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Performative Aesthetics in Selected Nigerian Telecommunication Adverts

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Abstract
The value of communication in advertisements has increased over the years from just a transference of messages from sender to receiver. It has exponentially grown to accommodate other areas like aesthetics, performance and performativity; and this growth has equally open up vistas to aesthetic, creativity and marketing opportunities for both the buyers and the sellers. As the markets grew competitive, companies devised topnotch advertisements that do not just entice and attract customers, but also leverage the uniqueness and viability of their products above other direct competitors. Drawing from the above, the paper examines the performative aesthetics in Nigerian telecommunication media from MTN and GLO, engaging analytical interferences from selected adverts through content analysis. However, it came to fore that the selected telecommunication adverts are imbued with ample communicative and aesthetics qualities that registered in the minds of prospective customers through the performative and symbolic presentations.

Keywords: *Adverts, aesthetics, GLO, MTN, performative, telecommunication*

Introduction

In life, communication is very important. It makes life easy for human beings and helps them navigate their daily activities. "As a basic necessity of human society, communication plays very important roles in the advancement of the society, as it provides the avenue for the exchange of ideas and co-operation by which society can grow and develop" (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2022, p.5). It is considered as an operative and interpretative transfer of information from one end to another, which can be through verbal or non-verbal means. Communication allows us to share our thoughts and feelings, relate with other people, understand others and ourselves, influence people in our lives, play, help, and resolve our differences. This shows that when communication is involved, expressions and messages are passed across through body languages such as voice, eye contact, facial expression and gestures. However, in today's world, several communication means are employed to create

awareness and pass messages across. Such avenues include but not limited to online chats, telephone conversations, emails, and text messages amongst others. All these are done with the use of data and call cards which helps to get messages across through what is known as telecommunication. As Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) has rightly observed, "Breakthroughs in science and technology have no doubt brought about tremendous enhancement of effective communication process; validating science and technology's invaluable role in human communication activities" (p.1). Telecommunication can be seen as the transmission of information by different technologies over wire, radio optical or other electromagnetic systems through which signs, signals, messages, words, writings, images and sounds or information of any nature can be passed across. However, the insatiable quest of human beings to cover a greater distance than the feasible voice cannot reach led to this evolution. Huurdeman (2003, p.3) observes that:

> Telecommunication is a technology that eliminates distance between continents, between countries, between persons... Telecommunication eliminated a master-to-servant relationship... Telecommunication enormously reduces the time required to transport messages, accelerate business transactions, and improves human relationships.

Huurdeman reveals that communication occurs when the exchange of information between communication participants is done through the use of technology. It is transmitted through a transmission medium such as physical media, for example, electrical cable, or via electromagnetic radiation through space such as radio or light. Such transmission paths are often divided into communication channels which afford the advantages of multiplexing. Since the term communication is considered the social process of information exchange, the term telecommunications are often used in its plural form because it involves many different technologies. However, this paper does not concern itself with the technological terms and scientific involvement of telecommunications; rather, the paper explores the performative aesthetics and artistic communication deployed by selected telecommunication companies' advertisements in Nigeria in order to get their products to the designed consumers.

Also, aesthetics as a branch of philosophy concerns itself with the notion of the beautiful and the uncomely that is either visible or felt; a view of perception that calls on individual's senses. For example, Hartley (2018) observes that aesthetics has become an everyday term used to distinguish those objects which are delightful to look upon or listen to, from those which are not. Coming to terms with the performative aesthetics in the selected telecommunication adverts, one considers the ingenuity of creativity that includes, but not limited to the plot, dialogue, camerawork, music, editing, amongst others. With the use of all these,

advertisement is the human effort meant to draw people to a particular product for its sales, but the aesthetics and view of how it is presented will help the prospective user to decide. While advertisement is a public means of announcing a product or service to the audience, ironically the audience is left to decide on the aesthetical value of the advert. Using adverts as means of communication helps in the selling of goods and services. According to Fairclough (1989, p.203), "advertisers generally use gimmicks of "synthetic personalisation of audience". This shows how many advertisers use different means of getting the customer-audience to patronise their products. Most of the Nigerian adverts use celebrities that are well known to the intended customer-audience to sell their products. These celebrities include but not limited to footballers, actors, actresses, comedians amongst others to entice the general populace. This is also visible in the selected adverts to be analysed.

