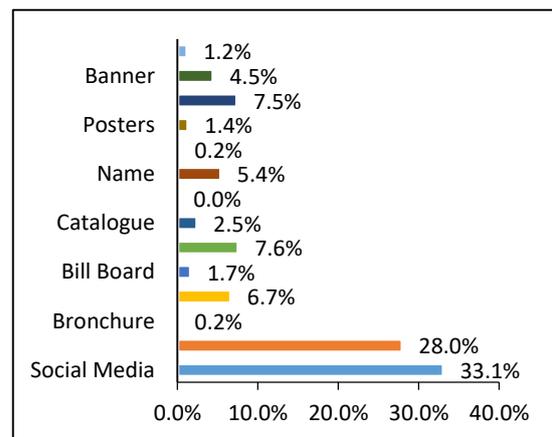
Types of graphic design used in SFE advertising were investigated through questionnaires, interviews, and observation. Graphic designs used in Small Furniture Enterprises advertising is highlighted in Figure 1:

FIGURE 1: GRAPHIC DESIGN USED IN SMALL FURNITURE ENTERPRISE ADVERTISING

The study on graphic design usage in Small Furniture Enterprises (SFEs) advertising, as depicted in Figure 1, indicates that 33% of SFEs employ social media for sharing text-infused photographs. Additionally, 28% utilize branded stationery, with receipts and business cards being the predominant forms. Business cards, signage, branded names, printed photographs, banners, and other methods account for varying

percentages, such as 7%, 8%, 5%, 7%, 5%, 3%, 2%, 1%, 1%, and less than 1%, respectively and nil packaging design.

Small Furniture Enterprise Welfare Leaders (SFEWL) interviewed affirmed increased use of business cards, flyers, receipts, photographs, catalogues, banners, posters, signage, and various branding elements except branded packaging materials.



Sharing of Photographs through social media at 33% and use of stationery at 28% is attributed to its flexibility. Receipts serve as documentation for sales, while business cards contribute to fundamental advertising by providing contact details. The findings align with the growing global internet user base, suggesting increased online advertising and purchases. Social media's advertising potential was identified and its likely role in leveraging e-commerce for business expansion. These findings correlate with the KNBS, (2016) economic survey, revelation that 49.2% of small enterprises refrain from using traditional advertising tools like posters and brochures. The study underscores challenges in small enterprise sector, whose majority operate in unfavourable conditions that partly hinder the use of other graphic design tools like, banners, posters, signage and publications: Enterprises use traditional and wrapping

materials for product protection and therefore branded packaging materials is prioritised. A variety of graphic designs observed in Small Furniture Enterprise are discussed below:

DRAWINGS

Figure 2 shows an illustrated book used in Small Furniture Enterprise advertising.

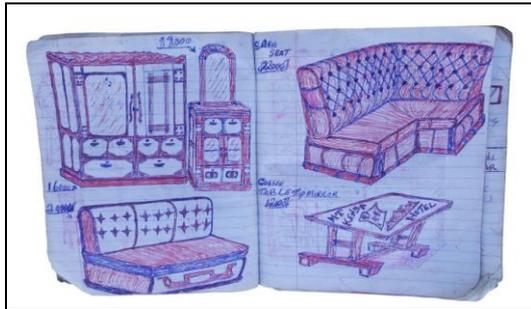


Figure 2 shows two pages of in single exercise book used with furniture illustrations. The book was created by SFE owner using red and blue inked pens in exercise book. The captioned illustrations include wardrobes, dressing desks, sofa seats, coffee tables and many other different furniture products in a similar artistic style and finish.

Although the illustrated images utilise graphic design elements, the execution of the design elements, such as shapes, texture, and colour, lacks precision and the drawings fail to abide by fundamental graphic design principles of balance, proportions, perspective, dominance, and harmony, which are essential rules followed through a design process to achieve a strong and effective visual communication. These contrasts Reid, (2021) advice on the need for ingenious application of fundamental elements and principles of design in any graphic design creation. Elements and principles of design similarly apply to furniture design, directing the coordination of the eye and hand within a complex visual system of

thought and action, as evident in the furniture catalogue at De School Zeen website (*Furniture Design*, 2024).

CATALOGUE BOOKLETS

Figure 3 shows a catalogue's cover and content page used in Small Furniture Enterprise advertising.



Figure 3 depicts a dilapidated enterprise product catalogue, showcasing photographs of furniture. Furniture categories featured include beds, wardrobes, dressing desks, sofas, and coffee tables.

The overall quality is marred by poor image composition, framing, focus, and exposure, that lead to distortions. Additionally, the catalogues suffer from subpar printing materials, resulting in stains, tears, and crumbling, which further diminishes the quality of the printed photographs and subsequently hampers effective communication. The brand for the enterprise is omitted to maintain flexibility for multiple use across various enterprises within a cluster. However, this strategic choice clashes with Kabue, (2013) and Mustafa, (2023), who emphasize the importance of conveying a message in every image to inform, educate, promote brands, entertain, and persuade the audience.

