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# PORTRAYAL OF MOTHERS IN TV COMMERCIALS: CASE STUDY OF NIGERIAN INDOMIE NOODLES CAMPAIGN

Abigail Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika  
&  
Oluyinka Esan

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# CHAPTER FOUR



## PORTRAYAL OF MOTHERS IN TV COMMERCIALS: CASE STUDY OF NIGERIAN INDOMIE NOODLES CAMPAIGN

Abigail Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika  
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### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the sociocultural role of advertising, specifically, how Nigerian mothers are constructed in certain adverts. No doubt advertising is used to influence people to buy a wide range of products but advertising offers much more along with these. Moriarty et al, (2015) identify four functions which it performs - facilitating exchange between producers and consumers, adding value to perceptions of products and services, cultivating customer relationship, fostering customer loyalty through dialogues and building brands. To achieve these, advertising through its communicative roles brings buyers and sellers in contact, and it bridges the gaps of cognition in marketing. It helps consumers see and know, what producers want consumers to know. As Berger (2015) notes, advertising teaches about the material world, lifestyles and as we argue here attendant social values too. Consumers buy into brands and identity of who they are, who they want to be or who they are expected to be. This role of the media in industrialising contexts has been recognised, even criticised. The media have been criticised

*“ . . . for playing on emotions, simplifying real human situations into **stereotypes**, exploiting anxieties, and employing techniques of intensive persuasion that amount to manipulations. Many social critics have stated that advertising is essentially concerned with exalting the materialistic virtues of consumption by exploiting achievement drives and emulative anxieties, employing tactics of **hidden manipulation, playing on***

*emotions... and generally reducing ...women...*" (MacBride et al 1981: 54). (emphasis mine)

The charge that media rely on "stereotypes", "hidden manipulation", to "play on emotions"... and "generally reduce ...women" (emphasis mine) suggests that the media circulate particular images which undermine women and encourage audiences to do same if they jump to erroneous conclusions due to the associations made within the advertising messages. In this chapter, the word women will also be deemed to refer to mothers as it appears to be the norm in literature about advertising and women. This may be due to the importance of this subgroup to business especially as regards decision making regarding consumables and the domestic arena. Buttressing this view, the Beijing Platform for Action (Section 236), argues that the "world-wide trend towards consumerism has created a climate in which advertisements and commercial messages often portray women primarily as consumers and target girls and women of all ages inappropriately".

Well, Burnett, and Moriarty (2000) have argued that the presentation of a group of people, and in this instance, mothers, in an unvarying pattern that lacks individuality is one major criticism of advertising. Russel and Lane (1996) had argued that the lamentable outcome of such patterns of representation is that advertising does to some extent influence how groups and individuals are regarded and treated by others in society. Nigeria's Gender Policy, notes that women operate within male supremacist culture, which prescribes their roles; "gender-based norms ... ascribe women the responsibility of carrying out tasks related to household management (i.e. domestic tasks, such as caring for children and elderly)" (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2006: 4) This explains the second-class status to which mothers and the girl-child have been assigned in many cultures but becomes more striking when one considers how this pattern is reinforced through media messages such as representation in advertisements. Omenugha citing Hooks and Ross, noted that "Reinforced by the media ...women are still represented as inferior ... maternal figures, whose most endearing characteristics is the self-sacrificing self-denial for those they love". (2011: 7) She further asserted that the "...representation of African women often shows them as weighed down by patriarchal dominance ... [and] the portrayal seems to reflect that women are assumed incapable of engaging in challenging activities" (Omenugha, 2011: 39 and 40).

So, although, the direct mission of advertising is cognitive that is to present (or highlight) certain needs that a product or service can meet, the impact of advertising can also be felt socially, in the attitudes that accompany incidental knowledge that audiences pick up. Concern for such social impact has informed this chapter. Using a sample five television commercials from the Nigerian Indomie Noodles' "Mum Like No Other, Indomie Like No Other" campaign launched in 2010, it examined the roles ascribed to mothers. This was considered against the quest for the attainment of the third Millennium Development Goal. MDG 3 that sought to achieve gender equality

and women empowerment by 2015. The TV commercials were appraised for the mothers' personal fulfilment and their social progress. By studying this from the context of an industrializing society, one seizes the opportunity of revisiting the traditional roles played by mothers, albeit in contemporary times.

In studying prescribed roles for mothers in the TV commercials, the chapter also considers distinctions between different spheres of life – the private and public domain. This was based on the assumption that media messages shape perceptions of mothers (and fathers). The study sought to answer the following questions - How are mothers portrayed in the commercial through their roles? How empowering are the roles mothers played in the commercial? To what extent do the roles represent the desired shift for womanhood? In what ways may these roles influence a young generation of viewers? What cultural associations informed the conceptualization of mothers in the commercial? This study aims to bring to the fore, the concern regarding the shift in the stereotyping of mothers in Nigeria, mindful also of the prevailing social, cultural, economic and political realities.