However, telecommunication advert is very important in giving insight about the product being advertised to prospective customers. In this study, four selected MTN and GLO adverts are examined. Two of MTN adverts (Traditional Wedding and MTN Extra Value) and two of GLO adverts (GLO Yakata and Glo 4X Formula) are analysed in relation to the interconnection between performative aesthetics and telecommunication adverts. The selected adverts explain how MTN and GLO telecommunications promote their services and increase patronage from people from different spheres to use and benefit from these services through the ingenuity of their adverts.

For conceptual purposes, the elements of performative aesthetics in electronic telecommunication adverts include: action, language, costumes, make-up, technical elements, spectacles, characters, cinematography and music. Indeed, these performative elements are very important and crucial in performance criticism, because they help in defining the strengths and weaknesses, or in other words, the beauty and ugliness of the selected adverts. Every advert has its own aesthetics which will be the instrument and gauge for the selected advert's criticism.

MTN Advert 1
Advert Title: Traditional Wedding

Synopsis
There is a traditional wedding between an Igbo lady, Adaaku and an Igbo man. Although the lady is blind and usually walks around with a stick to support her movement. During the traditional wedding, Adaaku's parents ask her if she is sure she is ready to settle down, and she nods her head as a way of replying that she is ready to settle down. Her mother afterwards tells her to go and bring her husband to them. Meanwhile, Adaaku's husband sees that she is ready to come to take him to her parents, so he puts a call through to her phone and directs her to where he is sitting. Adaaku, with her spouse's direction is able to locate where he is seated

without using her walking stick as a support. Adaaku afterwards expresses how happy she is to her husband as she does not need any other aid to locate the husband where he is seated. Adaaku's husband on the other hand is glad that no other man got her before him. He afterwards tells her that he wants to be her eyes. They both move to where Adaaku's parents are seated and her parents finally bless them.

MTN Advert 2
Advert Title: Extra Value

Synopsis
It revolves around a woman who always finds it difficult to carry her loads conveniently due to the fact that her loads are much and her small bag cannot contain them all at ones. For this reason, she has to carry two bags while holding other things in her hands. Whenever she enters the elevator, the machine gives a deep beep which means that something metallic or incriminating is around or something that is not included in its encodings is detected. Her inability to have an encompassing bag always distracts and inconveniences others because of the load and inability to reach their own respective destinations or offices on time. She, therefore, resorted to getting a big, but portable bag which can harbour many of her things like food flask, phone, tea flask, files, etc. She does not have to be disturbed again. She now has something that can make life easier and smarter for her.

Symbolic Analysis of the Selected MTN Adverts
This advert is intentionally selected because the motif of the advert is to appreciate the richness, authenticity and strength of MTN network. The wedding between a blind woman and an able-bodied man shows that the network can be trusted irrespective of the personality or the status of the person involved. Such can be used by the rich or poor, educated or illiterate, lower class or middle class in urban or rural areas. The advert emphasises the fact that MTN network has the ability of reaching "everybody anywhere and at any time". To a large extent, the advert shows a rich and elegant Igbo culture through the traditional wedding being showcased. The orchestra displayed by playing different drums with the use of diverse traditional musical instruments to portray how the network can aid cultural exploration. This advert portrays and celebrates the Igbo culture to some level, although with some flaws which created the loophole in the advert.

