

Graphic Design Opportunities in Advertising Small Furniture Enterprise Products and Services in Nairobi County Kenya

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Abstract — Graphic design (GD), known for its capacity to inform, educate, persuade, and build brand loyalty in advertising, is poorly perceived and applied in small enterprises. Studies show that only 15.6% of GD is used in form of in fliers, brochures, contact cards, photo albums, and signage, which is too weak to create an effective brand presence by Small Furniture Enterprises (SFEs). Economic status reveals that 49.2% of small enterprises do not use any form of posters, flyers, brochures, and packaging design. It is perceived to be unnecessarily expensive despite the many opportunities that big furniture firms have taken advantage of. This situation is the case in Nairobi County, the capital city of Kenya and an important economic hub for regional trade. The application of GD in advertising by SFEs in this region is crucial because the area has a higher concentration of SFEs with significant influence on other small furniture enterprises across the country. A sample size of 273 Small Furniture Enterprise Managers (SFEM) and 9 Small Furniture Enterprise welfare Leaders (SFEWL) was used. Questionnaires and interviews were used as methods of data collection. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods. Out of 273 questionnaires administered, 89.7% were returned and found adequate for the study. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and presented through frequency polygons, tables, bar charts, and pie charts. Qualitative data were coded, cleaned, analyzed, and presented using patterns and themes. Findings revealed design opportunities in SFE's visual communications, especially branding and advertising. Consumers' need for various and accurate information, education, and persuasions provide GD opportunities in SFEs. Findings revealed opportunities in advertising, packaging, photography, fabrics, stationery, branding, and signage, all graphic design fields. The study found photographs to be the leading forms of graphic design imagery used in SFE advertising. However, photos used are sourced from business vendors or recorded by enterprise owners, managers, or employees with devastating poor qualities. Some photos are downloaded from the internet or acquired from customers' samples, while others are borrowed, cutouts, or scanned from existing publications. These scenarios offer immense opportunities in photography and related photographic manipulations in the design processes. Therefore, the study recommends that small enterprise stakeholders and graphic design professionals use available opportunities in graphic design to enhance the quality and quantity of advertising in SFEs.

Index Terms— Advertising, Graphic Design, Small Furniture Enterprise, Opportunities, competitiveness.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Graphic Design plays a critical role in developing advertising and branding strategies. Its opportunities in Small Furniture Enterprises (SFEs) have, however, drawn little attention in research. Visual communication is a pictorial statement or a graphical tool created to deliver a message visually. The historical perspective depicted by Meggs (1992) points out that the Industrial Revolution of 1750 to 1850 influenced the rise of graphic design to address rising communication needs arising from an increased middle class, education, and literacy rates. Jennifer's (2020) article on the ten benefits of graphic design clarifies that graphics can be used by small businesses to: create awareness and recognition; manage time and money; create visual identity and brand; increase employee morale, pride, and productivity; enhance competitiveness; enforce professionalism; encourage effective layouts that are legible and credible; and enable storytelling and customer persuasion. Several authors sharing similar opinions include Zimmerer and Scarborough (2011). They observe that entrepreneurs need a unique graphic design identity in their businesses and product differentiation, while Rahman (2010) posits that globalization and competitiveness are achieved through design. Graphic design elements can be artistically used to create powerful and persuasive communication, whether in signage, branding, advertising, packaging, publishing, television, or web design (Tappenden 2004). This is reinforced by Landa (1998) that all graphic designs serve a purpose that often falls into three categories: information, editorial, and promotional.

National policies and County Government bylaws guide and provide opportunities for graphic design use in small enterprises. Manual on Consumer Protection (2016), Constitution of Kenya (2010), and County Government of Nairobi (2014) have respective policies that advocate the need for well-designed and accurate information on goods and services as well as where, when, and how graphic design should be displayed. In part, the Manual on Consumer Protection (2016) states that all advertisements should be truthful and accurate devoid of neither deceptive nor misleading information, and should refrain from using vague statements, superlatives, exaggerations, or comparisons that may be misunderstood or misconstrued. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) defines the rights of consumers to accurate information on goods and services and the protection of their health, safety, and economic interests (RoK 2010). City by-laws by the County Government of Nairobi (2014) advocate the need for well-designed advertising materials.