### **Women in Advertisements and Millennium Development Goal 3**

Images used in TV commercials are as important as the spoken words and accompanying jingles because images facilitate the delivery of the message by making meaning more readily accessible. In fact, images used in TV commercials reveal assumptions about age, class, gender relations and much more. This may account for the focus of Strategic Objective J.2 of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action on promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media, charging governments to encourage the media and advertising agencies to develop specific programmes to raise awareness of the Platform for Action. So, those responsible for creating advertising messages, especially visualisers and graphic artists responsible for 'imagining' advertising messages and those responsible for approving visuals (pictures, illustrations) are crucial links in the attempt to attain MDG 3. Decisions made by advertising teams are important as they have a bearing on gender and culture issues. Where messages are not consistent with the aspirations for progress evident in society but remain rooted in tradition, it may be the advertising team has failed to act as change agents. Such inaction should be subject to scrutiny, why might they have failed to use the media opportunities to effect change. It may be evidence of deeper resistance within the cultural environment. After all, traditions which anchor media messages are also socially constructed. Unless these structures are uncovered, they will remain unchallenged weapons for continued subordination [of mothers, in this case]. Although, advertising cannot be held accountable for the subordination or objectification of women, yet like other media messages, advertising influences the direction of desired social change. Regarding the circulation of meanings, it has been argued that “in the absence of real contact or communication, stereotypes march on unchallenged; prejudices easily substitute for knowledge” (Ehrenreich 1995: 40).

Thus, the imagined may be more crucial than reality in informing viewpoints that

inform social behaviour. In a study such as this which is concerned with the attainment of social change, it is pertinent to consider if adverts are poised to stimulate or retard social change, and to note the role played by those responsible for creating these adverts in the process.

As argued by Okagbue culture should not be static or ahistorical (1996: 15). Rather, it should be dynamic, subject to the forces of change and these should be reflected in media messages. Yet, when it comes to representation of gender issues, tradition often seems static. Ortner (1992) explains how this occurs, noting how culturally women are positioned between nature and culture. By their physiology, women are more closely associated with the giving of life which warrants them to be situated within the less valued domestic context. She observed that women in a variety of world views and diverse cultures are deemed to be at one with nature yet critical participants in any attempts to transform cultural life. In this explanation, it is evident that the potential for motherhood is what accounts for the structural subordination of women, yet women are also required to maintain these exploitative structures, whether in reality or through media representations (including advertisements) that prescribe social roles that women are expected to maintain in order to preserve the status quo.

*Any culture's continued viability depends upon properly socialised individuals who will see the world in that culture's term and adhere more or less unquestionably to its moral precepts. The functions of the domestic unit must be closely controlled in order to ensure this outcome; the stability of the domestic unit must be closely controlled in order to ensure this outcome; the stability of the domestic unit must be placed as far as possible beyond question (Ortner, 1992: 84).*

In subtle ways, advertising reinforces cultural values by playing up inequality between sexes; presenting women as subservient to men. Prior to the various global initiatives to address such inequalities, it had been observed that the media:

*...seldom depict women as significantly involved in work, in the pursuance of careers, or in public life....Women are shown primarily as confined to domestic sphere, or else secretaries, assistants, and in similar roles ancillary to those of men....In advertising particularly, women are shown either as housewives whose interests are limited to domestic needs, or else as the sexually alluring background which makes consumer goods more attractive by association (MacBride et al, 1981:190)*

Perhaps there is a good reason for this. Proponents of the use of stereotypes in advertising argue that it is inevitable:

*Advertising...does not work by creating values and attitudes out of nothing but by drawing upon and rechanneling concerns that the target audience (and the culture) already shares. As an advertising executive puts it: "Advertising doesn't always mirror how people are acting but how they're dreaming. In a sense what we're doing is wrapping up your emotions and selling them back to*

*you.” Advertising absorbs and fuses a variety of symbolic practices and discourses; it appropriates and distils from unbound range of cultural references. In so doing, goods are knitted into the fabric of social life and cultural significance. As such, advertising is not simple manipulation, but what ad-maker Tony Schwartz calls “participation”, with the audience participating in its own manipulation (Jhally, 1995: 79-80)*

Logical as that may seem, there are consequences of practices described by Jhally. Dunn et al (1990) state that most advertisers understand that it is both dangerous and irresponsible to deviate too far from reality in portraying people in their ads. They also know that they have a responsibility to society because advertising influences societal standards and values. Similarly, Williamson notes the connections between objects and people to whom they are offered, the manner in which advertisements in particular, sell more than the goods on offer, but also ideas of 'self' to the consumers. She argues that, “Pervading all the media, but limited to none, advertising forms a vast superstructure with apparently autonomous existence and an immense influence.” (Williamson, 2010: 11) So, it appears that advertisers will continually be faced with the problem of how to portray people in ads; how to reflect culture appropriately while at the same time appealing to people's desires and aspirations. They have a challenge of how to promote the stability of life including paid employment. It is in finding the right balance that they are able to contribute to the attainment of the third millennium development goal (MDG 3).

This argument is made against the backdrop that media products are profound sources of cultural knowledge as “They contribute to educating us about how we behave and what to think [about], feel, believe, fear and desire – and what not to...forms of pedagogy that teach us how to be men and women, how to dress, look and consume; how to react to members of different social groups; ... how to conform to dominant system of norms, values, practices and institutions” (Kellner, 1995: 5). These may account for why Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) Code devotes attention to the subject. Section 4.18:2 of the APCON Code states that “The African woman in an advertisement shall be in reality an African woman and not a caricature of the Western woman” (viii). The code states further in Section 4.19:3 that “advertisements shall portray the African virtues of care, hospitality and high moral standards.” and that “. . . every advertisement shall refrain from stereotyping” (xi).