The advert serves as a metaphor to people. MTN makes the audience and users of MTN see the importance of culture to the network that in as much as people cannot do away with their culture which is their way of life, MTN cannot be done away with as well due to its wider coverage, reliability and effectiveness when it comes to Nigerian network. This can be more explained through the question posed by Adaaku's Mother: "are you sure you want to do it" to which the lady nods in

affirmation. This is because of the level of determination and trust the lady has in the guy who is a symbolic representation of MTN network. The guy on the other hand promises to be the lady's eyes which points out that, "come as you are, we have what will help you". "The eye" can also depict "data" that helps to see into the society through the internet. Social media or internet becomes useless when data is lacking. The data now becomes eye. The eyes also signify "voice communication", the reason being that one can see far just by putting a call through. In less than two seconds, you can be at a fifty miles distance from where you are. Since the network of MTN is everywhere they now become the extra eyes instead of the use of one's limited eyes. The husband has to put a call through to lead the blind wife to where he was even though there was interference by a young man to distract her, but she succeeds by trusting the network.

The setting, though may have looked like a cultural traditional wedding, but there are certain things missing in this advert which could have made the advert more aesthetically pleasing. However, the message in the advert is that, you can rely on MTN even on special moments. No fear of break in communication as they have clear signals in such a one-way advert! Nonetheless, it is not just enough to have a traditional wedding setting and then have the couple, then the guests; it goes beyond that.

There are other things found during a traditional wedding which are missing in the advert. During a traditional wedding, there is the need to see what people call gifts from the husband's family, but gifts are missing. The two or three tubers of yams that viewers can see after searching tirelessly for gifts look like computer placed tubers of yams, which are probably inserted after it was discovered that no gift was placed in the ceremony during the advert shoot. Gits such as boxes to contain different attires and wrappers, blouses, jewelries, drinks, kolanuts, amongst others are not seen. Even, the parents of the man getting married are not presented in the adverts which makes it unreal. This is because in every wedding, two people always matter from both the family of the lady and the man and they are the lady's parents and the man's parents. Blessings come from both husband's parents and the wife's parents.

In the second MTN advert examined in this study, the bag in context here symbolises a tariff plan or network package. It should be noted that the lady carried two bags which symbolise data plan and call plan which is somehow tiring. Some plans encourage more of data and calling while some, it is calling; e.g. MTN Beta Talk. The lady appears smarter, orderly and does not need to disturb others or herself by taking the stairs instead of the elevator machine. The people as depicted are on that plan already. They all appear tidy and neat and this lady appears the same with smile on her face. Her getting a big smart bag reflects that she is stable, calm and intelligent. Her level of interaction changes as she notices that she can successfully be around, enjoy her world and business without the stress of being

disconnected through data use or calls which is suitable at any time she chooses. She gets a mega bag that has it all. The advert attacks no network. It is so mature and very comprehensive.

GLO Advert 1
Advert Title: GloYakata

Synopsis
GloYakata, a one scene advertisement, presents a popular artiste, Gordon, who is the narrator. The advertisement adopts a one-person narrative technique and it showcases the everyday GLO routine, how it has been functional, essential and optimised through the use of fibre optics and advanced technologies to enhance our mode of communication through the creation of a wider coverage. The advert explains the importance of communication in our day to day activities either through data or voice communication in different strata of life: marketing, business world, youth environment, telecommunication world, etc. GloYakata gives data and call credit to individuals who are on the plan, including both new and old sim cards.

GLO Advert 2
Advert Title: GLO X 4 Formula

Synopsis
This advert opens in a mechanic shop where there is an interaction between four bosses in the shop and an apprentice who has always been sent to get food from a nearby restaurant. The four bosses have a meal each as was meant for each of them. The apprentice was so glad to hear as he was being praised, and told his oga that he is the one "that sabi the formula for enjoyment well". Papi Aluwe, a character in the advert noticed another apprentice, Bashiru eating at a corner. He was called Onigbese (debtor) by Aluwe because he had 4 plates of swallow food in front of him. He was told that if anyone predicted that his future would be great, he should know it is a lie as it is only obvious that he is already eating his "today, tomorrow and future with the food". Bashiru was surprised and gave the reason for the 4 plates of food in front of him. At Iya Nashiru's shop, you get four times of whatever you buy and that is reason for 4 plates of food. The other apprentice was caught red handed because he has cheated the bosses by just buying one plate of food after which he pocketed the remaining money in his pocket.