Since photography is key element in visual communication, SFE ought to acknowledge its inherent value and capacity to capture forms with meticulous details and realism, crucial in

any advertising endeavour. To enhance their product catalogue strategy, they should heed Curtin, (2007) recommendations, advocating the use of high-quality, realistic, and appropriate digital photographs. Images which can subsequently be transformed into universally recognized digital formats, facilitating easy storage, manipulation, display, retrieval, distribution, and sharing without losing their communicative value. Such a shift not only addresses the current shortcomings but also has the potential to elevate the overall presentation and effectiveness in SFEs advertising efforts.

SIGNAGE

Figure 4 shows a signage identifying a Small Furniture Enterprise. Names, symbols, and addresses of signage used in this paper was pseudonymized through graphic design image manipulation techniques to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents.



The critical analysis of Figure 4, illustrating the signage of a furniture enterprise along Jogoo Road in Nairobi, Kenya, reveals notable visibility but raises concerns about its legibility. Such vice is common in small enterprise signage's observed with majority being placed closely cluttered together. The findings indicate the presence of elements in the signage observed which are not consistent with typical enterprise

stationery brand. Such lack of uniformity is crucial for achieving brand harmony and fulfilling the signage's roles, including identification, promotion, information provision, directional guidance, product awareness, and overall enhancement of the enterprise's competitiveness through effective branding.

Figure 4 deviates from Ambrose et al., (2019) concept that branding and signage should empower small enterprises to distinguish themselves and their products while throughout establishing positive customer connections to foster loyalty. The repetition of visual components across various advertising platforms is emphasized by Ambrose et al. as a strategy to engrain the brand in customers' minds, invoking emotions and ideas associated with the brand.

Furthermore, the findings contradict Onkoba, (2016), who posited that businesses with a robust brand identity tend to excel in market competition, because a strong brand identity is characterized by a design that imbues meaning and quality into the brand through cohesive use of colour, typography, imagery, and style across all related stationery, creating both aesthetic and functional appeal. SFE should embrace signage design to supplement advertising through influencing walk-in consumers' purchasing decisions based on perceptions of quality, safety, luxury, value, or other factors deemed crucial in the consumer decision-making process.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Figure 5: shows a Face book Account used in advertising Small Furniture Enterprises' products. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents was achieved through graphical pseudonym of names, symbols, and addresses.

Figure 5 vividly demonstrate a segment of a small furniture enterprise's Face book advertising site, featuring various furniture types, capacities, materials, processes, and prices. However, a visual discrepancy arises as the outdoor elements depicted in the photos contrast with the indoor nature of the furniture products. The inclusion of unfinished furniture frameworks in the image may convey a perception of low-quality products, especially when shared on competitive social media platforms. The findings contradict the principles outlined by Kabue, (2013) and Mustafa, (2023), emphasizing that every image should convey a purposeful message, whether to inform, educate, promote, entertain, or persuade the target audience.

The conflicting visual message in Figure 5 diverges from established views, and it fails to capture the necessary details and realism. According to Helena, (2016), the quality of photos is pivotal in effective furniture product advertising especially in any website page design. For such a design, photographs taken by professionals or images that adequately represent the brand are recommended. Website users form rapid judgments about the enterprise's credibility and trustworthiness based on image quality. Helena emphasizes the positive influence of reality-based websites, particularly those with engaging graphics, while cautioning against the use of numerous tiny images similar to those used in in many small enterprise advertising. Such visual disorganization

often deters consumer attraction, persuasion and conversion, reinforcing



the importance of presenting fewer, bolder photos to project an image of a trustworthy enterprise.

BUSINESS CARDS

Figure 6 show a variety of business cards used in Small Furniture Enterprise advertising labelled from Business BC 1 to BC 12. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents was achieved through graphical pseudonym of names, symbols, and addresses on the cards.



The design flaws in the business cards depicted in Figure 6 hinder effective communication due to visual impairments. Most cards fail to adhere to fundamental design principles such as balance, alignment, contrast, repetition, proportion, movement, and white space. Font styles, images, layout concepts, colours, shapes, and materials exhibit striking similarities among BC 1, BC 9, BC 10, and BC 11. BC 2 and BC 11 lack unique and distinctive symbols. BC 5 and BC 11 feature cluttered photographs, while BC 3 suffers from illegible tiny fonts. BC 2 and BC 11 have faded content. Tight margins are

evident in BC 1, BC 2, BC 6, BC 8, and BC 10, affecting content legibility.



