

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Awareness of the Role Graphic Design Play in Advertising among Small Furniture Enterprise Managers in Nairobi County, Kenya

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### **Abstract**

Graphic design (GD) is expressed through text, image, or both text and image, and large-scale furniture companies have embraced it a lot in their firms. GD is usually transmitted through print and electronic media, including websites and several social media platforms. Despite GD's significance in large-scale furniture companies, Managers of Small Furniture Enterprises (SFEs) rely on word of mouth, referrals, and informal exhibitions, which does not reach the external market. The purpose of this study was to assess the role of graphic design in advertising among small furniture enterprise managers in Nairobi County, Kenya. The specific objective of this study was to establish SFE managers' awareness of GD's role in advertising. The study was guided by 'The Graphics Triangle Theory' by Bruce Brown (1979), whose central tenets are: Explanation Values, Persuasive Values, and Identification Values coherent in any appropriate GD messages. 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. Findings revealed that most (SFEM) and (SFEWL) are fully aware of GD's role in advertising and the various graphic design types. Most managers are highly aware of graphic design statutory regulations being enforced. Their unanimous assertion illustrated a high prevalence of awareness that some of the enterprise graphic designs are created by SFEMs or employees. The high rate of SFE managers' attention is because of their formal education and advertising experiences acquired from other enterprises. Although SFEs engage graphic designers to a small extent, other entities involved in GD production are printing firms, signwriters, artists, ICT officers, media houses, painting technicians, web developers, and architects, which further illustrates their conscience for quality graphic design support in advertising. Despite the high rating on GD awareness, it was established that appreciation and application of GD in SFEs advertising are relatively negligible. The study, therefore, recommends future SFE advertising strategies to consider available GD opportunities in SFEs. Enhanced graphic design awareness amongst SFEs management, its appreciation, and application can ultimately improve visual communication values in SFE advertising.

**Keywords:** Graphic design, small furniture enterprise, advertising, awareness

### **1. Introduction**

Graphic Design, also known as visual Communications, dates back around 40,000 years when the earliest civilizations used cave walls as canvasses to share knowledge, skills, beliefs, and stories. Graphic communication increased during the 18th century's Industrial Revolution in Britain and spread to other parts of the world, eventually entrenching its social and economic influence. As technology advanced and mass production flourished, urbanization and cities proliferated while people sought employment in manufacturing industries. Mass production of goods brought a need for mass communication, entrenching graphic design further to play an essential role in marketing industry output (Meggs, 1992). Although modern life offers numerous 'canvas' options currently digitalized, visual communication influences human activities. Several authors have differently described graphic design to be: an art of communications that inform, educate, influence, persuade, and provide visual experience as well as a process (designing) by which the communication is created and the final product (design) generated (Rhoads 2007); a social, cultural and economic activity (Barnard 2005); a medium of corporate branding and vehicle for message translation, understanding consumer behavior and persuasion (Sametz & Maydoney 2003); an art (creativity) that rides on technology (media) to relay messages and a tool used in advertising. Whether the SFEM are aware of the above roles is a question that needs attention in this study.

Carr (2008) carried out a study on branding within SMEs in Donegal, with an overall objective to analyze the various literature available under critical areas, namely benefits, limitations, strategy development, and branding tools.

The study's outcome shows that SME owners are not marketing specialists, and therefore, complex marketing theories may not be appropriate. Tools evaluated in the analysis were networking, reputation, leadership, and identity, showing that SMEs in Donegal lack resources, time, and expertise. Tools considered in Carr's (2008) study were not assessed in graphic design but networking, reputation, leadership, and identity, which creates a research gap in GD.

Chahal (2015) also confirms a section of small enterprise managers who hold basic information on the benefits of branding often struggle to create marketing strategies and budgets. Frascara (2006), Anarnkaporn (2007), Mowle and Merrilees (2005) studies demonstrate how the phenomenal and persuasive power of graphic design is necessary. If effectively harnessed, SFEMs can radically improve the branding and commercialization of their respective enterprises.

RoK (2007) reports prepared by Kenya Industrial Property Institute show that SFEMs are unaware of trademarks design and protection (SME Handbook, 2011). Trademark is a creative sign, name, or brand is used to communicate, distinguish and differentiate goods or services of an industrial or a commercial enterprise. Small enterprise managers are encouraged to use affordable graphic designs to solve emerging visual communication needs (RoK, 1999).