These materials include billboards, sky signs, wall wraps, light-emitting diode screens, street pole adverts, bus shelter and transport termini, street furniture, guard rail advert panels, wall branding, and vehicle branding. Mobile advertisements, construction site hoarding advertising, and other below-the-line advertisements, including posters, handbills, and umbrellas, are also part of the materials. Despite existing policies, standards, and regulatory guidelines that provide GD opportunities in the public domain, numerous perceptions within small enterprises still hinder GD adoption in advertising.

Branding allows a company to differentiate its products from the competition while establishing positive customer loyalty. Brands are competitive in markets because they influence consumers to make buying decisions based on their perceptions. These perceptions may include quality, safety, luxury, value, or other considerations important to the consumer during purchase (Ambrose & Harris 2009). In creating a brand identity, a designer infuses meaning and various qualities into the brand through a combination of colour, typography, imagery, and style to make an aesthetic and functional appeal to the viewer. A study by Rhoads (2007) shows that businesses that use brand identity perform well in market competition. According to Ndemo (2010), small furniture manufacturers in Dagoretti Market in Nairobi, Kenya, require branding, packaging, and advertising to build capacity and reach global markets; it was against this background that this study had to establish whether the SFEs and their Welfare leaders are aware of the above opportunities that with effective use of graphic design.

Ngui et al. (2014) suggest that government should subsidize advertising costs for small enterprises, whereas Share & Guyo (2013), state that enterprises require advertising design to remain competitive. Advertising design develops information that enables enterprises to introduce new products and services, establish and maintain company products and profiles and also create awareness. It informs, educates, and persuades consumers by inducing favourable perceptions and imageries. Consumers can be manipulated to rejuvenate their purchasing/repurchasing behaviours through advertising. When multi advertising strategy is engaged (variety use of posters, billboards, website, TV, signage, and handbills), each advertising segment can energize and strengthen other non-visual forms of advertising. Used creatively, advertising provides sales guidance, supports, and motivates interactions among sellers (McRury, 2009), also supported by (Mats 1999) that advertising builds brands gradually in line with the enterprise strategy for meeting customer needs.

Design Council's (2011) study identifies high potential returns from raising awareness of design within small enterprises. The study shows that while 90% of rapidly growing businesses agree that innovation is significant, only 26% of slow-growth companies use graphic design. Mowle and Merrilees (2005), Gillespie, Jeanett, & Hennesy (2007) Claudiu (2015) observe that creating a successful brand positioning strategy means offering consumers strong consideration in purchasing the brand. Sutherland (2008) supports this notion by stating that advertising is an

independent element that increases sales in the universal marketing mix concept (product, price, and promotion). Since RoK's (1999) survey on economic status reveals that 49.2% of small enterprises do not use any form of posters, flyers, brochures, and packaging design, this study endeavoured to deviate from the scope of all the studies and focus on graphic design use in small furniture enterprises advertising.

Packaging is the art and technology of enclosing or protecting products for distribution, storage, sale, and use. It also refers to designing, evaluating, and producing packages. Packaging is used to contain, protect, preserve, transport, inform, and sell products. Bildik's (2016) study on the importance of packaging design of modular furniture indicates that demounted furniture trends are increasingly preferred globally because of the associated ease of transport and installation. Muteti (2011) observes that small enterprise managers may not consider packaging necessary for protecting, informing, and educating, which can uplift business profiles. According to Anokye (2013), valuable unpackaged furniture products are usually damaged due to breakages, bruises, scratches, and abrasions during transportation and storage. EBDSN (2015) report further shows that packages must be cost-effective, convenient, reliable, and durable, containing visual information that is graphically clear, and accurate with distinct exposure of the brand. Information on a package should be depicted through typography and imagery achieved through illustrations and photography.