Symbolic Analyses of the Selected GLO Adverts
In this advert, food is used as a medium of communication. If one buys a plate of food, four of what one buys will be given to him or her. One of the apprentices was able to explain the truth of the issue but the other was a cheat. The cheat as imbedded in the advert helped the audience to know the truth about the plan and people will not have to swindle them. In a disguised form, the advert also presents other competitive networks with promises to be the best, but are not giving the

required services. The apprentice believes he knows the formula for enjoyment, but he does not as he cheated his way through the data bonus given which is morally wrong.

Most times in the community, when people are called several times, they tend to be suspicious of winning a gamble or promo which is evidenced in the dialogue between Aluwe and Bashiru. The geographical setting of the advert also has its own relevance to the advert's criticism. The shop is a mechanic shop and cars cannot do without it, and the same thing is also true of communication; we cannot do without data and voice plan at this jet age. The 4x recharge can be used to make international and local calls, text and browse. Though the food in quote is not realistic but one can understand the need for that exaggeration and humour which actually added colour and beauty to the advert.

Furthermore, Glo telecommunications are seen as the grand masters of data; meaning that the network encourages more of data than calling, but MTN extra Value is different. This is because it gives the user opportunity to use one SIM and enjoy both data and calling system without any problem. Even one has the opportunity to decide on which one he or she wants; maybe more of data or call.

This advert basically reflects how easy life can be with communication at this jet age. The plan is even titled, "YAKATA"; which suggests something that falls and spreads or occupies enough space. This can be interpreted to "The Heavyweight voice and data plan" which shows how freedom and access can be obtained through communication because "life all depend on you". You tend to decide which and what you want because the choice is yours. Considering the advert in details, it is not restricted to one sector or some set of individuals, but it is all encompassing. The advert shows many people can benefit from it and they can also improve their business through the data plan which is seen when a market woman uploads her textile materials online. The youth can also enjoy the fun while exhibiting their goods and services through the improved data plan. The first question Gordon asked was "what makes life easier?" exposes to the potential buyers the data and voice plan which is to make life easier for their customers. He concluded that "no bundles, no data plan", and ended on the note that there is "no hassles".

Performative Aesthetics in the Selected Adverts

Walton (2017, p.149) sees esthetics as the philosophy of art and beauty. It recognises that we are interested in all manner of issues having to do with paintings, music, theater, literature, film, and anything else that counts as art, not just what makes them art or what works of art have in common but as well as whatever might be philosophically interesting that is beautiful. In analysing these selected adverts, the term aesthetics and performance needs to be defined as a pervasiveness of socio-cultural lives which is central to any domestic or public sphere. It is of note that, in the 1940s, the moment social science theorists in the

United States of America began to employ theatre as an avenue to study human everyday interactions, performance became inevitable. Scholars like Kenneth Burke (1945), Victor Turner (1959), Jerzi Growtoski (1968), Eugenio Barba (1970), Peter Brook (1975), Bertolt Brecht (1964), Artonin Artaud (1958) all changed the view of performance and its functionality in various disciplines especially the ones that involve communication. Therefore, this study also considered the performative aesthetics in the selected adverts that give more meaning to their effectiveness and usefulness. In doing this, certain elements such as action, language, technical elements, spectacles, conflict and characters amongst others are considered to buttress this study.

