

## Media, Communication and the Dynamic of African Culture: Advertising Design and Identity Focus.

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### Abstract

Globilisation of markets since 1980s in Nigeria assumed dynamic developmental progression. But, part of the problems of multinationals is that they exert strong centralized control over their marketing communication mix globally. They use standardized advertising production approach, sometimes unmindful of the local culture in their message constructs. Invariably, companies that advertise abroad owing to different values systems, environment, language encounter problems such as purchasing abilities, habits of consumers and motivations. However, the media conditioned by technological advancement has made cultural assimilation possible including the understanding and the nature of production of meaning in various global markets today. The idea of identity, representation, ideology and meaning of symbols particularly among the youth market are gradually coalescing. Identities as ideology and representation have been paramount to African cultural producers in the media and communication platform since Pan Africanism. In fact multinationals were conscious of these facts in graphics design message constructs since 1960, when modern advertising debuted in Nigeria. As Nigerian consumers' encounter all manner of production methods at the marketplace, consumption pattern reflects trends as both active and subliminal, participation of the locals in globalized attitudes.

Keywords: Production patterns. Content. Globalised activities

### Introduction

The international markets with varied cultural differences are problematic to most international marketing experts since 1980s. However, the trends show case significant progress as the espouse by Smith and Taylor (2010) situate that, "Globalisation, intertwined with cultural idiosyncracies, appears to be in many markets around the world. The marketing maxim "think global, act local" validates the problems. Also, to attain acceptable creative designs for each market, four options are operational today: Central strategy and production; Decentralised strategy and production, Central strategy, Central Strategy and local production as well as Central strategy with both central and local production. Nigeria's market absorbs all the options, particularly the first option which allows the multinational to control and produce their advertisement at their International head office. Aptly, the research problem and objective resonate from lack of historical documentation of visual communication design as integral part of modern Nigerian art historical construct owing to academic lacuna in course contents in the universities. This research uses analytical methodology and relies on primary as well as secondary sources of information for historical analysis. In addition, being a Fellow of Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) involved in training and retraining of practitioners over the years provided additional sources as methodology. At the end is revealed, how visual communication

designs mediated through advertising is driving cultural assimilation in Nigeria's marketplace.

Modern advertising debuted in Nigeria in 1960 through the intervention of Lintas West African Ltd which metamorphosed from West African Publicity Ltd, (WAP) was essentially, an outdoor contracting firm. WAP as the agency was referenced had its studio in Seargent Inn, in far away London; its early attempt at establishing a graphic studio in Nigeria as its promoters realized the need for one was unsuccessful in 1955. This was sequel to the opening of Kingsway Stores, a modern Shopping Mall in Lagos. Such attempt was unsuccessful because seeking out trained graphics designers knowledgeable in environmental symbols for message construct was elusive, the publication *Lintas 50 Years Still Growing* (1976), reveals. In assessing the situation Amifor (2009) concludes that "graphic artists were non-existent owing to the lacuna created by the British Colonial administration's restrictive educational policies in place" which excluded art from the school curricula. Clearly, such reasoning justified the nationalists' identity quest. Again in 1960 when Lintas started operations, the agency's effort at recruiting trained graphic designers was also elusive. In fact, there was celebration as Erhabor Emokpai the first Nigerian visualiser was located in far away Enugu where he worked with the Ministry of Information. His recruitment was a significant moment in the history of modern Nigerian art, including the reception accorded him as (Plate 1) reflects; the presence of the Chief Justice of the Federation Sir Adetokunboh Ademola, his wife and British officials exhibit "a catch of a rare fish"

Between 1960 and 1990, local contents in message constructs recorded enviable identity focused pass mark; this was because creative feat metamorphosed into an appreciable height towards what could be regarded as national style within modern Nigerian art. In 1990 emerged new level of awareness, perhaps apprehension towards the millennium and the nature of what was expected generally was speculative. But one focus was discernible in the advertising industry: mergers and affiliations within which advertising agencies were opting for the second option.

Within the first four years of the new millennium, Centralized Production system by international companies featured mostly, all white models through the media. That was the first alert; arguably it was aimed to subvert the local advertising design content. Amifor (2009) elaborates on the nature of production systems companies advertising at the international markets adopts: Centralized system and Decentralized system. This corroborates with Belch and Belch (2012) description "In recent years a great deal of attention has focused on the concept of global marketing, where a company uses a common marketing plan for all countries in which it operates, thus selling the product in essentially the same way everywhere in the world". Meanwhile, Decentralization strategy promotes local creative content, and use of environmental symbols based on value system.