Steeves cited in Creedon, (1985) in an essay about feminist theories and media studies, distinguished different feminisms by various broad organising principles - individualistic, biologicistic, social psychological or socio-cultural and economic. Although all these have contributions to make, he suggested that social feminism, which critiques the public/private dichotomy as a reasonable framework with which to address crucial contextual and pragmatic issues, such as portrayal of mothers in television commercials. Besides, it has the potential for producing a comprehensive

review of women's oppression.

The public/private dichotomy recognises the traditional notions about realms of existence where women's roles can be viewed. The public realm covers the workplace, law, economics, politics, intellectual and cultural life, where [formal] power is exercised and from which women tended to be excluded. It was once regarded as the preserve of men. The private domain refers to the home and family, where women were deemed to belong (Cook, 1993). It may be argued that the public/private dichotomy had been used to silence women and exclude them from the public domain. So how far women have since come, at least as portrayed in the chosen television commercials? Answering this question will give an indication to show if perhaps there has been a paradigm shift since the various global initiatives made to push for gender equality and women empowerment. Would these commercials be seen to promote the idea of stay-at-home mothers, or do they give allowance for mothers involved in work, pursuing careers, or operating in public life?

### **The Research Design**

The context in which the study was conducted is an example of an “industrializing country, in the new world” (Jefkins and Ugboajah, 1986: 3). These are societies in transition, rooted still in their indigenous ways yet aspiring to western ideals and values which are sometimes complementary but often conflicting especially as regard domestic power relations. Thus this was an opportunity to revisit roles played by mothers in contemporary incarnations of societies that were poised to cast off the shackles of traditional values. The choice of Indomie Noodles TV commercials was purposive, given their explicit focus on mothers. The brand appeals to the aspirations of the new 'empowered' mother because Indomie noodles have been positioned as a quick fix meal; convenient for hectic urban lifestyles, for young people and working mothers especially. Being an example of a quick fix meal, the product may also be symbolic of the desire of women to be more involved in public life and the aspiration to be divorced from laborious, time-consuming meal preparations typically associated with traditional meals.

Indomie Noodles is a global brand marketed worldwide and distributed in Africa, Australia, Asia, Europe, Middle East, New Zealand and United States. The product's origins is in the global south - Indonesia where it was first introduced to the market in September 1970. It was introduced into the Nigerian market in 1988 when it was first imported. However, local production of the brand began in 1995 which attests to the success of the relatively new culinary experience in the Nigerian market. The product of a collaboration between Singaporean, Indonesian and local (Nigerian) firms, it has permeated the diverse Nigerian cultures to the extent that there are production lines in factories in three locations around Nigeria – South West, South and North Central. The marketing aspirations reflected in this distribution pattern, is also evident in the national advertising campaigns.

The campaign employed what can best be described as the “good mother” concept with specific references to Nigeria. This pan-Nigeria multi-media campaign ran in 2009 – 2013. It consisted of television messages carried over into press (newspapers and magazines), radio, outdoor and below the line promotional items (such T-shirts, face-caps, bios and other souvenirs) thus extending the reach and frequency of exposure to the ideas triggered off in the texts to be considered here.

The brand's popularity is well known; it is reputed to be the largest selling instant noodle brand around the world and in Nigeria. It appeals to consumers across demographic segments in Nigeria and once (even as recently as 2006) commanded a 100% share of the market. Although, as at 2013, there were 16 instant noodles producers contending Indomie's market domination of the Nigerian market, Indomie brand held approximately 74% market share, with an estimated annual growth of 40%. ([http://www.duful.com/K\\_corp.asp](http://www.duful.com/K_corp.asp)). Indomie Noodles is clearly the brand leader and remains a household name, synonymous with instant noodles. Besides, it has the biggest advertising-spend in the noodles product category (MediaReach OMD, 2012). It is therefore arguably the most visible brand and a good one from which to draw inferences on images in advertising and the attainment of the third millennium development goal.

Although, Indomie noodles is a global brand, the campaigns as seen on YouTube are generally country specific. The texts on YouTube reveal a variety of advertising concepts and 'slices of life' in the television commercials from different countries. For example the Indonesian Indomie TV commercials - “You are what you eat” and “Dare, sing your story” and from Kenya the various “Indomie delicious...Ijaribu yum yum”. The prominence of the male protagonist in the Kenyan commercials is remarkable but these examples are beyond the scope of this study. The explicit focus on mothers in the five advertisements chosen commends them for analysis on the portrayal of mothers in Nigerian commercials. The popularity of the product across different social strata is another reason to study the advertisements for this chapter.

Though audience understanding of the messages is useful, the attention here is on a critical analysis of the texts. The focus is on the image of mothers, the roles assigned to them, their relationships and the mise-en-scene in the Indomie noodles TV commercials with careful attention to mothers' occupation of the private domain and evidence of their migration into the public domain. Might these indicate shifts in previously held paradigms about the place of mothers? In an era of heavy media saturation, people are daily inundated with diverse media messages. It is important to understand, interpret and critique meanings that are being circulated.

