Advertising Executives' Perception of Nigerian Mass Communication Graduates' Workforce Readiness and Employability in Lagos Agencies

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Abstract

This study explores advertising executives' perceptions of the employability of Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates in Lagos-based advertising agencies. The conceptualisation of employability, encompassing the synthesis of cognitive knowledge, practical competencies, and professional preparedness, is a requisite condition for the continuous flow of innovation in creative industries. In Nigeria, mass communication graduates are expected to contribute across journalism, broadcasting, public relations, and advertising. However, recurring concerns about the adequacy of their training continue to raise questions about their preparedness for advertising agency practice. Grounded in structural unemployment theory, this study adopts a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 37 executives using a 27-item online questionnaire, complemented by in-depth interviews with five chief executives from leading Lagos advertising agencies. Survey results indicated moderate agreement that graduates were prepared for agency roles ($\bar{x}$ = 3.62) but lower endorsement of their overall employability ($\bar{x}$ = 3.27). Respondents acknowledged graduates' theoretical knowledge, creativity, and enthusiasm while expressing concerns about their digital competence, analytical skills, and industry-specific readiness. Qualitative findings corroborated these findings, highlighting a persistent "gown-to-town" gap between university curricula and workplace requirements. The study concludes that enhancing graduate employability requires curriculum reform, structured apprenticeships, and stronger academia–industry collaboration. It recommends embedding job-specific competencies and continuous professional development into training pathways better to align graduate outcomes with the dynamic workplace expectations.

Keywords: *Advertising Executives, Curriculum Reform, Employability Skills, Nigeria Graduate Preparedness, Perception*

Introduction

Advertising is a capital-intensive business and a key contributor to the national economies of capitalist states worldwide. Some aspiring entrants see advertising as a highly lucrative career path for making commercial benefits in a creative setting, particularly in Nigeria's ailing economy. As a result, many mass communication graduates consider it their first choice (Okoeguale, 2024). As a critical sector of the economy, advertising agencies desire highly creative and skilled individuals who can contribute immensely to their creative endeavour in a highly competitive business environment.

The challenge of locating employable applicants who check all the boxes has made filling these needs enormous (Mainga, Murphy-Braynen, Thompson and Robins, 2025).

The Nigerian higher education system, particularly mass communication programmes, is expected to prepare graduates for roles in journalism, public relations, broadcasting, and advertising. However, there have been persistent debates about the adequacy of Nigerian-trained graduates in meeting the needs of employers in these knowledge-driven industries (Ebiringa, Asiegbu, Ikerionwu, Emereole, & Ebiringa, 2024).

The challenge is notably acute in advertising, a field where market demands necessitate that professionals possess creative aptitude, requisite digital literacy, and sector-specific proficiencies to maintain competitive standing. Scholars such as Ojebuyi and Salawu (2015) and Adeosun and Shittu (2022) argue that Nigerian mass communication curricula, though broad, have historically emphasised theoretical instruction at the expense of practical, industry-oriented training. The outcome is a recurring gap between what universities teach and the skill sets required in contemporary advertising practice. This skills gap has fuelled concerns among employers regarding the readiness of graduates to integrate into agency operations without substantial retraining.

Graduate employability has thus become a subject of policy and academic debate in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has undertaken reforms aimed at overhauling the mass communication curriculum, including the recent unbundling of the discipline into separate degree programmes such as advertising, broadcasting, public relations, and journalism (NUC, 2020). The strategic objectives of this reform are to enhance disciplinary specialisation and to synchronise educational instruction with the demands of the professional environment. However, questions remain as to whether these changes are sufficient to meet the expectations of advertising executives, who ultimately determine graduates' employability in practice. In rapidly evolving industries such as advertising, employers often prioritise graduates' problem-solving abilities, creativity, adaptability, and digital competence over rote academic knowledge (Coetzee, Ferreira & Potgieter, 2023).

Globally, studies have shown that employer perceptions strongly shape graduates' career trajectories and influence higher education reforms (Tomlinson, 2017). In emerging economies such as Nigeria, employer perspectives are particularly significant given the mismatch often observed between academic qualifications and workplace requirements (Otu, 2025). Advertising agencies in Lagos, compete in a fast-paced, highly creative environment influenced by global trends in digital marketing, consumer

data analytics, and branded content production. This context, according to Akinro and Olatunji (2020), places enormous pressure on agencies to recruit graduates who can contribute immediately and effectively to organisational goals. Executives are often tasked with balancing client expectations with internal workforce capacity, making their assessment of graduate employability a decisive factor in recruitment strategies. Their perceptions offer valuable insights into whether Nigerian universities are producing graduates capable of driving innovation and sustaining the growth of the advertising industry.

Poncio (2024) opines that there is a significant disparity between training institutions' outputs and the demands of professional environments, which negatively impacts graduates' employability. This gap stems from limited industry experience and a lack of understanding of modern workplace requirements among trainers, coupled with inadequate training facilities and low welfare packages for trainers.