### **Influences and Identity quest**

In dissecting the trends and impact of identity and ideological essence in Nigeria media and communication cultural factors given globalization dictates today, historical essence of PAN Africanism is imperative. For simple reason that informed similar issues raised by Fleming (1980) that "for how can human beings know where they are going unless they know where they have been.?How can they understand the present until they know the past?.. Consequent upon the initiative of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 on identity related issues, Marcus, Garvey, George Padmore and UNIA collectively issued statements which in part realized the educational lacuna among the black people of the world. The document sought to establish universities, colleges, academics and schools for racial education as well as understanding of the culture of African people.

With recourse to finding common origin and to terminate void created in art educational system imposed by colonialism, Afrocentrism and Pan Africanism ignited the flame of

nationalism. The torch bearers were Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe whom Coleman (1986) reiterates encouraged many Africans to head to the United States of America for higher education. Other Pan Africanists were Dr. Kwameh Nkrumah, Houghtat Bouagney, Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Jomo Kenyatta, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Haile Selassie among others. These illustrious Africans sought empowerment of cultural values and rejuvenation through art, scholarly training and laid the foundation aside from cultural revival but also essence of black beauty as in Negritude. In fact, Coleman (a) informs us that important literary works abound devoted to cultural issues, amongst them certain sections of Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Renascent, Africa*, which centred on what he called “mental emancipation from colonialism. Also Coleman in Nancy Cunards *Afroophile* contains contribution of articles written by few Nigerians including Adetokumboh Ademola, Nnamdi Azikiwe, T.K. Utchay and Ladipo Odunsi in which they laid great emphasis on African history, art and cultures as basis for national renaissance.

Media and communication are effective and destructive weapons the nationalists deployed to secure independence for Nigeria and invariably extended cultural evolution and participation in globalization in later years. *West African Pilot* was established and edited by Nnamdi Azikiwe; the tabloid became a training ground for younger nationalists among them Anthony Enahoro. Among other tabloids was the Tribune established by Obafemi Awolowo, a reputed nationalist.

### Results of quests

Significantly results arising from UNIA, Afrocentrism, Pan Africanism, Negritude and the nationalist critical intervention began to yield dividends particularly in Nigeria right from 1954 Mcpharson constitution. The constitution introduced regional autonomy as federated units. Competition was set in leading to industrialization effort, educational pursuit, urban development and employment opportunities. Between 1960 and 1980, higher institutions were burgeoning; notably Yaba College of Technology, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and University of Ife were producing graphic art graduates that supplied manpower needs of emerging advertising agencies. Importantly, the media became more society friendly through cartooning earlier deployed by Akinola Lasekan of famed Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot*. Younger cartoonists such as Jossy Ajiboye Dele Jegede both artists from the *Daily Times* tabloid were known for social commentaries during the hectic era of military dictatorship. Further, the nationalists identity focused ideological quest and response led to the establishment of two ideological art schools in Nigeria: Enweonwu College of Fine Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka 1961 and the Department of Fine Arts, University of Ife, Ile-Ife which earlier was a unit of African Studies established as research institution but trained B.A. degree in art education for the faculty of Education. Along, identity focused ideology was behind the appointment of Nigeria’s famous artist Ben Enweonwu as a Professor of fine art by the authorities of University of Ife in 1971. The unit transitioned into a full fledge department in 1976. Professor Babatunde Lawal, a pioneer graduate of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, assisted by other academics mentored the school along identity ideology. The school’s philosophy issued from

- A re-orientation of art education towards functionalism
- The adaptation of indigenous design resources to meet with the needs and requirements of modern times and
- The evolution of identity for contemporary Nigeria art.

The battle for freedom of choice which we enjoy today as a result of globalization dictates given free market economy is hardly appreciated by the present generation as a hard fought battle won by African nationalists. Their effort informed part the United States conditions for

joining the battlefield during the World War II. This is discernible from the Atlantic Charter of 1941 which sought freedom for colonized people to decide their future and the type of government they desire. Such was the effort of African people whose culture had been destroyed by colonial administration policies.