The non-compliance with these principles in Figure 6 renders most cards ineffective in attracting, informing, and persuading as intended. Small enterprises aiming to effectively communicate through business cards should incorporate clear and unique images, brand colours, appropriate shapes, ideal sizes, and typography to convey essential contact information and promote brand recognition, creating lasting impressions ideal for multimedia advertising (Freepik, n.d.; Reid, 2021).

RECEIPTS

Figure 7 show a Cash Sale Receipts used in sales administration in SFE. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents was achieved through graphical pseudonym of names, symbols, and addresses on the receipts.



Cash sale receipts in Figure 7 are printed on white paper with a blue spot colour, numbered in red, perforated, and bound into duplicate booklets. They

include enterprise details, a unique identifier, and entry slots for transaction details. The receipts feature a bed image, possibly to entice future purchases, and bear the abbreviation "E&OE" for error protection. A disclaimer makes goods irrevocable, preventing returns.

Receipts in Figure 7 exhibit design inconsistencies and cramped layouts. Examples like High Tech Signs show significant differences from associated business cards, hindering a clear brand image. The HF logo design lacks professionalism due to the redundant circle enclosure. Stationeries in SFEs contradict Reid, (2021) quality criteria and lack consistency, trendiness, and impact, especially when using photographs in a single colour, diminishing persuasive impressions compared to full-colour alternatives. However, this study conceptualizes strives to illuminate an ideal corporate branding through graphic design stationery impressions highlighting a collage of various stationeries, as shown in Figure 8 below



FIGURE 8: BRANDED STATIONERY TO IDENTIFY ENTERPRISE, TO INFORM AND PERSUADE CUSTOMERS

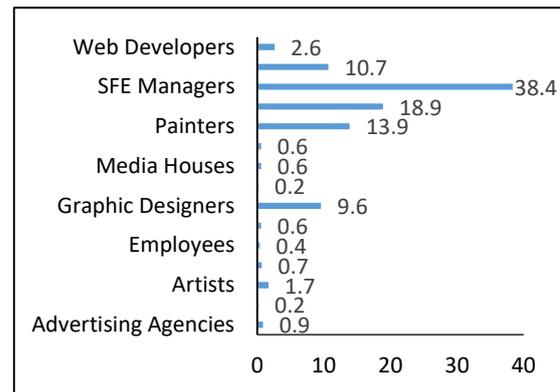
Source of all Stationery Graphic Designs: Authors Concept.

Figure 8 showcases a range of branded stationery designs for the fictional Cane Furniture, a manufacturer of Unique Rustic Furniture. The designs, including a letterhead, cash-sale receipt, business card, mouse pad, sticker label, and product catalogue, adhere to a consistent visual identity and harmony. This uniformity across various communication channels is aligned with the concept of hypnotic advertising as proposed by Winston & Granat, (2014), emphasizing the power of repetition to reinforce sales messages. Popnikolov (n.d.) supports this approach, stating that providing consumers with a consistent experience across communication channels builds trust and familiarity. Reid, (2021) further underscores the importance of consistent logos and stationery layouts for attracting and retaining consumers, a characteristic lacking in most enterprise stationery layouts. The consistency, simplicity, and uniqueness of the designs in Figure 8 build on Popnikolov, (n.d.), Reid, (2021) and Winston & Granat, (2014) principles and also amply allow white space to facilitate the inclusion of additional business information on letterheads and cash sale receipts.

POSTERS

Figure 9 shows several posters used in SFE advertising on display in the enterprise.

Figure 9 is an example of dilapidated posters displayed in an enterprise, depicting dining sets, beds, wardrobes, dressing desks, sofas, and coffee tables. The dilapidation is probably due to inappropriate display points, mishandling, or inappropriate design materials used in their production. Furthermore, most pictures seem sourced from other printed matter or



online publications to help customers decide on preferred product designs.

Figure 9 contradicts Lippert's (2017) view that a poster is a temporary promotion of a product placed in a public space for mass consumption as opposed to enclosed enterprise factories, stores, and narrow display spaces with less public traffic and less impact on advertising. Although close to about 1.4% of SFEs in this study used posters to promote their products, the study established that most posters used in SFEs contain cheaply sourced photos from outside the enterprises while others were not developed by professionals. To a large extent, most posters are displayed within restricted spaces in enterprise with less consumer traffic to the detriment of the advertising intensions.

GRAPHIC DESIGN PRODUCTION

Figure 10 shows sources of graphic design used in Small Furniture Enterprises advertising. The data presented in Figure 10 highlight the preferences of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) regarding graphic design sources. Notably, 38.4% of SMEs prefer in-house graphic designs created by owners, managers, or employees. Other sources include printing firms (18.9%), painters (13.9%), and sign writers (10.7%). Limited involvement is observed from advertising agencies,

architects, artists, business vendors, enterprise employees, family members, ICT officers, media houses, painting technicians, and web developers. Small Furniture Enterprise Welfare Leaders' interviews emphasized that printers, artists, painters, and cyber cafes contribute to different aspects of graphic design, including business cards, receipts, banners, logos, signage, branding, photographs, and photo albums.