Action

The series of events that constitute the plot in any literary work is referred to as dramatic action. It includes what the characters say, do, think and in some cases, fail to do. Action involves activity. This activity becomes more pronounced in drama where the action is presented in concrete form as the actors present the story to the audience for entertainment and education (Iwuchukwu, 2008, pp.30-31). However, the action is so clear and very dramatic. The blind woman really tried because she kept the suspense of her challenges until the last moment. She actually did not appear blind or looking sad to reflect her condition. Her movement is as smart as one with two eyes. Some people while acting blind tend to lift their heads and drag their legs in order to convince people about the reality of their state. Through an excellent interpretative action in this particular advert, she portrays a being living without any form of physical challenges. Also, in extra value advert, the action can be said to be 80% pantomimic dramatisation. This occurs when actions or narration are done without the use of words, but gestures, facial expression, actions, etc. The first-person narrative technique was used in the advert. Her gesture was her main instrument of communication, complimenting it with her own voice as background. She was able to convince and communicate her thought well to her audience. Her action was so explicit and expressive.

Gordon's action is superb in the advert. Even though it was like a speech rendition, but the strength in the way he speaks can be weighed and qualified. The advert is more of a descriptive essay, yet the editor tried by allowing a concurrent display and visualization of what was being said by Gordon. Gestures, good delivery of lines, facial expressions, composures and expressions were employed to aid the performative aesthetics inherent in the advert. All these helped his action, while the other personality tried to express his character in the best way he could by trying to interpret what was happening through mime.

The action was a give and take expression. It opens with bosses being kind, friendly and happy, but the discussion becomes so serious, there is a change of action. The advert is both narrative and expository because it narrates a story and better explains the 4x recharge and this is done through action. All the actors used

actually interpreted their roles effectively, for example, the two apprentices' actions portray their inferiority compared to the bosses. There was facial expression and body language to pass their messages across.

Language

Language seems to be the most essential technique in the analysis of any dramatic text. It is through language that the playwright communicates his ideas; so he manipulates it to suit his intention. Language could be in form of speech, gestures or other bodily signs/symbols. Dramatic language is not just an ordinary language because the playwright is compelled to incorporate descriptions about setting, character and the overall presentation of the story through the language. The language must, therefore, be very economical, vivid and expressive (Iwuchukwu, 2008, p.81). The language employed in the wedding advert is simple and easy to comprehend. Even though it has Igbo setting, the choice of language is English, which is an official language that the audience can understand. This mirrors Alo (1989, p.19) view that, "language is basically a psychological behaviour" which plays significant roles in human thoughts and perception. It is used to express and appeal to attitude, emotion or mental state.

While the language of an advert is highly emotive and convincing, in extra value advert, the background voice is considered as the major communication tool which is simple and easy to understand. It was clearly known that good and tangible communication cannot exist without language. Her signs and other actions can be well interpreted without suggesting any other contradicting meaning. The language as used in the advert gives additional information about the advert. The meaning and interpretation lie beyond the text or spoken words.

The language is Pidgin English. It is simple to understand and relate with. The choice of language used by each of the character explains who they are. The language of Papi Aluwe shows him as someone who loves to abuse and use foul language. The choice of language by another veteran actor reflects him to be language. The choice of language by another veteran actor reflects him to be someone that loves food and same as others. The apprentice A's language depicts him as someone who loves to talk, praise himself and also show off.

Technical Elements

The technical aspect of the theatre is a combination of costumes, light, sound, prop, make-up, music, dance, drama, material and any technical equipment. When properly utilised, such enhances and give a production the desired outlook and concept creating a harmonised blending for a performance (Amali, 2020, p.112). The technicality can be seen in the area of costume, make up, cinematographic work, property, etc. Considering the use of costume in the MTN advert, the costumier did a fantastic job diving into the communicative and interpretative message of these uses of costume. The costume amplifies the richness of the Igbo culture and shows the colour of MTN which is "yellow". The use of beads, Igbo caps,

reality of the advert and the plate used shows it is from a local shop. These are good aesthetics that brought out the technical effect of the advert.