Photography is the art of capturing visuals through a camera to achieve images used in advertising (Sibila and Jelena 2010). Since its introduction in 1826, photographs have played a significant role in media communications, such as billboard advertisements, illustrated magazines, newspapers, television, and the internet (Padil & Mustaffa, 2014). Mustaffa (2011) observes that every image delivers its message purposely to either inform, educate, promote, entertain, or persuade. Photography is an element of visual communication that has value in capturing form with complete details and realism. Curtin (2007) notes that today's digital photography trend has revolutionized graphic design making it possible to capture images and restructure them in universally recognized digital formats that are easy to store, manipulate, display, retrieve, distribute and share. Photographs are accurate, realistic, and persuasive, making them ideal for graphic design-based advertising.

The government's course of action through graphic design policies provides several design opportunities among SFEs. Enforcement of the Manual on Consumer Protection (2016) to achieve truthful and accurate advertisements which are not deceptive or misleading or contain vague statements, superlatives, exaggerations, or comparisons that may be misunderstood or misconstrued create an immense opportunity for GD. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) also avails another opportunity through a requirement for consumers to be provided with accurate information on goods and services and protection of health, safety, and economic interests (RoK 2010). The County Government of Nairobi's (2014) requirement for well-designed advertising products

brings another GD opportunity to SFE, where designers must accurately create billboards, sky signs, wall wraps, light-emitting diode screens, street pole adverts, bus shelter and transport termini, street furniture, guard rail advert panels, wall branding, and vehicle branding, Mobile advertisements, construction site hoarding advertising, and other below-the-line advertisements, including posters, handbills, and umbrellas. Despite existing policies and regulatory guidelines in the public domain, numerous perceptions hinder Graphic Design adoption in SFE advertising which this study aimed to investigate.

Earlier studies showed minimal use of graphic designs in small enterprise advertising. In the case of small furniture enterprises, furniture trends, types, sources, specifications, usage, materials, costing, and ornamental values are essential furniture attributes lacking in visual expressions. To bridge this gap and market their furniture, SFEs rely on informal roadside exhibitions or word-of-mouth and referral methods which are unsuitable for attracting customers in the distance market. Furniture displays are not consistent and keep varying. Word-of-mouth depends on customer perception that may be positive but, in most cases, negative, resulting in distorted messages. The general perception that the cost of hiring designers (professionals), designing (process), design (product), and advertising (media) is expensive limits the use of GD in small enterprises. Factors that lead to inefficient graphic design use in visual advertising among SFEs form a design problem this study intended to solve. The finding of this study would enable SFEs to adapt to emerging GD trends for improved advertising. The study's overall importance is establishing graphic design opportunities to advertise small furniture enterprise products in Nairobi County, Kenya.

The scope of the study is to establish graphic design used in print media and electronic media, such as corporate identity design (logos and trademarks), advertising design, publication design, packaging design, and branding design. The study used 273 registered SFEs with physical production and exhibition sites in Nairobi County, Kenya, and 9 Small Furniture Enterprise Welfare Leaders (SFEWL).

The Graphics Triangle Theory (Brown, 1979) was relied upon to guide the study. The theory describes three facets possessing values of persuasion, explanation, and identification in the form of a model, emerging from a need to embed communication values when conveying either messages or ideas in a visual format. The model demonstrates how three facets of graphic design – explanation, persuasion, and identification – form a triangle of communication values that SFE managers must take cognizance of.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewed literature confirmed that Graphic design interventions stated in various empirical studies pointed out that small enterprises can remain competitive in a globalized economy, including branding (Ambrose & Harris, 2009), advertising (McRury, 2009), packaging (Muteti, 2011 & Anokye, 2013), photography (Padil & Mustafa, 2014,

Mustaffa, 2011 and Curtin, 2007), implementation of graphic design policies (Ngu et al. 2014, Sharu & Guyo, 2013, MCP, 2016 GoK, 2010), differentiation of enterprises and products (Zimmerer & Scarborough, 2011). Most empirical studies covered, however, did not describe precisely how Graphic Design is created and applied in SFE, causing a gap in the field of graphic design.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design process which enabled the quick collection of large amounts of data from a population comprising small furniture enterprises in expansive Nairobi County. The study area was Nairobi County, the capital city of Kenya. The location was preferred for the study because of its highest number of small furniture enterprises, a substantial industrial and commercial hub covered 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, a population of 3,138,369 people, and a population density of 4,800/km². 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 nine welfare group leaders coordinating SFE participation in national trade fairs, exhibitions, and other commercial publicities (RoK 2015). A systematic random sampling method selected 273 SFE managers. The study also used nine SFE welfare leaders in every sub-county selected through the saturated sampling method. The questionnaire, Interview Schedule, and Observation Checklist were the three research methods used to collect data