The employability of Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates goes beyond academic certification to industry relevance. In Lagos, advertising agencies face globalisation, digital shifts, and client demands, highlighting graduates' capacity to adapt. Therefore, this study seeks to examine advertising executives' perceptions of graduate preparedness for advertising roles in Lagos, Nigeria.

Objectives of Study

The specific objectives that guided the study are to:
1. assess the enthusiasm of advertising agencies' executives in Lagos, Nigeria, in employing Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates
2. determine the perception of advertising executives about the overall preparedness and employability of Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates for the advertising agency business in Lagos, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:
1. What is the level of enthusiasm of advertising agencies' executives in Lagos, Nigeria, in employing Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates?
2. What are the perceptions of advertising executives regarding the overall preparedness and employability of Nigerian-trained Mass

Communication graduates for work in advertising agencies in Lagos, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

Ho: Advertising executives in Lagos do not significantly differ in their level of enthusiasm toward employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates

Ho: Advertising executives in Lagos perceive Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates as adequately employable.

Literature Review

The Nigerian advertising industry has undergone remarkable transformations over the decades, emerging as one of the most vibrant segments of the creative economy. Historically, the practice began with the Royal Niger Company (RNC), later rebranded as the United African Company (UAC), which played a pioneering role in formal advertising activities—the incorporation of Lever Brothers International's agency, LINTAS, further institutionalised advertising practice in Nigeria. Since then, the sector has grown into a globally recognised industry that contributes significantly to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with billions of naira generated annually through creative services and marketing communications (Olatunji, 2018). This developmental path emphasises the strategic value of advertising agencies, which are instrumental in both fostering corporate profitability and contributing to macro-level economic advancement. Central to this success is human capital. The indispensability of a skilled workforce in the agency business is emphasised by Doyle (2021), who underscored that competencies such as creativity, communication, project management, interpersonal skills, and leadership are essential to modern agencies.

Employability and the Skills Gap

Employability in knowledge-driven industries extends beyond academic qualifications to include the attributes, skills, and competencies required to meet dynamic workplace demands (Bancoro & Bancoro, 2025). In Nigeria, this issue is pressing due to the persistent mismatch between university training and labour market expectations. Mass communication programmes, though broad and theoretically rich, often lack the practical

and specialised focus demanded by the advertising industry (Mpia, Mburu & Mwendia, 2023; Colman, 2018). Scholars have long highlighted this gap, noting that curricula often neglect employability as a core outcome. Gómez-Bayona (2024) attributes this to the academic belief that job readiness lies outside institutional responsibility, deepening the divide between training and employer expectations. Employers increasingly seek graduates with both academic grounding and workplace-ready competencies—teamwork, adaptability, critical thinking, and creativity, yet many Nigerian graduates overemphasize degrees while undervaluing transferable and soft skills (Otu, 2025). Faingold (2019) emphasized that employability reflects an interaction between educational systems, organizational needs, and student preparation. In today's marketplace, foundational literacy and numeracy must coexist with digital fluency, communication, and interpersonal skills. Akinbode and Oyelude (2020) further observed that while disciplinary knowledge remains vital, success in advertising and marketing increasingly depends on applied and interpersonal abilities that extend beyond theoretical mastery, highlighting the urgent need for curriculum reform and practical learning integration.

Evolving Demands in Advertising Practice

The advertising industry increasingly demands **hybrid skills** that combine creativity, technology, and psychology. Copywriting, once a purely literary task, has evolved into a multidimensional craft requiring digital design proficiency, storytelling, and audience psychology. Olatunji (2018) described copywriters as professionals blending dramaturgical creativity with computer-assisted design and insights from sociology and the humanities, reflecting the cross-disciplinary complexity of modern advertising. Monge and Etxebarria (2017) similarly highlighted the collaborative nature of contemporary advertising, where diverse experts co-create integrated campaigns. Bierhold (2020) reinforced this view, emphasizing the growing necessity for digital fluency, employees must now integrate campaigns, segment audiences, and evaluate outcomes through data analytics. However, many mass communication curricula in Nigeria still lack substantial digital advertising content, leaving graduates underprepared for modern practice. Globally, this concern persists: Dodson (2016) found that only 37% of U.S. employers viewed new graduates as adequately skilled for technology-driven roles. While the employability gap is international, it is particularly acute in Nigeria, where underfunded institutions and outdated curricula hinder adaptation to the

evolving digital landscape. Addressing these deficiencies through curriculum reform and industry collaboration is essential for equipping future advertising professionals with the competencies required in today's technology-driven marketplace.