The study aligns with Manzini, (2015) assertion that everyone possesses a natural design capacity, but not everyone can be a competent or professional designer. Despite only 9.6% of SMEs utilizing graphic designers, collaboration with various entities, such as advertising agencies, media houses, printing presses, sign writers, web developers, artists, and painting technicians, is deemed appropriate for their supportive roles in graphic design and advertising. Concerning architects' involvement (0.2%) in graphic design production, there is contention with McIlroy's view that architects may not excel in creating elements like characters, symbols, logos, and branding-related graphics. Vidic, (2013) study on branding among Slovenian enterprises, on the other hand, reveals that 9.4% used unqualified persons, 8.3% relied on the printing industry, 3.9% involved architects, and 2.8% hired a marketing agency for branding. However, Vidic's findings cannot be generalized to graphic design because the brand is highly uninfluenced by design.

Only 9.6% of graphic design used in Small Furniture Enterprise advertising is created by graphic design professionals due to resource scarcity and several underlying perceptions. However,

designing on a budget does not imply cheap design, and therefore, it's imperative for small enterprises to find designers aligned with the creative vision rather than solely focusing on fees. The evolving graphic design industry, shifting towards online-based systems, suggests that graphic designers need to adopt new skills and technologies to enhance graphic design production through accurate and efficient timelines and on budgets that would support effective and sustainable enterprise advertising.

CONCLUSION

The study delved into the realm of graphic design practices within Small Furniture Enterprises, unveiling significant strides, challenges, and implications in its application in advertising. The findings reveal a prevalence of photograph-based advertising on social media, stationeries that support businesses in enterprises, limited engagement of graphic design professionals, and the potential adverse effects on graphic design processes and products, brand, and advertising credibility.

Social media platforms are heavily relied upon for advertising in which raw photographs showing finished products are predominantly shared to potential consumers. Photographs used are mostly sourced remotely from enterprise stakeholders and to some extent from customers, contributing to numerous visual discrepancies and deceptions that affect advertising and which are likely to mislead expectations, cause customer discontent, and endure harm to brand credibility, resulting in reduced sales, legal ramifications, and negative word-of-mouth regarding small enterprise products. The situation is aggravated by use of low-quality

photographs taken with mobile phone cameras of low pixel counts and the image compression algorithms that automatically compress images on social media software compromising communicative clarity of shared images.

Observed were strong efforts towards use of illustration, product catalogues, signage, posters, and stationery characterised with low graphic design professional ingenuity revealing glaring communicative weaknesses. Further, minimal utilization of graphic designs in SFE advertising, particularly logos, posters, fabric designs, billboards, and brochures are unprecedented. Enterprise stationery comprising of business cards, receipts, invoices were also witnessed, however the inadequate articulation of elements and principles of design in various stationery observed raises questions about their effectiveness in complementing advertising and branding in small enterprises.

A significant portion of graphic design used in enterprises are created in-house by non-professionals, including owners, managers, and employees to lower costs. Engagement of graphic designers is remarkably minimal, underscoring the predominant use of non-graphic designers and the overwhelming visual misrepresentation, weaknesses, and inconsistencies observed.

Low quality graphic design observed in enterprises can raise significant visual concerns that can erode the values of advertising dilute brand identity and reduce consumer trust. The study aligns this concern with Brown's (1979) framework for image building design, educational design, and information design, emphasizing the importance of professional application of graphic design elements and principles in visual advertising. Professional graphic

designers are trained to understand brand identity nuances, target audience preferences, and the psychology of visual communication that can improve advertising in small enterprises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the small enterprises to establish an effective graphic design strategy in visual advertising by leveraging opportunities available through various print, electronic and online media. The roadmap should aim to utilize clean, cohesive branding across the available design materials and media, focusing on clear and honest communication of key messages that emphasize visual appeal to grab intended attention. Especially in packaging design which has the potential to enhance brand visibility, communicate quality, and differentiate their products. Guided by graphic design principles, the strategy should prioritize consistency and simplicity in design elements to enhance brand recognition and memorability within the target consumers.

Furthermore, the strategy should focus further into emerging online advertising due to its global reach, precise customer targeting, cost-effectiveness, real-time analytics, and diverse advertising formats, in which graphic design thrives, to effectively engage and convert audiences. Leveraging on online stationery for branding, communication, and cost-effective marketing will enhance credibility, professionalism, and brand recognition in a competitive market.

Further, small enterprises should consider hiring freelance graphic designers or working with graphic design agencies or advertising agencies inclined to support small businesses.

These professionals possess the skills and experience necessary to create effective graphic designs tailored to small enterprise branding and advertising needs, ensuring high-quality visual content for marketing campaigns.

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