The questionnaire contained structured questions designed to collect data on all visual communication opportunities in SFEs, and Small Furniture Enterprise Welfare Leaders were interviewed (SFEWL). 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 (2008). Six accounting (67%) out of nine SFEWL were interviewed.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Graphic Design Opportunities in Small Furniture Enterprise

The study sought to establish graphic design opportunities in advertising small furniture enterprise products in Nairobi County, Kenya. Graphic design opportunities were highlighted in statements aimed to elicit responses on the need for graphic design services.

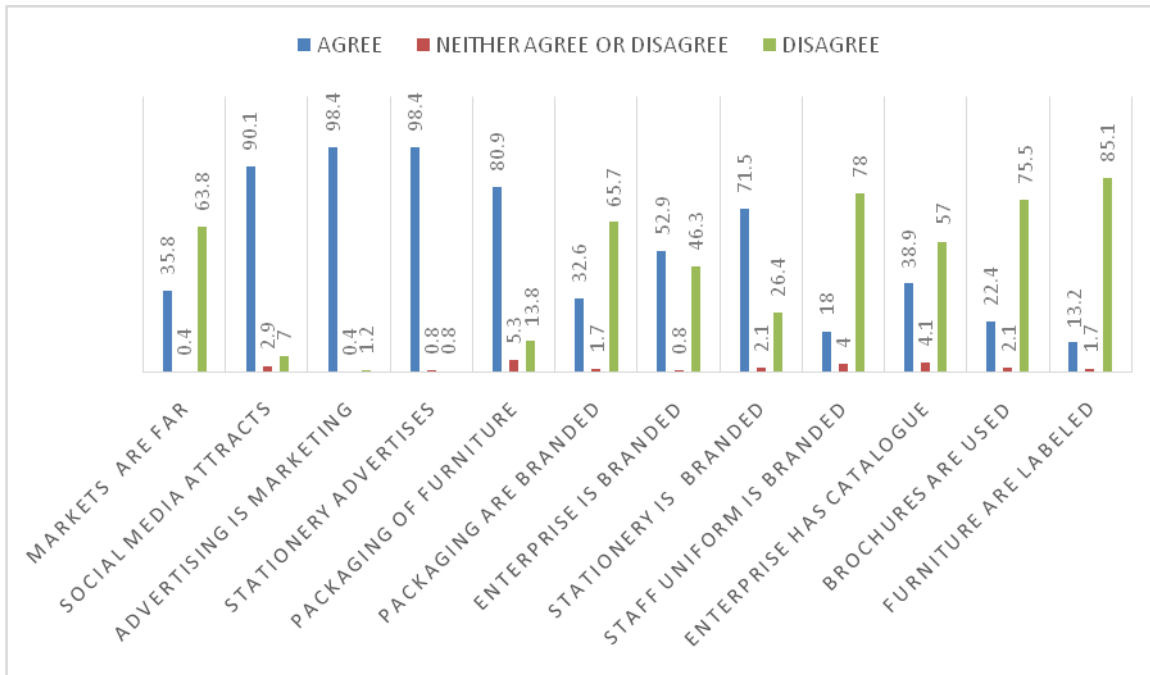


Figure 1: Graphic design opportunities in small furniture enterprises

Findings on graphic design opportunities in small furniture enterprises disclosed that 98.4% of SFEs managers agree that advertising can help market furniture. 98.4% also concur that branded stationery can improve sales. It further shows that 98.1% agree that social media is used to attract customers; 90.1% agree that social media attracts customers, whereas 80.9% agree that furniture is packaged to avoid damage; 71.5% agree that stationery is branded, whereas 52.9% agree on the branding of the enterprise; 38.9% agree that the enterprise has product catalogues; 22.4% agree that brochures can be used, whereas only 13.2% have their furniture labelled. The agreements indicate that SFE managers are already receptive to opportunities in visual advertising. On