The Expanding Role of Advertising Agency Functions

Beyond creativity, the roles within advertising agencies are expanding in scope and complexity. Ufot (2018) observed that client service functions have shifted from traditional relationship management to generalist roles encompassing strategic planning, marketing, promotion, and digital media execution. Client service executives are now responsible for developing and implementing integrated campaigns, identifying business opportunities, and ensuring that campaigns meet measurable objectives. This role also involves financial acumen, as executives handle cost estimation, budget management, and reporting to both clients and agency leadership.
Strategic planning has likewise become central to agency operations. Rattanapun, Morasilpin, and Pringle (2020) defined strategic communication planning as the process of identifying a problem that can be solved by marketing communication, setting objectives, choosing strategies, and implementing tactics within a defined timeframe. For mass communication graduates to achieve success in such roles, strong foundations in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are prerequisite. However, Gupta and Mahajan (2024) argued that fresh graduates often struggle to enter strategy and planning positions because these roles demand experience, industry exposure, and multidisciplinary insights. Nonetheless, a graduate with basic research training is better positioned to make this transition than one with purely theoretical knowledge. Llorente Barroso, Viñaras Abad and Marugán Solís (2021) reinforced this argument by stressing the need for new professional profiles in advertising. They contended that the sector's rapid evolution necessitates skills and knowledge not traditionally emphasised in academic programmes. As a result, the advertising industry seeks graduates who can bring innovative, interdisciplinary perspectives into practice.

Employability in the Digital Era

The rise of digital and social media marketing has placed additional pressure on universities to adapt curricula. Advertising is increasingly data-driven, requiring graduates who are comfortable with analytics, digital platforms, and new communication technologies. Bierhold (2020) argued

that digital literacy is now a prerequisite competence influencing employability outcomes in advertising. However, many Nigerian-trained graduates lack exposure to digital marketing tools and practices during their university training (Emmanuel & Olayinka, 2024). Dodson (2016) findings on the unpreparedness of graduates in the United States underscore that this is a global challenge. The implications in Nigeria are especially significant due to the country's youthful population and expanding digital economy.

Taken together, the literature underscores a widening gap between industry requirements and the skillsets of mass communication graduates in Nigeria. The rapid pace of digital innovation, coupled with evolving client demands, requires graduates who are versatile, technologically proficient, and strategically oriented. Consequently, the perceptions of advertising executives function as a key evaluative metric for determining the workforce preparedness of Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates. While other studies have explored this issue globally, little research has examined the perceptions of Nigerian advertising executives; this study, therefore, addresses this gap and investigates such perceptions within advertising agencies in Lagos State, where industry competitiveness and innovation are particularly pronounced.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Structural Unemployment Theory, advanced initially by Harry Jerome in *Mechanisation in Industry* (1934). The theory explains unemployment not as a result of job scarcity, but as a mismatch between the skills possessed by job seekers and the evolving demands of employers. Unlike cyclical unemployment, which is tied to economic downturns, structural unemployment persists even during periods of growth, as workers remain underprepared for available roles (Bell & Blanchflower, 2021).

In Nigeria, this framework is particularly relevant to understanding the employability of mass communication graduates. Despite earning academic qualifications, these graduates are often perceived by advertising executives as deficient in industry-ready skills, especially within Lagos' fast-paced digital economy. Agencies now prioritise expertise in strategic planning, integrated digital campaigns, and data-driven marketing (Bierhold, 2020; Rattanapun, Morasilpin, & Pringle, 2020). However, Nigerian universities continue to emphasise theoretical knowledge over practice-oriented training (Dodson, 2016; Gómez-Bayona, 2024). This disconnection

positions graduates within structural unemployment: jobs exist, but inadequate preparation prevents them from capitalising on such opportunities. Applying the theory here demonstrates that negative perceptions of Nigerian-trained graduates reflect systemic misalignment rather than a lack of ability or motivation. Employability, therefore, must be seen as the integration of theoretical knowledge, transferable skills, and specialised competencies. Persistent deficits in digital literacy, workplace readiness, and problem-solving skills force employers to retrain graduates, resulting in increased costs and inefficiencies. Thus, Structural Unemployment Theory emphasises the importance of curriculum reform, structured apprenticeships, and stronger academic–industry partnerships to bridge the gap and align graduates with labour market needs.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to enhance breadth and depth through methodological triangulation. The population comprised 90 registered corporate members of the Advertising Agencies' Association of Nigeria (AAAN). Using purposive sampling, 37 executives, mainly Managing Directors and Human Resource Heads, directly involved in recruitment were selected to participate in the quantitative phase. Data were collected through a structured 27-item questionnaire administered electronically. The instrument was subjected to expert review by two senior academics and one industry professional to establish face and content validity. A pilot test with five executives outside the main sample confirmed clarity, while a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 demonstrated high reliability and internal consistency.