The five TV commercials discussed here were produced for the Nigerian market but they can now be accessed worldwide, as entertainment if nothing else. As conventional within Nigerian advertising industry, the Indomie campaigns like other products which have a broad consumer appeal and marketed nationwide are in



English, Pidgin English and the main Nigerian languages – Hausa Igbo and Yoruba. The sample was restricted to advertisements in English and Pidgin English as these are more universally accessed languages. Thus the sample includes “Grandma's Coming” English Language TV commercial aired 2009-2010; “Mum Like No Other” English Language TV commercial aired 2010-2011; “Dinner with Dad” standard English TV commercial aired between 2011-2012; “Mama do good” Pidgin English TV commercial aired 2011-2012; and “Indomie Instant Noodle” Pidgin English TV commercial aired 2012-2013.

### **The Textual Analysis**

#### ***“Grandma's Coming” (English):***

*“Grandma's Coming”* is a 30 seconds commercial which aired in 2009 is the earliest of the adverts in the sample analysed for this paper. This is an English language advert which indicates that its audience are expected to be somewhat sophisticated. This is evident in the mise-en-scene - the décor and mod cons in the home. In this commercial, the grandmother, often signifying the old order has come to visit. The family consisting of a father, mother and two children represent the new order. The visit itself is indicative of the ambivalence between both orders, and evidence of the persistence of the African family structure. The conviviality that is apparent should not be taken for granted since mothers-in-law are often constructed as antagonists. Grandma's arrival could thus easily be the problem; advertisements tend to adopt a problem / solution format in which they begin with a knotty situation that the product being promoted helps to solve. Women are usually hard pressed to show older women that they measure up in their matronly duties, particularly in the kitchen. It was the grandson's suggestion to treat his grandma to dinner, in his enthusiastic welcome that led the mother down the path to the kitchen.

The knowing wink which was exchanged between the son and the mum reveals a mischievous side to the lad, but it is also indicative of his confidence in her ability to deliver. The mum in what seems like no time (just enough for the grandma to freshen up) produces an appealing meal, judging by the aroma and the taste. The commercial showed the Grandma 'following her nose' in anticipation of the meal. She passed a positive verdict once she tasted it. “This looks great!” she said simply regarding the presentation. “Tastes great!” she declared, relishing the meal and smiling.

This verdict is for the product but also for the new order. The grandma eating the meal happily suggests that the older generation of mothers are gradually accepting quick fix meals, which hitherto was seen as a meal for children (a compromise made by those who are charitable to busy young mothers). Otherwise, the meal could have been seen as evidence of poor grooming - an option adopted by women who are lazy or “lacked home training”. It used to be that quick fix meals were culturally associated with women whose culinary skills are deficient. The view was that it was those who had not learnt to cook properly or manage their resources judiciously that resorted to convenient meals. But this commercial suggests otherwise with the grandmother,

who should be the authority figure giving her approval. Furthermore, the fact that this was done with the connivance of the grandson (and the approval of the dad – a silent participant in the family drama) is indicative of the triumph of the new order; it is encouraging that the boy has been socialised to know how to handle the home front too.

This commercial does set parameters of good mothering and this is still set in the home front. Perhaps due to the product, cooking (care of the family) is integral to making the family happy. A good mother is still expected to be hospitable, and to have the knowledge and resources with which she produces a nutritious meal. The message promotes the serving of noodles with vegetables and proteins (chicken). It takes an empowered woman to appreciate the value of such a balance in diet and to have the economic means with which to execute this. It can be argued that the apparent shift, the acceptance of the new order depends on the performance of empowered women. It is this that is irresistible as was the conclusion of the commercial, the male voice-over saying “Can't say, no!”

***“Mum like no other”:***

The 60 seconds “Mum like no other” television commercial produced in 2010, presents in greater detail the complex roles of a mother. The advert features an intelligent little girl whose mother, was also acknowledged to be her teacher and coach. It opens with a little girl in the kitchen with her mum. The little girl was counting (for fun) the tomatoes on a kitchen worktop – evidence of the endorsement of girl-child education. The mum used the opportunity to teach her subtraction.

*Girl: Mummy, see five tomatoes!*

*Mum: Okay, if I take one, how many will be left?*

*Girl: Four!*

*Mum: That's my girl!*

With that affirmation, the mother lifts up her little girl. The mother here was portrayed as a teacher, another of her traditional roles. Along with her household duties she also manages to teach her child some numeracy skills and she was affirmed for this as seen in the superimposed text on the shot that labelled her as “Teacher like no other”. That the mother in the commercial has basic education, and not just knowledge and skills required to be effective in household chores further validates education for women. It signals expectations in the cultural role of mothers; they are now to be empowered in order that they are able to teach the children. This reading is reinforced throughout the commercial, even in the very next sequence of shots. While out shopping in a supermarket, the mum tests the daughter's ability to spell the word “Nutrition” as they picked up packs of Indomie noodles from the shelf. Clearly this was a ploy to associate the product with this quality, but it also showed the good mother–daughter relationship. Impressed that the daughter spelled the word correctly, the mother validate the girl with a “high five” gesture and a verbal affirmation, “That's my girl!” The mother in turn is affirmed by the superimposed credit, “Coach like no other”.