the contrary, table 1 also shows that 85.1% of respondents disagree that furniture produced is branded. 78% agree with branded staff uniforms, and 75.5% do not agree with information sheets. 65.7 disagree with branded packaging or wrapping materials, whereas 63.8% do not sell their furniture in far markets. The disagreements indicate that SFE managers may not be sure of graphic design input in advertising which raises the need to promote graphic design more among SFEs to leverage available visual advertising opportunities. Responses in figure 1 were summed up into opportunities, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Graphic design opportunities in SFE advertising

OPPORTUNITY	AGREE	NEITHER AGREES OR DISAGREE	DISAGREE
Markets are far	35.8	0.4	63.8
Social Media Attracts	90.1	2.9	7
Advertising is marketing	98.4	0.4	1.2
Stationery advertises	98.4	0.8	0.8
Packaging of Furniture	80.9	5.3	13.8
Packaging is branded	32.6	1.7	65.7
Enterprise is branded	52.9	0.8	46.3
Stationery is branded	71.5	2.1	26.4
Staff uniform is branded	18	4	78
Enterprise has Catalogue	38.9	4.1	57

brochures are used	22.4	2.1	75.5
Furniture is labelled	13.2	1.7	85.1
TOTAL	653.1	26.3	520.6
PERCENTAGE	54.4%	2.2%	43.4%

Overall, respondents’ output on the availability of GD opportunities in SFE indicates that 54.4% agree on the availability of GD opportunities. These imply that graphic design is already appreciated, which creates the need for its enhancement. Interview responses on graphic design opportunities in SFE advertising derived from six Small Furniture show that SFEs use business cards, brochures, and photographs through social media to market their furniture products. SFEs venture into social media to attract customers to their products. Contrary findings suggest that 43.4% disagree and 2.2% neither agree nor disagree, denoting graphic design absence in SFEs. These contradictions conform to Ndemo’s (2010) earlier observations that small furniture manufacturers in Dagoretti Market in Nairobi, Kenya, require branding, packaging, and advertising. It also disagrees with Ngui et al. (2014) assertion that government should subsidize advertising costs for small enterprises. Although Muteti (2011) observed that small enterprise

managers might not consider packaging necessary, most SFEWL interviewed agreed that furniture gets damaged during display, storage, and transportation, further agreeing with Anokye (2013), who held similar sentiments in favour of this study.

4.2 SOURCES OF PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN ADVERTISING

Photography is an element of visual communication with communication value that can easily capture form (object) with complete details and realism. Small furniture enterprises source and use a substantial number of photographs in compiling photo albums, enterprise catalogues, social media, flyers, and stationery in anticipation of attracting and persuading consumers.