For the qualitative phase, five chief executives from full-service Lagos agencies, including SO&U Ltd, Verdant Zeal, FCB DP Partnership, Tequila Nigeria, and CreativeXone Ltd, were purposively selected. Agency selection was based on workforce size (minimum of 40 employees) and operational breadth. Semi-structured telephone interviews explored themes such as readiness to employ graduates, perceptions of their preparedness, and assessments of employability. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically coded. Integrating both strands provided a holistic and practice-oriented understanding of advertising executives' perceptions of the employability of Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates.

Findings

Quantitative Aspect of the Study

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Questionnaire Survey Respondents

Variable		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22	59.5
	Female	15	40.5
	Total	**37**	**100.0**
Age	30-39	2	5.4
	40-49	24	64.9
	50 years and above	11	29.7
	Total	**37**	**100.0**
Educational Qualification	B.Sc/HND	22	59.5
	M.Sc	11	29.7
	PhD	1	2.7
	Professional	3	8.1
	Total	**37**	**100.0**
Level	Top Level	35	94.6
	Middle Level	2	5.4
	Total	**37**	**100.0**
Work Experience	4-6 years	1	2.7
	7-10 years	1	2.7
	11-14 years	11	29.7
	Above 15 years	24	64.9
	Total	**37**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Married	**37**	**100.0**

Source: Field Study, 2023

Table 1 indicates that most respondents were male (59.5%), aged 40–49 (64.9%), and highly educated, with B.Sc/HND (59.5%) or M.Sc (29.7%). Few held PhDs (2.7%). Nearly all were top-level executives (94.6%) with extensive industry experience, as 64.9% had over 15 years. This demographic profile allows for the inference that the participants are knowledgeable and experienced advertising professionals.

Research Question 1: What is the level of enthusiasm of advertising agencies' executives in Lagos, Nigeria, in employing Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates?

Table 2

Enthusiasm in Employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication Graduates

	Mean $(\bar{x})$	Standard Deviation (SD)
I employ several Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates	4.14	1.00
My level of readiness at employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates is high	3.84	1.39
I feel enthusiastic about employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates for advertising jobs	3.57	1.61
I prefer Nigeria-trained Mass Communication graduates to foreign trained Mass Communication graduates for advertising jobs	3.30	1.02
Average Overall Mean	**3.71**	**1.26**

Source: Field Study 2023*; ****Decision Rule if the mean is 1 to 1.79 = Neutral; 1.80 to 2.59 = Strongly Disagree; 2.60 to 3.39 = Disagree; 3.40 to 4.19 = Agree; 4.20 to 5= Strongly Agree

Table 2 shows that advertising executives expressed enthusiasm for employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates ($\bar{x}$ = 3.71). They reported frequent recruitment ($\bar{x}$ = 4.14) and readiness to employ them ($\bar{x}$ = 3.84). However, executives preferred foreign-trained graduates ($\bar{x}$ = 3.30). The survey data, validated by the interview transcripts, indicates that graduates' motivational drive is often offset by concerns regarding their competitive standing relative to industry requirements.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of advertising executives regarding the overall preparedness and employability of Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates for work in advertising agencies in Lagos, Nigeria?

Table 3

i.   *Perception of **overall preparedness** of Mass Communication graduates to work in advertising agencies* among advertising agencies' executives in Lagos Nigeria

	Mean $(\bar{x})$	Standard Deviation (SD)
Nigerian Mass Communication graduates are, by training, generally ready to work in advertising agencies	3.62	0.79
I perceive Nigerian Mass Communication graduates as having	3.62	0.95

the requisite skills to work in advertising agencies

Average Overall Mean	**3.62**	**0.86**

Source: Field Study 2023; ***Decision Rule if mean is 1 to 1.79=Neutral; 1.80 to 2.59 = Strongly Disagree; 2.60 to 3.39 =Disagree; 3.40 to 4.19= Agree; 4.20 to 5= Strongly Agree

Table 3 indicates that advertising executives perceived Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates as generally prepared for agency roles ($\bar{x}$ = 3.62). Respondents affirmed that graduates possessed requisite training and skills for advertising practice. These quantitative results align with qualitative insights, reinforcing executives' overall view of graduate readiness while still acknowledging gaps in industry-specific competencies.

ii.   What is the perception of the employability of Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates among advertising agencies' executives in Lagos, Nigeria?