These are private moments which may be consigned to the domestic realm, but they had consequences in the public space as seen in the last sequence of shots.

In this the girl in her school uniform was at a contest clarified by the prop in the backdrop – the banner marked “Spelling Championship”. The girl-child was participating in the public domain. Being in school uniform meant she was representing her school and her family. The mum was in the audience during the contest, the girl was on the stage. She was asked to spell “Nutrition”. She did this correctly, again evoking the pride of her mother, and the outburst “That's my girl!” was repeated. The mother was further rewarded in the public space as a judge, while decorating the child with her award, referred to her as “. . . a true spelling champion”. The mother was then seen on stage, dancing and rejoicing with the girl. This echoes a practice performed in the privacy of the home as seen in other ads after an impressive meal of Indomie. The shot of mother and daughter dancing on stage is clarified by the scrolling credit “Friend like no other”. This reveals another expectation of mothers' role.

In this commercial, the girl-child is not only educated in school, she is encouraged to attain to stardom to the end that she was pronounced a “good spelling champion”. The message reflects new attitudes within local cultures that seek to promote girl-child education and reshape views that girls are only good when doing household chores. This attitude is reinforced in real interventions such as the “Women Deliver 2013” programme that had as its message “Invest in women ...It pays!” So, the “Mum like no other” commercial does more than portray (prescribe) good education as an essential for tomorrow's mothers, it seems to suggest that future generation of mothers are not likely to remain cooped up in the private domain. This marks a repositioning of women in this African society. This should help achieve the desired women empowerment and gender equality but the commercial in closing returns to the status quo.

The next sequence of shots shows the mother at home in the traditional role - preparing and serving the meal of Indomie Noodles. On this occasion the family being catered for consists of the girl-child, her brother and her father, sitting at the head of the dining table. When she eventually settled to her meal, the mother was affirmed and decorated by the daughter - the happy spelling champion who removed the medal from her neck and adorns her mum with it. In a role reversal, the daughter to everyone's delight affirms the mother saying “That's my mum!” Dad's applauding further validates this but the associations were finally anchored by the female voice-over saying “No mum like you...no noodles like Indomie, that's why caring mothers trust Indomie to give the best to their family”. This endorsement, that consuming Indomie noodles brings out the best in a child, betrays the commercial motive of the message, and the ideological positioning of mothers.

*“Mum like no other”* highlights the bond between mother and daughter.

Although, this commercial presents the mother as a typical housewife dressed in contemporary African attire consisting of cotton long skirts and blouses, it also presents them as people who do more than cook and wait on the family. Mothers play the role of teacher, coach, and friend; this one was empowered enough to prepare her child for success in the competitive public domain. This represents a little shift in womanhood because it presents the mother as an educated woman privately socializing her child to function both in domestic and public domains (in the kitchen, in the shops - buying Indomie, and in time for a remarkable performance in public spotlight). The message here is that a “sound” education will make all proud of the girl child. However, the desired shift in womanhood stops short of presenting the woman as a working mother, rather she is celebrated as a housewife still, who can give a balanced diet to her family and support her child in her school work. In all these, mother is still portrayed in the private sphere! The man is still to be waited on.

However, the commercial does showcase other women besides the protagonist who had reasonably respectable public roles. Both dressed in similar African attire (long skirt and blouse) served on the panel of judges during the “Spelling Championship” but theirs was not speaking parts. Only the male member of the panel spoke and had the privilege of decorating the champion, suggesting that he was the chief judge. More to the point, the fact that the women members of the panel of judges were merely “seen and not heard” perpetuates their subordinate (perhaps infantile) status. Despite this, the commercial deserves credit for taking them out of the domestic enclave and showing women being actors in the public domain.

***“Mama you do good” (Mama Yara, Pidgin):***

The 60 seconds pidgin TV commercial (“Mama Yara” 2010) is part of the Mama do Good campaign which was first aired in Nigeria in 2011. Yara is a Hausa word for children thus the title of the commercial refers to one who qualifies for motherhood because more than being a mere bearer, she is a lover of children. Featuring a mother and children, it opens (after a brief product pack shot) with a shopping bag in the foreground, and a hand dropping a second packet of Indomie noodles into it. The images in the background are out of focus, but it is apparent that these were more packets of Indomie noodles. This close-up gives way to the medium long shot of a woman accompanied by her young daughter. The woman, with a big smile on her face, picks up the shopping bag and walks away from the typical corner shop. This marks the act and place of purchase. This woman was clearly a comfortable and happy mother. She was dressed in African attire, a long skirt and blouse made out of what seemed like cotton fabric. The daughter looked on happily as the mother lifted the shopping basket which contained some packets of Indomie Noodles. This tacit endorsement is noteworthy, suggestive of a transferring of values to the future generation mothers.

As she leaves the shop she is hailed as 'Mama Do good!' by some neighbourhood children. She waves back familiarly. In this is the concept of motherhood in the

African community, evidently she is mother to hers and other children. The dialogue between herself and her daughter attest to this. The mother confirms her love for children, and the viewer gathers that hers is a welcoming home where the neighbourhood children could come in and eat. On this occasion, Indomie is presented as an attraction. This is not surprising, given that this is the product being promoted.