This reaction from the United States of America declaration inspired the British authorities to make amends towards their colonial subjects. Ultimately it led to independence for various colonies. By 1985, locating designers knowledgeable in the use of environmental symbols for message constructs had become a thing of the past. Earlier, most advertisement designs associated with WAP and later Lintas exposed in Nigeria's media in 1960's decade originated from its London office of Export Advertising Service. One Enie Damer, an assistant creative hand to E.J. Kealey, the creative director was reputed to "capture the essential African characters in his illustrations with uncanny fidelity" Lintas Fifty Years Growing (b ) attests. Damer never stepped his foot on African soil but was considered "the mainstay of African portraiture" even in 1978 the publication continued. However the emergence of Nigerian illustrators, Okey Horton, Tony Esemokhai, new entrant Enoch Okerekeocha in Lintas by the same 1978 must have made Damer swallow his pride and wide claim on his behalf by the publication; considering the dexterity of their work; the young Nigerians exhibited true African features which distanced Damer's illustrations in Raleigh Bicycles (Plate2), West African thread, Good Year tyres and Booths Dry gin; these illustrations suggest make belief African features.

As the void created by colonialism was being filled with graduate designers from established higher institutions content of message construct became obvious that Nigerian models were missing on the scene. Reality of the fact became glaring that advertising is an instrument of social change as scholars and practitioners contend. With the presence of expatriate graphics designers still visible on the scene, and as most finished art works, photography, TV commercial films were also concluded in London, recourse for use of Jamaican and West Indies models resident in London was settled for. Among the models for design constructs was Suzzie Martins, a TV model for Lux beauty soap positioning which subverted the identity drive intensified since 1960. Albeit, the most popular TV star Nigerians knew then were Julie Coker and Rosemary Anieze, one time Miss Nigeria at Independence.

As research is the main role of creative engagement in advertising given the need to plot creative difference for a product at the marketplace, Joy soap designed material was an eye opener. PZ the advertisers used Joy Enweonwu, the daughter of Nigerian famous artist Ben Enweonwu to make definitive identity difference. Lever Brothers later found the need to search for a Nigerian model of substance. Thus they found Pat Boulaiye, (Plate 3) a Nigerian film star of the popular genre "Bisi daughter of the River" directed by Ola Balogun.

Arguably, between 1960 and shortly before the new millennium, cultural producers, both in production and meaning were grappled with identity content in design construct as an ideology that was perfect at product positioning at the marketplace. The world transitioned into a new millennium, technology in its infinite flux began to reposition globalization with unseen limitless boundaries. Both, the media, the market and consumers are now driven by high technologies that defy boundaries. It is tempting to a convergence convergence between the traditional and the new media, but that is the reality. New media suitable for advertising within the locals and the entire globe and Nigeria inclusive have become cultural producers; both are now participants and consumers of means of production of meaning. Media now seek out consumers wherever they might be. New cultural attitudes were also attempting convergence. Since the year 2000 onwards, new attitudes facilitated social behaviour among mostly the youths where most products in the market today form the main targets. Differences in ways of doing things is traceable to Katz (in Solomon,2009), who reasoned that attitudes exist because they serve some function for

the person, basically determined by the person's motive. Solomon (a) digressed this notion further."As identifying the dominant function a product serves for consumers, what benefit it provides, marketers can emphasize these benefits in their communication and packaging" In clear reasoning messages are designed and targeted at youths markets in Nigeria's marketplace because the country practices a free market economy which provides several global products for local consumption pattern. Cultural influences are therefore, absorbed, filtered and discarded given fashion cycles.

The Glo advertisement design with the message "Rule your world" is a case in point. It was an adaptation from World's high cultural producers, the United States of America. Another message is "A new kid on the block" within same "Rule your world" positioning among others. But it is important to point out that the youth assimilate and discard fashion fades from outside, and designers recourse to use of such fads are simply means at reaching the youth market as the target audience at a particular time and space.

### **Cultural dynamism and globalization**

A case study of advertisement materials externalized in Nigeria's media space, prints, electronic and World Wide Web space lately showcases dynamic cultural design content and continuity.

Contents exhibit fashion cycles of different era, modernity and today's globalization inclusive (Plate 4) Satin Sheen positions different African hair styling with a copy. "At last a plaiting and hair conditioner for you". The design represent effort of graphic designer at using local fashion celebrated in hair plaiting for product positioning *at* the marketplace in 1970s. From 1970s utilizing traditional marriage ceremony concept was fashionable; the point of blessing and tying of knot between a man and a woman depicted a role often performed by the elders as prayers are offered to enable marriage endure the test of time. This creative directive remains the focus of Seaman's Schnapps evolutionary designs for several years.