Table 4

Employability of Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates

	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates have, over the years, made a positive impact on the overall productivity of Nigeria's advertising industry	3.81	1.37
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates have the requisite theoretical knowledge to work in advertising agencies	3.73	0.96
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates possess the following skills: creativity, writing, communication and critical thinking skills	3.46	1.17
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates are always at the front of the good work ethics rate when employed in advertising agencies	3.35	1.21
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates possess the requisite industrial specific skills to work in advertising agencies	3.27	1.05
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates possess the following skills: analytical, research, digital and time management skills	3.22	1.29
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates show good knowledge of the Nigerian advertising environment	3.19	1.22
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates bring the best to advertising agencies' work by combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills	3.19	1.18
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates are equipped with the requisite practical skills needed to work in advertising agencies	3.16	1.21
Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates can work with little or no supervision when employed in advertising agencies	3.05	1.10
I would rather employ and train graduates from other	2.49	1.10

disciplines than employ Nigerian-trained Mass Communication
graduates

Average Overall Mean	**3.27**	**1.17**

*Source: Field Survey 2023; *****Decision Rule if mean is 1 to 1.79=Neutral; 1.80 to 2.59 = Strongly Disagree; 2.60 to 3.39 =Disagree; 3.40 to 4.19= Agree; 4.20 to 5= Strongly Agree***

Perceptions of Employability

Executives expressed more scepticism about overall employability. The average employability score was $M = 3.27$ (SD = 1.17), which fell short of the benchmark of 3.50, indicating "agree." A one-sample t-test confirmed this, $t(36) = -1.12$, $p < .05$ (one-tailed). While executives credited graduates with positive contributions to industry productivity ($M = 3.81$), strong theoretical knowledge ($M = 3.73$), and creativity/writing skills ($M = 3.46$), they also highlighted weaknesses in digital competence ($M = 3.22$), industry-specific expertise ($M = 3.27$), understanding of the advertising environment ($M = 3.19$), and capacity for independent work ($M = 3.05$). These results highlight a paradox: graduates are perceived as capable in theory and creativity, but deficient in applied, industry-specific competencies.

Hypothesis 1

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Advertising executives in Lagos do not significantly differ in their level of enthusiasm toward employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates ($\mu = 3.0$, neutral).

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Advertising execs in Lagos express significantly higher enthusiasm toward employing Nigerian-trained Mass Communication ($\mu > 3.0$).

Decision Rule: At $\alpha = 0.05$ (one-tailed), reject H₀ if $t > 1.69$ (df = 36).
Results: $M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.26$, $t(36) = 3.35$, $p < .01$ (one-tailed).
Effect Size: Cohen's $d = (3.71 - 3.00) / 1.26 \approx 0.56$ (medium).
95% CI: [3.29, 4.13].
Decision: Since $t > 1.69$, **reject H₀**. Executives express significantly higher enthusiasm than neutrality toward employing Nigerian-trained graduates. This suggests that advertising executives are generally enthusiastic about hiring Nigerian-trained graduates, though preferences for foreign-trained graduates temper that enthusiasm.

Hypothesis 2

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Advertising executives in Lagos perceive Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates as adequately employable ($\mu \geq 3.5$, "agree").

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Advertising executives in Lagos perceive Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates as less than adequately employable ($\mu < 3.5$).
Decision Rule: At $\alpha = 0.05$ (one-tailed), reject H₀ if $t < -1.69$ (df = 36).
Results: $M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.17$, $t(36) = -1.12$, **p** = .14 (two-tailed) / $\approx$ .07 (one-tailed).
Effect Size: Cohen's $d = (3.27 - 3.5) / 1.17 \approx$ **−0.20** (small).
95% CI: [2.88, 3.66].

Decision: Since $t = -1.12$ is **greater** than -1.69, we accept H₀ under the strict rule. However, the negative effect size and CI suggest employability is trending below the benchmark, indicating gaps in digital, analytical, and industry-specific skills. This suggests that while graduates are perceived to contribute theoretical knowledge and creativity, their employability is considered below the expected standard, with gaps in digital, analytical, and industry-specific skills.

Qualitative Aspect of the Study

Thematic Analysis of Telephone Interview

Five chief executives from advertising agencies were interviewed over the phone. The interviews were conducted using a structured interview guide designed based on the study's subject-matter. Excerpts of the interviews were grouped based on how they related to the study's variables and the findings were analysed and presented using a thematic approach.

Table 5
List of executives of advertising agencies interviewed

List of Executives of Advertising Agencies Interviewed	
Biodun Adefila	COO, SO&U LTD
Fadoju Odunmoluwa	MD, FCB DP Partnership Ltd
Dipo Adesida	COO, Verdant Zeal Ltd
Ayo Elias	MD/CEO, TEQUILA Nigeria
Doyin Adewunmi	MD, CreativeXone Ltd

Source: Field Study, 2023

All five executives of advertising agencies interviewed on their enthusiasm about employing Nigerian mass communication graduates were keen on employing Nigerian Mass Communication graduates. The following themes were deduced from the interviews:

Table 6
Themes on enthusiasm to employ Nigerian-trained Mass Communication *graduates*

Themes	Isssues on Employment of mass comm grads
Employment of mass comm graduates	Have always employed
Readiness to employ	High level, Always ready
Enthusiastic about employment	Keen to employ
Preference for employment	Level playing field, equal opportunity employer

Source: Field Study, 2023

Employment of Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates: All five executives of advertising agencies interviewed were unanimous in stating that they employed Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates in their respective agencies.