The next sequence of shots shows the preparation of the meal, starting with the water boiling in a blue enamel pot. The quality of the cookware is indicative of the family's financial stature. Two packets of Indomie noodles, were emptied into the pot. The ready meal, served into small bowls was garnished with an array of vegetables. These added colour but was also indicative of nutritional balance in the meal presented to the party of children. By now these had settled into the living room, expectant of this mother's usual hospitality. This pattern of behaviour is consistent with the stereotype of mothers, as “the carer” attested to in the provision of appetising and nutritionally balanced meal.

There was no father in view in the entire sequence, yet the mise-en-scene gives no indication that the family is deprived or lacks a breadwinner. It could be assumed that the man of the house was away at work, whilst the mother held the fort. Though she spoke in pidgin English, often indicative of lower educational attainment, the mother does appear to be enlightened and capable of being in the workplace too. Yet she seems house-bound taking care of “business”. Her smile as she glances back at the children wolfing down the meal shows that there is equilibrium in the status quo. She is satisfied with her role and the task she had just performed, and so is her family. She is properly affirmed and appreciated in the final sequence of the ad. She is included in the children's fun. They dance around her in a circle (ending with a group hug) chanting the advertising jingle:

<i>Call:</i>	<i>Mama do good, o</i>	<i>[meaning Mother who does well]</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>You do good</i>	<i>You've done well</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Mama do good, o</i>	<i>Mother who does well</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>You do good</i>	<i>You've done well</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Mama wey good to us</i>	<i>This mother is good to us</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>You do good</i>	<i>You've done well</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>She give us Indomie</i>	<i>She gives us Indomie</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>You too much</i>	<i>You're too much</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Indomie good well well</i>	<i>Indomie is very good</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Indomie!</i>	<i>Indomie!</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Indomie sweet well well</i>	<i>Indomie is very tasty</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Indomie!</i>	<i>Indomie!</i>

Through the jingle there is an association between the goodness of a mother and the desirability of the product. The tacit message here is that a good mother knows what

children appreciate; indeed, what is good for children. The two voice-over announcements which wrap up the commercial makes more explicit the comparison between a good mother and the nutritious, tasty and convenient meal of noodles.

The closing shot is a product pack shot, consisting of two packets of Indomie noodles and a plate of noodles garnished with vegetables and eggs. These are displayed on a table with other suggested accompaniments including another plate of fried chicken drumstick and an array of vegetables: lettuce and peppers in the plate, onions, tomato and peas on the table. It takes a knowledgeable mother to offer such a balanced diet, but more to the point, it takes a financially capable mother to afford such a meal even though the product being promoted is constructed to be within reasonable reach of working class families. Both knowledge and economic capacity must be regarded as indices of the attainment of the MDG 3. Yet the cultural role presented here may at face value seem contradictory in that it confines the woman to the domestic sphere. However, it may be evidence of some semblance of progress in the coexistence of traditional paradigms alongside values aligned with aspirations for development. There is no indication of the mother's means of livelihood in spite of the apparent relative affluence portrayed in the furnishing of the home. There is no reference to her participation in the public domain, thus no need for evidence of the conflicts or struggles in balancing her existence in both realms. The mother in this commercial is obviously happy and fairly comfortable; she does not seem to be over burdened with household chores nor does she seem to be engaged in menial tasks.

Though the attention in this textual analysis has been on the 60 second Pidgin English TV Mama Yara commercial, the Mama you do good Indomie campaign was executed through other media including outdoor and print. The synergy of these media mix means that the images discussed above are reinforced as the target audiences encounter them severally and new audiences receive them through some of the unique opportunities to see built into the campaign. In all these, the image of the mother remains the highlight. The image of mother in the TV commercial regardless of the language of broadcast (English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo) ties in with that on the bill boards. Consistent with the principles of integrated marketing communications, the TV commercial, does not work alone; as with the rest of television messages they do not exist in isolation from the rest of the media. These recurring images indicate the emphasis and betray how the mother is constructed.

#### ***“Indomie Instant Noodles 2012 Theme (English)”***

The 60 seconds “Indomie Instant Noodles (English)” TV commercial from the 2012 theme campaign has been running for about eleven months (since May 2012). It features three generations of women - a grandmother, a mother, the girl child and her brother. This offers an opportunity to appraise the consistency of social mores. The commercial began with someone's finger (Grandma's) on the door bell. A fairly young woman (Mama) dressed in her African wax-print long skirt and blouse opened the door. The grandmother was welcomed by her daughter with a hug, a western gesture

and not the genuflection that would have been the more traditional mode of courtesy between women of different generations. Though different, (Grandmother in her wrapper was more traditional) they were both clad in contemporary styles of African dressing.

The warm embrace from the grandchildren in later frames further attests to the cordial relationship, perhaps indicative of the cultural accord or the stability in the particular domestic enclave. There is more to glean from the children's excitement about dinner and their exchange with their grandmother. It was the granddaughter who asked, "Guess Grandma, what we're eating tonight" The question places the woman firmly in the kitchen – her place traditionally especially as it is juxtaposed with a shot of the mother preparing the meal with those of the group on the sofa. The mother is still the producer of the family meals as exhibited in the commercial which demonstrates the product's unique selling point – the ease of meal preparations. So contrary to the usual cultural expectations when women are situated in the kitchen, she is not slaving over a stove. The effortlessness in preparing this meal is symbolic of the contemporary lifestyle and taste. It is endorsed by the grandchildren, the youngest generation.