Two great advertisements came to mind in 1980s; one was the Equatorial Trust Bank which featured the interpreter who mimicked Colonial District Officers of the old in a soap opera "Ichoku".



Plate 1.  
Erhabor Emokpae  
first Nigerian Visualizer  
*Photo Lintas 50 years still  
growing*



Plate 3.  
*Satin Sheen* hair product  
*Photo Lintas 50 years still  
growing*

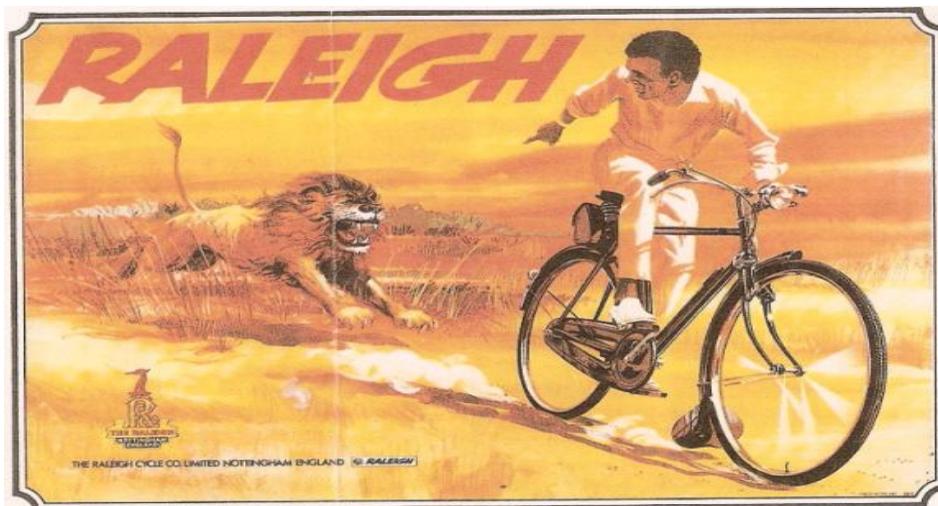


Plate 2. *Raleigh Bicycle*,  
*Photo Lintas 50 years still growing*

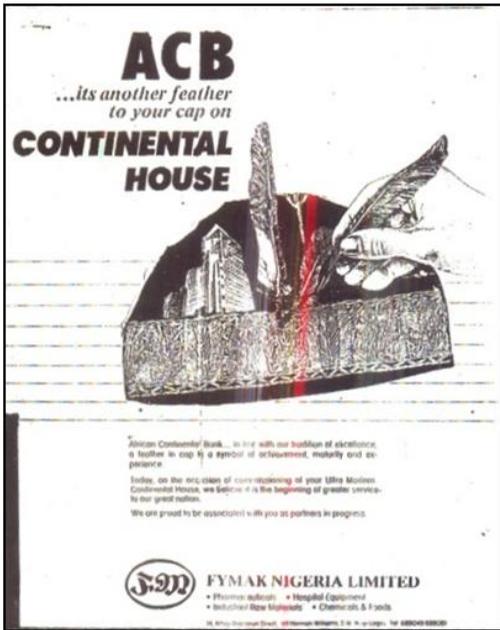


Plate 4. ACB Continental House,  
Photo Courtesy John Amifor



Plate 6. Eggon Woman  
Photo Courtesy James Agum



Plate 5. Aji-No-Moto, a bill board site

design featured a model holding a mat as the copy headline read “Do you take a mat to the bank also? Design content of both text and image made mockery of the Nigerian banking system orchestrated by delays before a customer could get attention. Creative content betrays lack of time consciousness of our cultural value, utilized as negative vice to growth. The design contemplated an attitudinal change in a moving world.

Arguably, the public communication message “ACB it’s another feather to your cap” seemingly is an example and results of Ife school identity thrust externalized in the media in later years. Given both production and meaning, the message produced by John Amifor, one of the designers mentored by Babatunde Lawal deconstructed established stereotyped public notice messages.

These messages often read “Congratulations” or “Felicitations” in the media; such creative direction is still present in Nigeria’s media space today.