Readiness to employ Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates: Regarding the issue of readiness to employ Nigerian Mass Communication graduates, the five executives of advertising agencies interviewed stated that they were always prepared to hire Nigerian-trained graduates in this field.

Enthusiasm about employment: Executives of advertising agencies interviewed believed that it was only patriotic for employers to be keen on taking the youths off the street by providing opportunities for them to be gainfully employed.

Preference for employment: Here, executives emphasised merit over sentiment when comparing Nigerian- and foreign-trained graduates, stressing equal opportunity and commitment to quality. Four of five affirmed their firms hire strictly on competence. Echoing this view, Biodun Adefila, COO of SO&U Ltd, insisted that only the best candidates are recruited, regardless of background**.**

> For the organisation I work for, recruitment is strictly merit-based, with no bias for gender, ethnicity, religion, or creed. As an equal opportunity employer, we prioritise the best talent available. However, experience shows that foreign-trained Mass Communication graduates often demonstrate stronger practical and

workplace skills than their Nigerian counterparts. This highlights the urgent need to improve the quality of local graduates for global competitiveness.

The advertising executives believed that Nigerian institutions must play their parts for the Nigerian-trained graduates to be competitive with their peers from other parts of the world.

Table 7

Themes on perception of preparedness of Mass Communication graduates

Themes	Issues on perception of preparedness
Perception of readiness	Training, modern or archaic
Equipped to work	They possess requisite skills,

Source: Field Study, 2023

All the advertising executives interviewed asserted that Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates were generally ready to work in advertising agencies. To them, Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates possess the requisite skills to work in advertising agencies. The following themes were extracted from the interviews.

Perception of readiness: The advertising executives perceived Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates to possess the requisite skills to work in advertising agencies. According to them, their training had prepared the graduates to work in advertising agencies.

Equipped to work: The advertising executives were all in agreement that Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates possessed the requisite skills that were needed to work in agencies.

Table 8

Themes on employability of Mass Communication graduates

Themes	Issues on employment chances
Employability	Skills and training
Readiness to work	Positive attitude
Transition from gown to town	Understanding of process/environment;

Source: Field Study, 2023

All five advertising executives interviewed affirmed that Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates gave their best when employed in advertising agencies. The professional community acknowledged the fundamental contribution of mass communication graduates to the

Nigerian advertising sector. The following themes were deduced from the interviews.

Employability of Nigerian Mass Communication graduates: All the advertising executives interviewed were unanimous in their agreement that Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates require more than theoretical knowledge to meet the demands of modern advertising practice. Odunmoluwa Fadoju, MD, FCB, of DP Partnership Ltd, stated that there is an urgent need for industry intervention in both the curriculum and the area of apprenticeships, so that Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates become more employable.

Work readiness: The five advertising executives interviewed were all in agreement that Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates were always eager to work whenever given the opportunity. Dipo Adesida, Chief Operating Officer, Verdant Zeal Ltd, expressed the sentiment of other executives of advertising agencies thus:

> In my decades of experience in advertising, the Nigerian Nigerian graduates, particularly in Mass Communication, consistently display a commendable work ethic and positive attitude despite economic and leadership challenges. Contrary to stereotypes of "lazy Nigerian youths," their resilience and readiness to work stand out. Having worked across African markets, I can affirm the indomitable spirit of Nigerian graduates as one of their most admirable qualities

Transition from gown to town: The five advertising executives interviewed all agreed that there was a wide gap between the schools' curriculum and what was needed to survive in the advertising industry. They agreed that Mass Communication graduates needed practical, on-the-job training in order to fit into Nigeria's advertising industry. Odunmoluwa Fadoju, MD, FCB, DP Partnership Ltd, echoed the belief of other executives, thus:

> All stakeholders in the Marketing Communication industry must come together to save the education sector by collaborating with higher institutions. This collaboration ensures that graduates enter apprenticeship schemes, exposing them to best industry practices and equipping them for the task ahead when they transition to the boardroom. Currently, most Mass Communication graduates lack the necessary training to excel in advertising roles.

Emergent Themes

From the foregoing, three dominant interpretive themes emerged: **(1) Enthusiasm mixed with ambivalence, (2) the "raw potential" paradox, and (3) the systemic "gown-to-town" gap.** Each is unpacked below.

1. Enthusiasm Mixed with Ambivalence: Executives consistently expressed enthusiasm for employing Nigerian-trained graduates, noting their creativity, eagerness, and relatively affordable labour compared to expatriate or foreign-trained counterparts. Graduates were viewed as vibrant, motivated individuals who bring fresh perspectives into the workplace.