The exchange between the Grandma and the children dates the arrival of this meal into the nation's menu. It was introduced by an earlier generation of mothers to mothers who now feed their children with it. From the evident satisfaction of all, this trend will endure. This may be thanks to the taste of the product as suggested by Grandma's outburst when responding to children's excitement about their meal, "... so you like Indomie like your mum . . . Sweet [tasty] Indomie noodles!" This was confirmed in the strapline. "There's no noodles like Indomie noodles . . ." Still, the convenience of the meal should not be overlooked. So while the meal offers a measure of liberation on one hand, though by these messages, the Nigerian woman is still saddled with the burden of care.

The consensus of opinion found across the generations prompted a song through which the sales pitch is presented. The jingle, because it uses the traditional story telling format, demonstrates how mothers transmit cultural heritage. "Just say, 'Yes' to everything I say" instructed the Grandma. The song erupted in the typical call - response style that facilitates audience participation. It had been prompted by the grandson's question "Did Mum also like Indomie when she was small?"

<i>Call:</i>	<i>When your mama small</i>	<i>Meaning: When your mum was young</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eben</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>She no 'gree me rest</i>	<i>She gave me no rest</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eben</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Until she chop Indomie noodles</i>	<i>Till she had a meal of Indomie</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eben</i>	<i>Yes</i>

<i>Call:</i>	<i>Na so she go dey dance... dey rub belle leave us</i>	<i>She'd dance and rub her tummy</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eben</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Indomie noodles</i>	<i>Indomie noodles</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eben</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Sweet Indomie noodles</i>	<i>Tasty Indomie noodles</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eben</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Sweet Indomie noodles</i>	<i>Tasty Indomie noodles</i>

The mother worked out of a modern clean and spacious kitchen, while grandma and grandchildren were busy singing. Her smile as she cooked could be interpreted to mean that she is happy cooking or perhaps happy with the quick (less burdensome) meal. In the sequence of shots that followed she dished out the meal for the family. Thereafter they relished the meal of Indomie noodles enriched with vegetables and chicken. The use of vegetables and chicken portrays the woman as enlightened enough to know the value, and able to afford a balance diet, indicating that she is empowered. This product and the performance of her role were endorsed in the voice-over delivered by a male voice. “There is no noodle like Indomie noodles that is why generations of caring mothers trust only Indomie”. It can be argued that the real endorsement here was for the action of a caring mother – using the trusted brand was an aid to being a good mother. It is interesting that the final endorsement came from a man, even though the adult male figure had been absent from the scene.

The closing sequence of shots helped tied this message to the “Mama do Good” campaign. The children dance round their mum, while the grandma dances happily alongside outside their ring, though as the routine ends she moves in as they all form a circle, and there is a cut to the product pack.

This TV commercial is set in a modern house space as seen through the door bell, the arrangement of the sitting room - the toys, shelves, framed paintings, other carved art works and decorative pieces in sight. The mother's polished nails, seen as she was adding seasoning to the Indomie in the pot do not reveal a life of drudgery. These are all indicative of a family that is fairly economically comfortable.

### **Emerging Issues**

Two common themes emerged from the above review of the roles prescribed for mothers in the advertisements. These are empowerment of mothers and traditional concept of motherhood. There a few indicators from the mise-en-scene that portrayed mothers as being empowered. The apparent comfort in the homes attested to by the furnishings and the mod cons. These suggest that the women are relieved of the drudgery typically associated with domestic duties. There is evidence of the women having essential knowledge which complements the empowerment offered through the more enabling domestic space. This is evident in the quality of the meals served. Boosting the nutritional values of the noodles and transforming an otherwise bland meal to tasty dishes with vegetables and chicken are themselves indicators of



empowerment. The fact that mothers were able to give their kids the best, coach a child to be a “spelling championship” is evidence of mothers' educational empowerment. Going by the cost of living, and the healthy portions of vegetables and chicken in meals served, the mothers are both knowledgeable and economically capable. In all, these indicators suggest that mothers are empowered, but the validation in the tone of the messages suggest that society welcomes such empowered women.

Regarding distinctions between the private and public domain and the roles prescribed for mothers in these TV commercials remain traditional. They were placed mostly in the domestic space, portrayed as caregivers, hospitable and accommodating homemakers, housewives, dedicated, and cheerful charitable neighbours, committed enough to feed children from other homes. These are consistent with the traditional paradigm in gender role assignment. Placing mothers in the private domain was in keeping with traditional good mother roles, even though this may be devoid of prestige, status or power. It appears that the commercials sought to validate this pattern, encouraging its perpetuation by encouraging them to take pride in their service and their children. The affirmation was anchored through the children's closing song and dance routines. Thus, it may be argued that the roles prescribed for mothers in the commercial does not promote change but a maintenance of the status quo which contradicts the empowering of mothers. It is remarkable that there was no signifier to show the women being involved in any gainful employment – returning from work or running a business.