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Studies show that only 15.6% of small enterprises use graphic designs in fliers, brochures, contact cards, photo albums, and signage, too basic to create an effective brand presence. Small furniture enterprise managers have embraced informal exhibitions mounted on road reserves, word-of-mouth, and referrals as common marketing strategies despite difficulties encountered through these methods to competitively attract the local, regional, and even global furniture market. It is upon this that this study assessed the role of graphic design in advertising among small furniture enterprise managers in Nairobi County, Kenya.

### 1.2. Research Objectives

The study's main objective was to assess the role of graphic design in advertising among Small Furniture Enterprise Managers (SFEM) in Nairobi County, Kenya. Specific objectives were establishing SFEM awareness of graphic design's role in advertising.

### 1.3. Scope of the Study

The study used 273 registered SFEM with physical production and exhibition sites in Nairobi County, Kenya, and 9 Small Furniture Enterprise Welfare Leaders (SFEWL).

### 1.4. Theoretical Framework

The study relied on *The Graphics Triangle Theory* (Brown, 1979). 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 cognizant of.

## 2. Literature Review

Graphic Design's role in advertising and branding is fundamental and has not drawn much attention in branding and advertising research which causes a significant empirical gap for this study. Most studies on graphic design are not comprehensive compared to related studies in marketing (Zimmerer and Scarborough, 1998), (Serazzi, 2001), (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004) and (Williams, 2007). According to Merrilees (2007) Abimbola (2001), branding has been missing in most small enterprises. Krake (2005) observed that, although SME branding research began in the late 1990s, SMEs are hardly mentioned as separate entities in brand management books and journals, creating a gap for this study. Huang and Lai's (2011) study on brand management problems in SMEs investigated issues encountered by SMEs in managing brands. The study revealed that SME owners and managers have a narrow interpretation of brand management and fail to differentiate the brand and product concept. Although the study looked at SME owners' and managers' inability to interpret brand management, it did not investigate SFE awareness of graphic design's role in advertising which formed a gap for this study. Carr (2008) analyzed various literature under critical areas, such as benefits, limitations, strategy development, and branding tools within SMEs in Donegal. Tools evaluated were networking, reputation, leadership, and identity. The study showed that SME owners in Donegal lack resources, time, and expertise and are not marketing specialists. The study did not assess graphic design as part of branding tools creating a research gap.

Several studies were reviewed on awareness of GD's role in advertising. Frascara, 2006, observed that Small Enterprises have limited design knowledge and skills to continuously develop market sustainability. Oana & Furdui (2009) also state that advertising and customer perception are the main challenges in small enterprises. Uusitalo, Wendelin, & Mahlamaki (2010) also believe that small enterprises do not engage in conventional marketing and promotion. Ohnemus (2009) observes that the inability of SMEs to market is due to lack of finance, whereas Gilmore et al. (2001) allude to the incapability to lack time and market information. Chahal (2015) holds that small enterprise managers have basic knowledge on branding benefits, causing them to struggle in developing marketing strategies and budgets. RoK (2007) reports by Kenya Industrial Property Institute indicate that many enterprises are not aware of trademarks design and protection (SME Handbook, 2011). Many of these studies on GD awareness often give a generalized and miserable impression about small enterprises' branding inability, which formed a gap for this study.

According to Walker (2017), even though graphic design research has gained momentum and respect within the academic community over the last 20 years or so, research in graphic design has not been regarded as a significant player. Indeed, there has been a tendency to view graphic design as supportive to other projects. *In the context of this study, GD has either not been discussed or shallowly mentioned in small enterprise branding, advertising, and marketing, causing the need for in-depth investigation of its awareness among SFE managers.* This study anchored heavily on Walker's (2017) advice that there is considerable potential for developing methods and frameworks for considering graphic design, contributing to new knowledge, and understanding its relationships in broader economic contexts such as small enterprise advertising.

### 3. Methodology

The research adopted a descriptive research design which enabled quick collection of large amounts of data from the significant 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 it has the highest number of small furniture enterprises, a huge industrial and commercial hub covered with a stable supply of raw materials, and a huge 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 an approximate area of 696.1 km<sup>2</sup>, 3,138,369 people, and a population density of 4,800/km<sup>2</sup>.