Character

Character is the primary material from which plots are created, because incidents are developed through the speech and behaviour of dramatic personages. A character is revealed in several ways through the descriptions of stage directions, body gestures, explanatory materials not part of the dialogue, through what the character says, what others in the play say about the character and most importantly through what the character does (Brocket, 1980, pp 45-46). In this context, the adverts are seen as dramatic pieces which must develop the characters in use to their full potentials. From the beginning to the end a character must be presented in a way that the audience or intended customers will understand the product he or she wants to sell, else, effective communication has not taken place; thus aligning with Chukwu-Okoronkwo's (2022) assertion that "communication can only be considered successful when the intended effect is achieved; that is, when the target receiver is effectively reached" (p.7). In the language and gesture given to a character in the adverts, a product's value, use and importance is supposed to be known which allows the intended customer to purchase it. In GLO YAKATA, everything revolves around a lady who is a business woman whose characterisation influences others in the advert to want to know the reason for customers flocking her shop while neglecting other shop owners to purchase her products. Her self-interpretation adds more beauty to the advert.

Conclusion

Telecommunication advert is important in persuading, enlightening and orientating potential audience. The performative view helped in giving information about the product or plan in a more dramatic way putting into consideration all other elements in passing across the intended message. The visual performative aesthetics used by the telecommunication companies helped in presenting a pleasurable performative aesthetics. The paper observed that performative aesthetics in telecommunication adverts vary from one network to another due to the various network operators like MTN, GLO, 9mobile, amongst others and the kind of plan they are trying to advertise. The performative aesthetics helps in projecting each network and plan in a uniquely, dramatic way. Since performance exist in various forms, it has helped the marketing of telecommunication advert. The study discovered that in an attempt for the telecommunication companies to attract prospective customers, the various companies need to pay detailed attentions to their perfomative aesthetics which can be more valuable in passing their messages across to these prospective customers.

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and tying of wrapper by the men shows the reality of the advert. The make up being used is a normal make up. There was no use of special make-up. The ordinary or day to day make-up used added to the beauty of the advert. With the costume and make up, it looks more colourful. In terms of the Cinematographic aspect, it is obvious that it was shot by professionals who actually know the worth of a good visual aesthetics. The properties also helped in making things look real. Such properties as, the walking stick, the cup with the bride, apparently depicted some of the Igbo wedding accessories.

The costumes as used in this advert are office wears. They are smart dresses which depict business men and women who are working in companies. The make-up on the other hand is simple and used in adding beauty to the face of the actors. They are not heavy or special or fantasy make-up, but that which tone or amplify the skin. The colour of their costume helped in revealing the network colour which is yellow. The cinematographic work really synchronised with the costume, make-up, and action because it reflected the business world and the jet age. The packing lot was a very good location, while the elevator and the office were all revelation of the kind of environment in which they were. The music is not lyrical but pure instruments to set the pace and background tone to the actions and voice over.

The kind of costume Gordon wore is a wine suit with a green pocket tie to represent the symbolic colour of GLO. The cloth is well fitted and makes him more official and presentable. No make-up was used expect for dying his beards which is part of his way of life. The location presented in explaining the tariff plan started from a business firm building which looks like a high scrapper, then to the street, market, house, telecommunication building, etc. The location helps in defining Gordon's words and allowed fluidity in expression and the use of sci-fi added colour to the advert. The camera work was of good quality and the editor is to be appreciated. The camera man was able to pick several actions from different angles making it look more professional. Sound effect is what was used to amplify the actions.

Spectacle

Spectacles create a lasting effect in the mind of the audience at any given time in any given place. The spectacles presented in the selected adverts are superb and added extra beauty which created a memorable appearance of the advert. The use of drums, flutes, gong, etc. added more aesthetical value to the advert. Music and dance are very prominent in any wedding either in our culture or western culture. All these are effects that cannot be ruled out in the advert. The use of costumes in GLO adverts cannot be over-emphasised. In the selected adverts, costumes really portrayed their profession as mechanic, status and reliability. While the bosses wore clean green work cloths, the apprentices wore shorts and round neck top with oil stain to depict class. There is no make-up use. The mechanic workshop as a location really synchronised with the mechanic costume seen. The cinematographic work is so good and of good quality. The food in question was shown to show the