These TV commercials should therefore not be regarded as empowering since the representations of women do not reflect substantial shifts for womanhood. These findings are in tandem with the view of MacBride (1981), Ehrenreich (1995), Kellner (1995), and APCON (2005), who posit that women's typecast in commercials situates them in the private domain. However, it is only partially at variance with Dunn et al (1990), who argued that the trend was changing in line with the changing roles of women in societies. This inconsistency suggests that the dominant hegemonic position is contested yet perpetuated. In consonance with tradition, TV commercial may still undermine women, keeping mothers in the private domain as with established norms regarding the public/private dichotomy.

The commercials present and endorse mothers, not fathers, should stay at home and cook even though Indomie noodles are easy to prepare. The woman remains the home maker as society prescribes. This is indicative of the dominant cultural values. Continued circulation of these may discourage the younger generation from pushing for gender equality. In essence, the commercials promote the same old stereotype, and this may not enhance the achievement of the third millennium development goal.

That said, there were positive dimensions to the messages which offer a glimmer of hope. One example is the girl child who won a spelling championship. Having been encouraged to prove their mettle in the public domain, this younger generation may

grow up encouraged to see conceptions of motherhood other than the traditional.

Similarly, the fact that mothers in the adverts did the cooking on their own without a retinue of servants or helpers (who typically are females) offers hope for the girl-child and may bode well for the lowly women who leave their families for the life of servitude. This will be good news, if only the wider social infrastructure could support such aspirations and avert the impoverishments that necessitate the servitude of some mothers to others.

Because the adverts were aired, it can be assumed that they met the requirements of the regulators as found in the APCON Code (2005). Thus it can be assumed that the adverts offer the validated notions of the “high moral standards” of African womanhood in terms of appearance, demeanour and virtues for the housewife.

It is important to note the absence of the father figure in three of the five texts analysed. There was no reference to a man (no physical presence of a father figure or even a photograph in the apartment). This arguably, is not cherished in the African culture, though it is usual to have female headed households. These adverts may thus be inadvertently contributing to a renegotiation of expectations of normal family life. Yet the sample reveals that relics of the old order remain. The Mum Like No Other commercial, showed a happy father applauding the daughter “spelling champion” and wife. Similarly the Dinner with Dad commercial presents cherished expectations of a “happy family” consisting of father, mother and children, even if by inference the mother may have sacrificed her career to keep the home and make them all happy.

### **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation**

The textual analysis reported above was conducted with several questions in mind. The study sought to know how women are portrayed, what roles had been assigned to them. Are these the same stifling roles from which (by global consensus expressed in the MDG 3) there is a desire to shift? The shift is necessitated by the need for women to be empowered. This comes in different ways as the study confirms – education, economic, social. The appraisal was conducted through advertising texts. Because these rely on cultural associations they give insight into wider cultural practices that may obstruct the realisation of the desired shifts.

The textual analysis suggests that mothers portrayed in the commercials were empowered, yet the messages could still be seen to be promoting traditional (African) concepts of motherhood. There is evidence of progress in the commercials as seen in the comforts of the home and the absence of the drudgery associated with menial tasks. This is clearly an aspiration, though it may not be the reality of many women yet. Another evidence of the adverts' aspirational stance is in the various product presentations which featured balanced nutrition. Ability to serve meals in this way signifies that women in this context are educated and financially capable - empowered. It can also be argued that this presentation raises the product from a humble base,

making it more acceptable as a (middle class) family meal. In spite of this, the mise-en-scene gives little indication that the mothers are involved in the public domain. Nothing in the commercial shows the women being involved in any economic activity. Benefits of formal education and knowledge were still confined to the private domain. It can thus be concluded that mothers are still located within the private domain, within traditional housekeeping “good” mother roles with little status or power. When propagated, such images and values are capable of undermining women in the public domain, since the media in this way, prescribe social expectations of women. Audiences may be expected to internalise these, if they view the media uncritically.

It is encouraging that at least one commercial in the sample acknowledged the mother as a teacher and successful coach. The girl child's potential to be a “super star” was also formally actualised when she became “spelling champion”. This may help to reshape social perceptions that consider girls as being only good for household chores. Yet the Indomie television commercials reviewed generally promoted traditional concepts of motherhood. Indomie television commercials may thus have both negative and positive influences. This may promote ambivalence, especially in young generations of viewers. The positive contribution of the five Indomie television commercials studies towards the achievement of MDG 3 thus remains questionable.

Against the backdrop that the output of the media - in this case advertisements whose ultimate function is economic (to promote purchase) - also perform socialising functions. Advertising influences attitudes and perceptions, the messages sell more than is evident. That being the case, we conclude that the role played by the mother in these television commercials still undermines desired changing roles of women in society. Though some progress has been recorded, in reality the sample studied fails to capture the challenges that accompany the new empowered status on show – the woman's place is still in the kitchen. Such advertisements still perpetuate elements of the dominant culture which informed their creation and through which viewers read the messages.

Media messages are not the fundamental cause of women's subordinate status, so media messages alone cannot be expected to remedy a situation undergirded by other deeply rooted social, economic and political structures. Yet given how pervasive they are, media messages in deed advertisement must be expected to contribute to a new culture and congruent attitudes that will make enduring change possible. The challenge is how.

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