The population of this study entailed managers in all Small Furniture Enterprises operating in Nairobi County. The accessible population was managers in 1540 SFEs derived from NCG (2019) with physical production or exhibition sites in Nairobi County. The target population consisted of 940 Small Furniture Enterprises managers licensed by the City Council of Nairobi and own physical productions or exhibition sites in Nairobi County. This study also targeted nine welfare group leaders who coordinate 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 the saturated sampling method of 6 SFE welfare leaders in every sub-county selected. The questionnaire and Interview Schedule were two research methods used to collect data. The questionnaire contained two parts of structured questions (or close-ended questions). Part One sourced demographic information: The interview schedule had thematic questions designed to solicit a reliable response to the research objective.

Cochran's (1963) formula and Survey System Software Version 11.0 tool approaches were used to determine sample size.

Cochran (1963) formula:

$$n_o = \frac{\frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}}{1 + \frac{(n_o - 1)}{N}}$$

Where:

$n_o$  = Sample Size

$z^2$  = Found in statistical tables

P = Estimated proportion of the population

1-p = desired confidence level

q = 1-p

e = desired level of precision

Considering a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% on 940 registered small furniture enterprises, Cochran's (1963) equation was used as follows:

$$n_o = \frac{\frac{(1.96)^2 (.5)(.5)}{(0.05)^2}}{1 + \frac{(385 - 1)}{940}} = 273$$

### 4. Results and Discussion

Output on gender distribution among SFE managers in figure 2 shows that 91 % of SFE managers were male against 8% female, 1% non-response, whereas 6 Welfare Leaders (SFEWL) interviewed were all of male gender.

#### 4.1. Education of SFE Managers

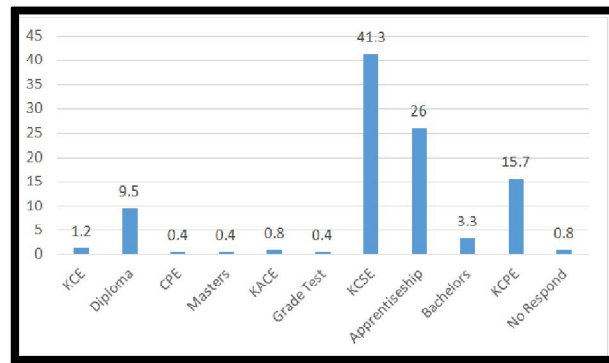


Figure 1: Educational Qualification of Small Furniture Enterprise Managers

Output on SFE managers' education in figure 1 reveals that 41.3% of SFEs have a Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) certificate, followed by apprenticeships at 26%, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) at 15.7%, Diploma at 9.5% and degree at 3.3%. Other qualifications are Master's degree 0.4%, Kenya Certificate Education (KCE) at 1.2%, Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) at 0.4%, Kenya Advanced Certificate Education (KACE) at 0.8%, and Grade Test are all under 0.4%.

In Fig. 1, the study revealed 26% of SFE managers gained their skills through apprenticeship programs, whereas 15.7 are KCPE holders. This is not supported by AL-Shuaibi (2014), who states that education helps people think, feel, and behave to contribute to their success and improve their satisfaction and that of the community. Education further develops human personality, thoughts, interpersonal interactions, social-economic life experiences such as visual communications. Education enhances a country's economy through manufacturing and trade, making it a milestone of small enterprise development. This is further in a YouTube presentation by Brown (2015) on a 'Well Crafted Mind,' revealing that the first Art Schools in Europe established in the 18th century supplied skills needed in response to the industrial revolution's surge for mass consumer goods and industrial competitiveness. Art schools were based in commercial societies or centers associated with furniture, pottery, glass, and textile.

The findings in Figure 1 further show that most SFEMs are holders of the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), and Diploma certificates. The findings contradict Frascara (2006), Vадnjal (2013), Vidic, Oana, and Furdui (2009), and GoK's (2007) observation that branding awareness among SFE managers is lacking. This also raises concern about the effectiveness of Art and Design education in the country. KCPE, KCSE, and diploma education offered to SFEM may not have covered art and design subjects, as Wagah (2014) alluded to, who states that many secondary schools in Kenya dropped art and design subjects due to challenges in curriculum implementation. The curriculum existed, but the art and design subject were not widely taught in schools leading to multiple industrialization challenges. Lack of branding awareness among start-ups may also be attributed to a lack of widespread education in art and design (Vidic and Vадnjal 2013). Therefore, this study aligns with Pido et al.'s (2017) study that urges design schools to offer education competent all-rounded, agile designers with social design academic backgrounds and is inclined to societal needs. Kwesiga (2002) further exposes the need to widen art and design studies, particularly in East Africa. Educated people are considered a valuable source of knowledge for society. Enhanced education will enable SFEM to view all visual advertising obstacles as challenges and fearlessly overcome them through effective graphic design.