Recourse to application of human psyche reminiscent of Jung “collected unconscious” evidenced in ACB message. Central to Jungian theory lies an unconscious state and shared memory underneath the “main brain,” that which also was meant to be shared by everyone. Mc. Dermott (1990) attests, that, most designers of 1980’s were not conscious of various theories expanded by Rowland Barthes, Baudrillard, Foucault on design, but worked along those semiotics and deconstruction attitudes. At the time of designing the ACB public notice, the designer was ignorant of those theories as well, but had memory and exploits of Azikiwe at the back of his mind. The content of the visual narrative was built around an Icon. He was in fact- Nigeria’s foremost nationalist. The design illustrates, various attainments of his vision, perception, and dreams with genealogy dating back to Pan Africanism. Reading the production of meaning, the message was an association of ideas in advertising message construct, based on perception, both concrete and abstract. Visually, content of the design bring together unrelated objects, cap, feather and a human hand as well as performance that symbolized pinning of a feather on a cap.

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the bird Eagle is symbolically revered as the king of all birds; its feathers are expensive and sought after, therefore each feather pinned on a cap is symbol of a higher height of achievement as well as an acknowledged status of a man.

This act of association of idea deconstructed the original meaning of both feather and cap and encoded them with new meanings and in a rare attainment. At the converging point is the man Nnamdi Azikiwe who established African Continental Bank, an indigenous institution focused to serve African people in a competitive atmosphere which Nigeria’s economy offered along with the colonial banks in 1950’s. The Mission Statement credited to Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe by Coleman (c) on the establishment of African Continental Bank is illuminating “The primary motive of establishing the bank was to make available an indigenous bank with the objective of liberalizing credit for the people of this country”. As a result the Continental House epitomized his ideological drive, perception and dreams. Theoretically, ACB message relies on symbolic metaphor. This is visually present in vivid illustration based on contextual modern issues. Today this message construct realized in 1980s underscores African cultural transition within globalized borderless space and ever shrinking village given media and cultural dynamism; the end still elicits discuss.

The borderless world and its economy also come with difficulties faced by multinational companies over the implementation of advertising and promotion programs for international market. This is due to unfamiliar marketing environment, sets of values, customs, consumption patterns and habits. Given Nigeria’s market situation put at 167 million

inhabitants by the National Population Commission and different religious groups with values system easily associated with ethnic nationalities, companies encounter different purchase markets in such a host market. The country in spite being a huge market has different demographic differences which marketing communication design in addition must contend with. These issues arise from income levels and distribution, education, population distribution, employment rates, particularly, household size among others.

Lesson is drawn significantly from the initial apprehension on globalization from Collins (in Moriarty et al 1999) that “The maintenance of national sovereignty and identity becomes increasingly difficult as the unities of economic and cultural production and consumption becomes increasingly difficult.” Studies show that consumer image pattern and perception of a product in Nigeria’s marketplace has been assimilation of free market economy sustained by sovereign attitudes underscored by dynamics of cultural values. These are constantly expressed in fashion, costume food, lifestyles, tastes, the media, particularly, advertising design. Media channels owing to advancement in technology expose such identity sourced mannerism to the global audience.

As such, identity cultural responses are further integrated in designed messages advertised nationwide as well as the global communication outlets. Understanding the importance of ACB creative work is underscored recently. A renowned Managing Director of a global public relation outfit, Impact Porter Novelli avers that” Public relation practitioners within the African space have got to drop their narrow-minded methods and open up to more engaging ways of handling corporate issues relating to reputation management by deploying strong narratives around products”. Further espouse on narrative was reinforced by the International Strategy Director of TBWA, a top advertising global firm, Jamieson, who revealed that “one of the best ways African agencies can achieve commercial success is by packaging their creative works in compelling narratives”

### **Cultural production and meaning**

The understanding of meaning associated with the fashion system within consumer influences involves quite a number of people and organizations both within and sources of manufactured products within and outside Nigeria. They are involved in creating symbolic meaning and transfer of those meanings to cultural goods. These people are drawn from multidiscipline. This theory is outside the general understanding of fashion we often relate with clothing or apparel, but involves wider connotation of cultural phenomena and diverse engagement of different minds in production of goods for consumption worldwide. The reason is because research is employed to establish branding and extent of market concerning competing products before their entry into a new market.

Albeit, in advertising, the quality of a product put together within fashion system and process have successfully played out in certain categories of seasoning brands in Nigeria. Invariably, such products are Maggi cube, Knorr, Ajinomoto and Onga among others. Communication system, packaging, colours, style and performance enabled Ajinomoto, a product of China acquire meaning, and provided the brand name with symbolic attributes. It now compares favourably with Maggi cube and Knorr both products of multinational Nestle and Unilever. Women as house wives and target audience are drawn to the site of its message content exposed in the media.