Biodun Adefila, COO SO&U Ltd, remarked: *"They come with ideas, they want to prove themselves, and they usually have the energy we need in this fast-paced industry."*

Although Nigerian-trained graduates were valued, executives expressed ambivalence, particularly when comparing them with foreign-trained counterparts. Foreign graduates were perceived to have stronger digital literacy, greater exposure to international advertising standards, and a higher level of professional polish. This perception created a hierarchy of trust, in which local graduates were accepted but not entirely relied upon for complex tasks. Such views reflect credential signalling in employability (Sam & Fred, 2023), where foreign qualifications are equated with prestige and capability. Okoro and Agbo (2020) similarly noted that Nigerian employers often prefer foreign-trained graduates over local entrants, despite the creativity and enthusiasm of local candidates.

2. The "Raw Potential" Paradox: A recurrent narrative in the interviews was that Nigerian-trained graduates are often viewed as possessing latent but underdeveloped talent. Executives described them as having strong theoretical foundations, including knowledge of media principles, creativity, and communication skills, but lacking in the applied skills necessary for immediate contribution. For instance, digital campaign design, data-driven strategy, client presentation techniques, and advanced analytical tools were frequently cited as areas where graduates fell short.

Odunmomi Fadoju, CEO, FCB/DP Partnership, summarised this paradox succinctly: *"They are intelligent, no doubt. However, when it comes to execution, you have to start from scratch with them practically."*

The "raw potential" paradox leaves Nigerian graduates in a transitional state: they are employable in principle but lack the practical skills to function independently. Employers are therefore compelled to invest in extensive retraining, which, though sometimes effective, fosters inefficiencies and frustration. This aligns with the Structural Unemployment Theory (Burdett & Mortensen, 1998) and supports Oyesomi et al. (2019), who observed that graduates possess theoretical knowledge but lack sufficient applied competence to meet industry needs.

3. The Systemic "Gown-to-Town" Gap: Perhaps the most profound theme was the systemic critique of the link between academia and industry. Executives emphasised that the inadequacies they observed were not necessarily personal failings of graduates but symptoms of a larger institutional disconnect. The so-called "gown-to-town" gap—the divide between university training ("gown") and professional practice ("town")—was repeatedly highlighted.

Executives identified outdated curricula, limited exposure to real-world projects, and the absence of structured apprenticeship models as the root causes of the problem.

Ayo Elias, MD, TEQUILA Nigeria, noted: *"The universities are still teaching advertising as if we are in the 1980s. By the time the graduates get here, the tools we use, the platforms we engage with, are completely new to them."*

The gown-to-town gap extends beyond technical deficits to the absence of transition pathways. Lacking internships, mentorship, and industry connections, graduates struggle to bridge the gap between theory and practice, echoing Okebukola's (2021) critique and Yorke's (2006) framework on work-integrated learning and employability.

4. Beyond Skills, The Employability Mindset: Interviews revealed that employability challenges extend beyond technical expertise to professional attitude and workplace culture. Executives frequently observed that graduates struggled with adaptability, time management, and confidence in client-facing roles. These concerns highlight the importance of soft skills such as communication, resilience, and professionalism, for achieving graduate readiness. As Clarke (2018) and Knight and Yorke (2004) argue, employability requires more than disciplinary knowledge, particularly in advertising's fast-paced, creative, and client-oriented environment.

Triangulated Findings on Preparedness and Employability

The convergence of data from both survey instruments and in-depth interviews yields a nuanced perspective on the preparedness and employability of Nigerian-trained mass communication graduates in Lagos advertising agencies. Quantitative findings indicate moderate enthusiasm for employing graduates (M = 3.71) and fair preparedness for agency work (M = 3.62), yet lower overall employability (M = 3.27), suggesting underlying reservations. Qualitative insights explain this contradiction: executives view graduates as enthusiastic, creative, and theoretically grounded, yet underprepared for the practical, fast-paced demands of industry. Comparisons with foreign-trained counterparts highlight gaps in digital literacy, client engagement, and campaign execution.

This "raw potential" paradox underscores how enthusiasm coexists with concerns about professional readiness. Interviews further attribute these shortcomings to systemic issues, outdated university curricula, limited exposure to applied communication technologies, and weak academia-industry linkages. While employers appreciate graduates' intellectual energy and cultural insight, they emphasise the need for retraining and structured apprenticeship programs to translate potential into performance. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data thus reveals a coherent narrative: Nigerian-trained graduates are valued for creativity and drive, but doubts persist about their employability due to persistent skill mismatches and institutional gaps.

The mixed-methods approach deepens understanding by linking measurable attitudes with contextual explanations, illustrating that pragmatic concerns about workplace readiness temper enthusiasm for local talent. Overall, the study highlights both optimism and constraint, celebrating graduates' promise while calling for systemic educational reforms to bridge the enduring "gown-to-town" divide.