#### 4.2. Managers' Awareness of Graphic Design Role in Advertising among SFE Managers

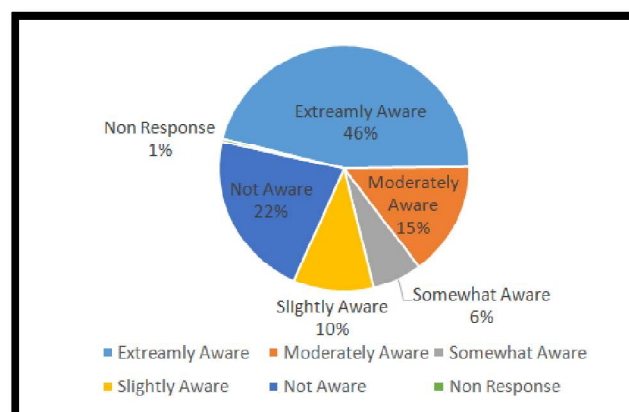


Figure 2: Managers' Awareness of Graphic Design Role in Advertising among SFE Managers

Aggregate output on awareness of GD role in advertising among SFE managers in figure 2 discloses that out of the 242 respondents, 46% are incredibly aware of graphic design role in advertising, 15% are moderately aware, 6% are somewhat familiar, 10% are slightly aware against 22% who are not aware and 1% who did not respond.

Figure 2 confirms that 46% are highly aware of GD's role in advertising, whereas 15% are moderately aware, forming a considerable percentage of small furniture managers' awareness. According to Myers (2021), awareness is the understanding that someone or something exists and converting that understanding to knowledge. Therefore, most SFEM has an excellent experience that graphic design exists and plays a role in advertising. They can convert that understanding to the knowledge required for advertising. Long term benefits awareness, according to Betz (2021), is that it induces in one power to influence outcomes, enables better decision-making, provides self-confidence — so, as a result, will allow one to communicate with clarity and intention, allows a clear understanding of things from multiple perspectives, and frees people from assumptions and biases.

The findings in Figure 2 contradict Frascara's (2006) assertion that Small Enterprises are constrained by limited graphic design knowledge and skills to continuously develop market sustainability. It further disagreed with RoK's (2007) report by the Kenya Industrial Property Institute, which suggests that many entrepreneurs are unaware of trademarks design and brand protection. A high level of awareness of GDs role was also confirmed by SFEWL interviews attributing it to education and skills acquired through the use of basic graphic design in advertising. SFEWL also confirmed that most SFE managers share GD through Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, typically social media applications. SFEM awareness and initiatives of GD embrace 'The Graphics Triangle Theory' by Brown (1979), which guides that graphic design should generate communication messages with clear explanation, persuasion, and identification values. The explanation value enables factual information to bring out a sense of accuracy, honesty, truthfulness, and practical knowledge in a GD. The persuasion value allows users to make informed decisions attracting and influencing users to believe in a desirable choice. Identification value helps the audience to differentiate and make decisions between given options. The awareness of GDs role in advertising among SFEM bonds with the tenets of the 'The Graphics Triangle Theory' on who's this study is anchored.