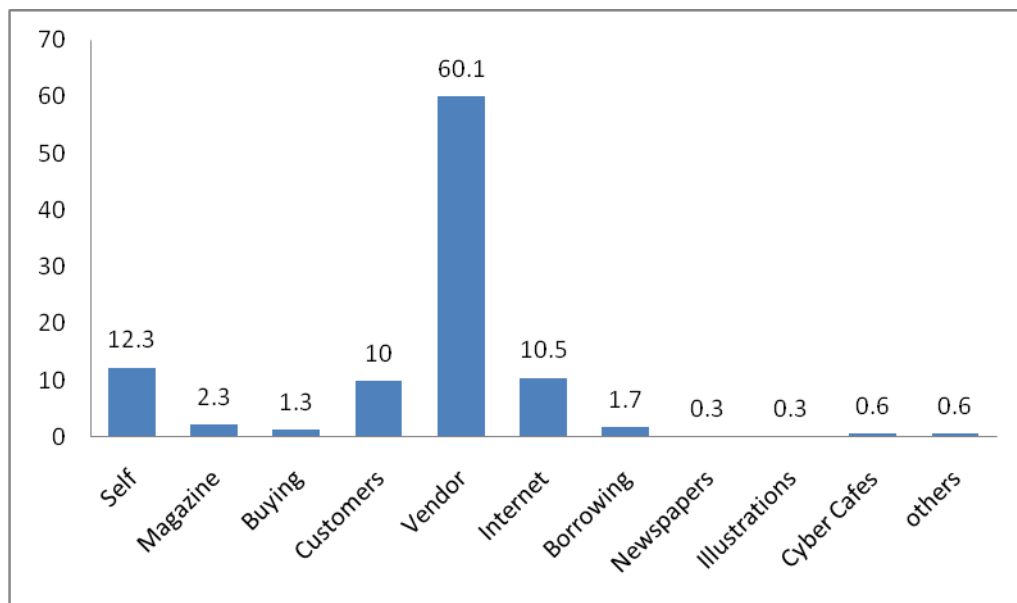


Figure 2: Sources of photographs used in SFE advertising

Findings on sources of photographs used in SFE advertising in Figure 3 revealed that 60.1% of enterprises use photographs acquired from business vendors. Photographs taken by SFE owners, managers, or employees form 12.3%, whereas photographs provided by customers in form of samples amount to 10%, while internet-sourced images are 10.5%. Other sources are magazines at 2.3%, purchased photographs at 1.3%, borrowed photographs at 1.7%, and less than 1% are illustrations and cuttings from the newsletter and downloads from cybercafes.

The findings further show that most photographs used in SFEs are bought from business vendors implying graphic design generated is not an accurate representation of small

enterprise products. The output displays only 12.3% of own enterprise photographs taken by enterprise owners,

managers, or employees. These findings dovetail with results from the interviews conducted on SFEWL on the sources of photos used in advertising. The majority of responses indicated self-photography and buying from vendors and internet downloads. For SFE to leverage competitive advertising, they must embrace photography because this brings forth advertising elements that are accurate, realistic, and persuasive. SFEs should acquire photographs from sources that guarantee quality because, according to Mustaffa (2011), every image delivers its message with different purposes, such as informing, educating, promoting, entertaining, and persuading. The findings differ with the

Constitution of Kenya (2010), Manual on Consumer Protection (2016), and County Government of Nairobi (2014) bylaws which require all advertisements to be truthful and accurate devoid of neither deceptive nor misleading information, and should refrain from using vague statements, superlatives, exaggerations, or comparisons that may be misunderstood or misconstrued.

The findings of this study agree with Curtin (2007), who observed that today's digital photography had revolutionized visual design, making it possible to capture images and restructure them in digital formats that make it easy to store, manipulate, display, retrieve, distribute and share. Evidence derived from figure 3 reveals that SFEs majorly source photographs through means that would not facilitate digital formats that are easy to store, manipulate, display, retrieve, distribute and share, such as cuttings from other publications and personalization of photographic samples from the customer. For SFE to leverage competitive advertising, they must embrace photography because this brings forth advertising elements that are accurate, realistic, and persuasive. SFEs should acquire photographs from sources that guarantee quality because, according to Mustaffa (2011), every image delivers its message with different purposes, such as informing, educating, promoting, entertaining, and persuading.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study's objective was to establish graphic design opportunities in advertising small furniture enterprise products in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings revealed several graphic design opportunities in small furniture enterprises. Most SFEs managers agree that advertising is marketing and that branded stationery and social media can advertise furniture products. In addition, product packaging, enterprise profiles, brochures, and product labeling were identified to have a high potential in SFE advertising. On the contrary, the findings also reveal that 43.4% of SFEs disagree with the opportunities implying a lack of awareness of GD's role in advertising. The disagreement signified the need for further graphic design promotion in SFE advertising strategies.

The study also found that most of the photographs used in social media advertising are sourced from business vendors, taken in-house by managers and employees, downloaded from the internet, and acquired from customers' samples. Other sources included borrowed pictures, cutouts, or scanned images from existing publications leading to issues of plagiarism and deception in advertising contrary to the Manual on Consumer Protection (2016) guidelines. There is a need for SFEs to embrace professional graphic design, especially in photography, to achieve accurate, realistic, and persuasive advertisements.

The study recommends that small enterprises take advantage of the available opportunities in visual advertisement to widen their brand presence in the market.

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