Discussion of Findings

This study's results contribute substantially to the literature by examining advertising executives' professional perspectives on the workforce readiness of Mass Communication graduates from Nigerian institutions within the Lagos labour market. Both the quantitative and qualitative results reveal a mixed assessment: while graduates are acknowledged as creative, enthusiastic, and theoretically grounded, their employability is undermined by deficiencies in practical exposure, digital literacy, and

industry-specific competencies. Quantitatively, executives expressed moderate enthusiasm for employing such graduates (M = 3.71), reflecting appreciation for their energy and theoretical grounding. However, qualitative insights revealed persistent doubts about their professional readiness, particularly in digital analytics, client management, and applied campaign execution. These findings affirm Okoro and Agbo's (2020) observation that local graduates remain vital to Nigeria's creative economy, though their integration into agency operations requires significant retraining.

The study further confirmed that enthusiasm does not equate to confidence in employability. With lower readiness scores (M = 3.22–3.27), executives cited limited analytical ability, outdated curricula, and weak adaptability. This aligns with Oyesomi, Salawu, and Olorunyomi (2019), who reported enduring gaps in applied communication skills, and Okebukola (2021), who linked such deficiencies to the persistent "gown-to-town" divide between academia and professional practice. Drawing on Structural Unemployment Theory (Kölling, 2022), the findings suggest that Nigeria's challenge lies not in graduate oversupply but in the **misalignment of skills and industry expectations**; graduates are employable in principle but not industry-ready in practice.

Importantly, this misalignment is multidimensional, encompassing technical, behavioural, and attitudinal deficits. Executives highlighted deficiencies in adaptability, teamwork, and critical thinking, echoing Clarke's (2018) argument that employability must be viewed holistically, including resilience and workplace culture. Recent studies further emphasise digital fluency, creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking as essential attributes for advertising professionals (Fajemisin & Popoola, 2022; Adegbite, 2023). Their absence reinforces both technical and behavioural aspects of structural unemployment.

Compared with the global literature, it advocates closer **industry-academic collaboration** through internships, applied learning, and mentorship programs to improve graduate readiness (Tomlinson, 2017; Coetzee, Ferreira, & Potgieter, 2023). In Nigeria, these measures remain underdeveloped. Consequently, the study concludes that continuous curriculum renewal, the integration of practical learning, and strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders are vital to producing graduates who are not only intellectually capable but also digitally fluent, globally competitive, and prepared to sustain the evolving Lagos advertising sector.

Conclusion

This study investigated advertising executives' perceptions of the preparedness and employability of Nigerian-trained Mass Communication graduates in Lagos-based advertising agencies. The findings reveal a dual perception: while graduates are commended for their theoretical grounding, creativity, and enthusiasm, employers remain concerned about their weak digital competence, inadequate industry-specific expertise, limited research capacity, and insufficient practical training. This reinforces the "gown-to-town" gap between higher education curricula and professional practice.

Beyond summarising these patterns, this study makes an important contribution to the literature. Whereas much of the existing research on graduate employability in Nigeria has focused on higher education curricula, graduate self-perceptions, or broader labour market outcomes, this study is among the first to foreground the voices of advertising executives themselves. By capturing the views of industry leaders, the research provides rare, practice-based insights into the competencies advertising agencies require and the deficits they routinely observe among graduates.

This contribution is significant because it bridges a critical knowledge gap between academic debates on employability and the lived realities of industry stakeholders. The study underscores the need for curriculum reforms that integrate digital competence, applied research, and workplace readiness, while also emphasising the value of structured apprenticeships and academia–industry partnerships. Consequently, the study contributes substantively to academic conversations concerning employability while simultaneously providing concrete, utility-driven advice for refining policy, optimising curriculum structure, and informing professional capacity building in Nigeria's creative industries.

Recommendations
1. Strengthen Practical Orientation in Curriculum: Universities should embed practical modules, simulation projects, and agency-based case studies into Mass Communication programmes. This will enhance preparedness by complementing theoretical training with applied experience.
2. Develop Structured Apprenticeship and Internship Schemes: To improve employability, universities and advertising agencies should

institutionalise robust apprenticeship programmes. Long-term internships will allow students to gain real-world exposure before graduation, reducing the retraining burden on employers.

3. Enhance Digital and Research Skills Training: With advertising increasingly driven by technology and analytics, universities must prioritise digital marketing, social media analytics, consumer insight generation, and emerging technologies. This will directly address executives' concerns about graduates' digital competence.

4. Promote Industry–Academia Collaboration: Regular dialogue between advertising executives and academics is essential. Industry input into curriculum design, guest lectures, and joint research initiatives can ensure that graduate training reflects evolving market realities.

5. Encourage Policy Support and Quality Assurance: The National Universities Commission (NUC) should enforce standards that emphasise practical training and digital competence. Policy incentives can also support partnerships between universities and agencies, ensuring the sustainability of reforms.

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