#### 4.3. Awareness of Graphic Design Types among SFE Managers

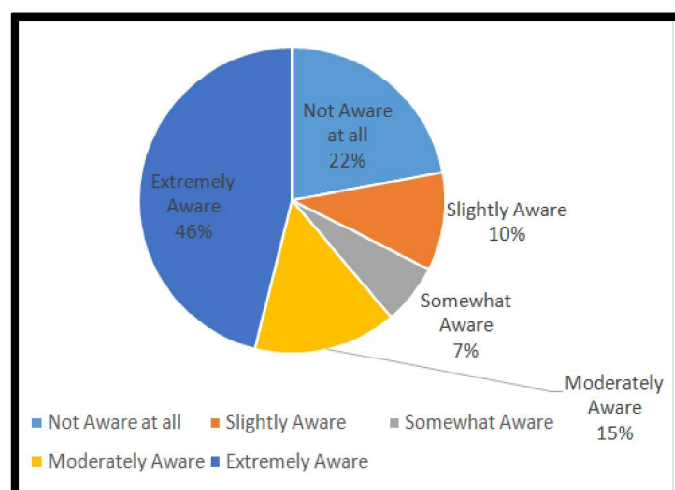


Figure 3: Awareness of Graphic Design Types among SFE Managers

Findings on awareness of graphic design types among SFE Managers in Figure 3 show that out of 242 respondents, 46% are highly aware of various kinds of graphic design, 22% are not aware, 15% are moderately aware, 10% slightly aware, and 7% are somewhat familiar.

The findings in figure 3 above clearly reveal that the majority of the SFEs managers are aware of the various types of graphic design that can be used in advertising. The findings agree with Agatowski's (2019) observation that there are many different types of graphic design. Still, the big ones that are most necessary for small enterprises are brand identity design, various advertising (marketing) designs, web design, and packaging design. Reasons for increased awareness are hinted at by Zimmerer and Scarborough (2011). Their study found that small enterprises are established by young entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs, immigrant entrepreneurs, part-time entrepreneurs, home entrepreneurs, corporate dropouts, corporate castoffs entrepreneurs, and family venture entrepreneurs. The findings of this study agree with Zimmerer and Scarborough's observation because SFEs managers are most likely to have acquired some knowledge on graphic design types from their previous social career engagements. SFEWL interviewed also attributed the awareness to education and skills developed in advertising where GD is shared through Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, typically social media applications.

Findings further show that 22% of SFEM are unaware of GD types. This is supported by Beata et al.'s (2013) assertion that graphic design adoption in small enterprise advertising is relatively minimal. Lack of awareness forms a significant challenge in developing corporate brand and identity designs among SFEs. According to Bruce (1999), corporate brand and identity designs that SFES need to be aware of entail (logos, signs, symbols, and branding);

publication design (magazines, newspapers, books fliers, and brochures); outdoor advertisements (posters, billboards, banners), online creativities (photography, icon design, web design, interactive design, and social media) and product labeling and packaging design.

#### 4.4. Awareness of Available Opportunities of Graphic Designs in Sfes Advertising

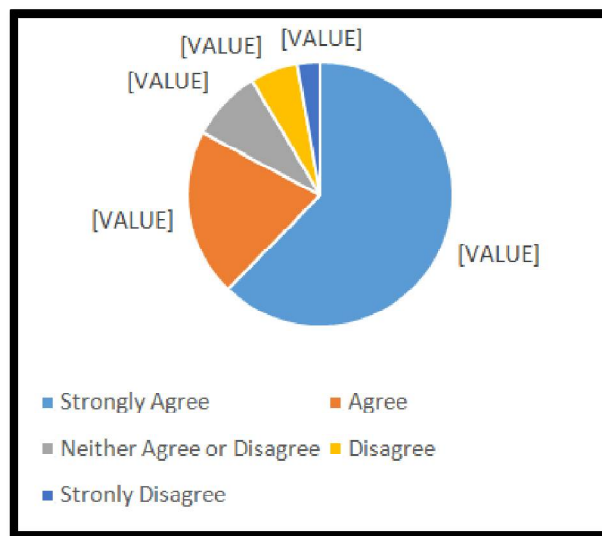


Figure 4: Awareness of Available Opportunities of Graphic Designs in Sfes Advertising

Responses on graphic designs with a potential for use in SFEs Advertising shown in figure 4 indicate that 62.2% of respondents strongly agree on various graphic designs with potential for use in SFE advertising, whereas 20.4% agree, 8.8% neither agree nor disagree, 5.8% disagree, 2.8% strongly disagree.

Study findings in figure 4 disclose that most SFE managers were enthusiastic about graphic design opportunities and highly acknowledge that GD opportunities are in enterprises. These findings go along with Jennifer's 2020 article on the ten benefits of graphic design. Jennifer confirms that small businesses can use graphics to create product awareness and recognition; manage time and money; create visual identity and brands; increase employee morale, pride, and productivity; enhance competitiveness; enforce professionalism; encourage effective layouts that are legible and credible for visual communication, and enable storytelling and customer persuasion.