According to Solomon (b)” creative sub-system within a culture production system opens up to anticipated taste of the buying of public. Ajinomoto has sustained tempo of local competition. by distancing cultural values from its original country, China. The brand is readily accepted as a Nigerian product. Considering that today globalization recognizes China and Japan as two countries involved in transformation of the global economy, product

from these countries have become part of Nigerian value. Their product messages are involved in the uplifting of cultural imageries in most graphic communication messages externalized in the local media by adopting Decentralized production methods. (Plate5), vividly illustrates the adaptation of local symbols, taste, values over the years as such witnessed constant uplifting to appreciable level of sophistication within certain class in Nigeria. Also converging at the local while thinking global, are dress attribute of the models.

Marketers of foreign consumer goods at the local market make models dress in attire outside their environmental up-bringing. Albeit, there are created convergence of values regardless of ethnic inclination permeating various ethnic groups. Recourse to (Plate 5) again shows a bill board visible in 36 states of Nigeria targeted at women. In the past the dress style was regarded as Ibo dress, now won by Nigerians in wider space. That is the power of media.

Level of sophistication and acceptance by global standard of the local culture is visible in Nikon camera advertisement externalized in DSTV station during the recent Brazil 2014 World Cup. This TV commercial best illustrate finding and result of positioning Nigerian culture and media as dynamic globally.

Nikon message featured its different product line ranging from Point and Shoot to professional Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR). Products are also linked to documentary, events, people and most visible a marriage ceremony from Nigeria. The entire commercial was targeted at international audience. In fact, Nikon copy read. "I am the spot light" "I am the professional capturing the world" "forever they are happy" "I am known as Nikon"

Findings show that Pan Africanism and nationalism particularly the activists who engaged identity issues as panacea for independence and economic emancipation of Africans from shackles of colonialism were far sighted. Identity focused designs in the media began its progress from the primordial time advertising practice debuted in Nigeria in 1960. It continued to evolve well into the early stages of globalization, a decade before the millennium and beyond.

Factual attributes could be discerned comparatively between the Seaman's Schnapps product positioning of 1970s and the Nikon camera assertion recently, using similar wedding engagement like the Seaman's direction. However, the audience today given the media outlet differ; while Seaman's audience was limited to national advertising, Nikon was visibly international as in the words of Belch and Belch (2012)' think global, act local'. The audience, the media and effect of technological input played out to make both situations, in time and space miles apart. Further aesthetic contemplation of the Nikon message was accentuated by lighting effects in higher digital resolution as well as the angle of shots used. Invariably, the frames showing Nigeria marriage scene illustrated and highlight sophistication of the Nigerian costume. Similarly, fashion from across ethnic groups in Nigeria has blurred the boundary of ethnicity, thus provides designers with costume that cuts across. For example, (Plate6) is an Eggon woman, Mrs. Deborah Joseph Asele from Nasarawa State. Her dressing vividly suggests Delta Igbo origin in Niger Delta region where the wrapper is known as 'Ntigbili'. Nikon was positioned as a global enigma that makes someone smile in association with known cultures worldwide. The message simply reveals the Iconic nature of images associated to 'mirror of reality' as attributes of photography, film and, television among other visual media.

The most enduring observation, using Nikon, a recent message is the accommodation of "other" cultures in global design construct. .

## CONCLUSION

Western, particularly American culture contributes to impact on the world, Nigeria inclusive since colonialism and more apparent after independence in 1960. Recently products of Asian

countries Japan and China, owing to the purchasing power of Nigerians have also, found market among the local consumers. Identity issues as cultural dynamics have constantly featured as part of Nigeria's advertisement design contents in the media since 1960. Practice progressed from the primordial period to collapse into globalization era today. Products from the Western countries such as Maggi cube, Knorr, as well as Onga and Ajinomoto at the marketplace compete favourably among Nigeria housewives based on differentiation and market segmentation. Traced from positive action taken by the recruitment of Nigeria's first visualiser and art director Erabhor Emopkai, through visible designs such as Satin Sheen, ACB Continental House, Seaman's Schnapp to Nikon Camera message on DSTV and the Brasil World Cup 2014. Technology has been used, in addition, to facilitate production and meanings, accentuate aesthetic response and to determine the media industry as well as exposure at the marketplace. Those who opposed (McLuhan 1994), (McLuhan and Fiore 1964) on the power technology given 'global village' phrase now know better as the global village is shrinking further. Branding and product positioning are constantly being tailored to conform with national values enabling Nigerian consumers participate as integral part of the global audience.

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