The output of the study concurred with Zimmerer and Scarborough's (2011 observation that entrepreneurs need unique graphic design identity in their businesses and products differentiation. Responses also agree with Rahman (2010). They posit that globalization and competitiveness are achieved through graphic designs' educative and persuasive communication, whether in signage, branding, advertising, packaging, publishing, television, or web design (Tappenden 2004).

#### 4.5. Awareness of Graphic Design Regulations among SFE Managers

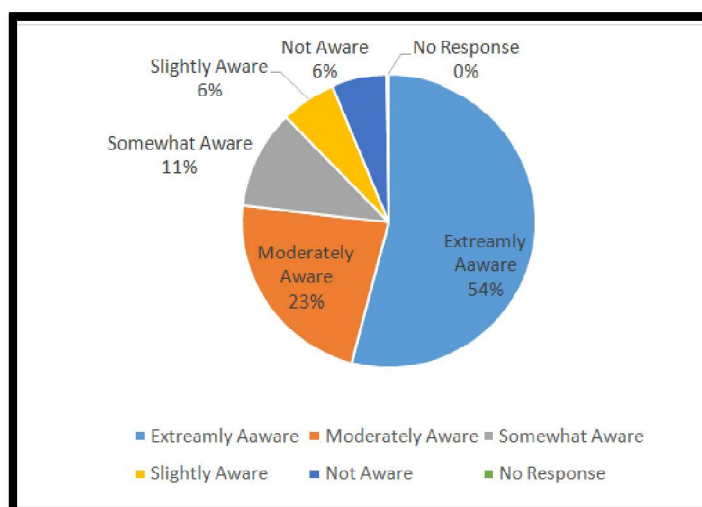


Figure 5: Awareness of Graphic Design Regulations among SFE Managers

The output on awareness of graphic design regulations among SFE managers in figure 5 shows that 54% of respondents are incredibly aware of County Government regulation, 23% are moderately aware, 11% are somewhat familiar, 6% are slightly aware, and 6% are not aware.

The findings in figure 5 show extreme awareness of regulations governing outdoor advertising and agree with the County Government of Nairobi's (2014) policy on outdoor advertising. It provides guidelines on how advert should be designed, approved, allocated space, erection of signage, the retirement of signage, and exemptions granted on outdoor advertising. According to Er (2002), Graphic design policy is a systematic government effort to develop national design resources that encourage the effective use of these resources for increasing national economic advantage. Heskett (2002) defines policy as a set of principles, purposes, and procedures about government intentions on a particular topic. Formulation, implementation, and enforcement of any National policy are achieved through relevant statutory MDAs.

The findings fulfill the aim of the policies in ensuring public safety reduction of environmental clutter by encouraging well-designed and placed advertisements where outdoor advertising and signage rates are applied (Nairobi City County Finance Act 2013). Most SFE managers get fully informed about the regulation during the licensing of their businesses and subsequent enforcement of outdoor advertising bylaws by the county. This is coupled with the fact that most SFE managers have attained basic education levels to comprehend government guidelines effectively.

## 5. Conclusions

The study evaluated Small Furniture Enterprise managers' awareness of graphic design's role in advertising. Findings show that education achieved by most SFE managers was adequate to uplift their awareness of graphic design's role in advertising. However, training that focuses on graphic design and advertising is required to enhance GD appreciation and application in Advertising among small enterprises, especially those who lack formal education. Contrary to earlier assertions, the study findings revealed that: most SFE managers are fully aware of graphic design's role in advertising; most managers are aware of the various types of graphic design, and also some have been advertising using graphic design; Most managers depicted reasonable know-how of numerous GD opportunities within their enterprises. Findings further revealed that most SFE managers are fully aware of statutory policies on outdoor advertising because of effective statutory enforcement. Although the result indicates high awareness of graphic design roles, a reasonable number of SFE managers are ignorant, raising the need for more sensitization and training. The study recommends enhanced GD education in schools and colleges, in general, to increase its awareness for improving GD appreciation and application in small enterprises.

## 6. Acknowledgment

The author thanks all Small Furniture Enterprise Managers and Small Furniture Enterprise Welfare Leaders who freely volunteered valuable information that contributed to the findings of this study

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