

Sound, Music and Visual Culture: The Influence of Multimodality on Meaning-making in a Multicultural Society

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Abstract

Current arguments - sometimes made boldly, and sometimes subterranean - by some scholars in the visual culture studies point to the historical superiority of literature over visuality. This position is preposterous, atheoretical and plausibly ahistorical. It is arguable whether literature precedes visuality, as visuality streams from the consciousness of sight and what is visible. The emergence of signs and symbols existed from the time of the cave man before literacy and literature. Meanwhile, in the postmodern world of visual preponderance meaning is derived by the application of multimodal decoding techniques with the attendant consideration of a specific cultural ecology in which the discourse is coded or formulated. This paper argues that communication involved visuals and pictures before they were transferred into literature forms. The paper also posits that even though visuals and images may be pervasive and preponderant in the contemporary world, they by themselves do not facilitate meaning-making unless combined with other symbolic forms including text, sound and music. The paper further argues that meaning-making is facilitated by two major interdiscursive modalities – multimodality and the multicultural ecology of discourse. In other words, multimodality and the socio-cultural environment are key determinants of meaning-making in a visual culture discourse. The paper finally supports and highlights the argument that in a multicultural society, such as Nigeria, for instance, meaning-making is a function of multimodality in consideration with the cultural environment of the discourse.

Keywords: Music, Sound, Visual Culture, Multimodality, Multiculturalism, Meaning-making.

1. Introduction

“Modern life takes place on screen” says Mirzoeff (1999, p. 2). This metaphorical statement apparently underscores the ubiquity and pervasiveness of visual culture in contemporary times. It also supports van Ginneken’s (1998) position that ‘man is a visual animal’. Today, humanity is bombarded daily with flurries of images such that capitalism is said to recreate itself through advertising and branding – using images to persuade and stimulate consumers to an unending consumption of popular culture products (Olivier, 2009).

The above statements sign-post the emergence of a lifeworld soaked in mediated and re-mediated experiences through the televisual, the cinematic, the internet, photography and all forms of creative productions, symbolic encounters and visual enchantments. The increasing flourish of images, and all that appear to sight, has raised academic concern about their import to today’s everyday living. The discourse has taken various turns including the debate on what visual culture is really all about. It raises questions of whether visual culture is more on the increase now, compared to the past, and if so why. It confronts the argument that late capitalism is fueling visual culture through pervasive mediated media communication.

Mirzoeff (1999) asserts that, previously, western culture had privileged the written word above the visual – rating the visual inferior to literature. So the emergence of visual dominance in our everyday life which has catapulted into a culture is perceived to have contested the hegemony of the written word, developing into what Mitchell (1994) refers to as ‘picture theory’, which following arguments by some scholars promoted the concept of post-modernism – seen as the response to the crisis of modernism. The textually dominated life has produced a discursive lifeworld with some linguistics-based intellectual movements such as structuralism and post-structuralism. On the other hand, for Mitchell, the picture world has produced concepts such as ‘spectatorship’ – the practice of surveillance, gaze, looking, observation and visual pleasure. Could this possibly be the reason some people leave their homes to go window-shopping and sightseeing? Window-shopping and sightseeing, some posit, is just more for visual pleasure.

Today, the idea of the world as picture is gradually but steadily gaining much ground, even as the CNN effect tends to lend credence to this fact - with millions of people all over the world glued to their television sets to watch the World Cup tournament, the Olympic Games or even the American presidential elections. Every of these occasions also stimulate corporate organisations to scramble for advertising windows to expose their brands to the several ‘eyeballs’ on screen. For instance, as the 2018 world cup was ongoing in Russia, there reigned a major corporate ‘wrestling’ between Nigerian Breweries Plc., and Guinness Nigeria Plc., or Coca-Cola and Pepsi over sponsorship of the Super Eagles (Nigeria’s national football team), and the exposure of corporate and brand related promotional materials on television during games. It is all a contest and struggle for ‘gaze’ and human ‘eyeballs’ on screen.

However, I reflect differently to the argument that before now literature dominated visuality. In my view, I argue that historically orality and visuality predate the dominance of

literature; and that the visual is only staging a strong comeback as a result of the rise, recognition and predominance of right brain thinking over left brain thinking, which has taken over the stage in contemporary human affairs (Olivier, 2009). The cause of this resurgence of the primacy of the visual over text is not the focus of this paper.

This paper aims to participate in the visual culture discourse as it seeks to establish the influence of multimodality in meaning-making, with particular interdiscursive and intertextual reference to the relationship between sound, music and visual culture. The paper posits that meaning-making is facilitated by two major interdiscursive modalities – multimodality and the multicultural ecology of discourse. In other words, multimodality and the socio-cultural environment are key determinants of meaning-making in a discourse or within a discursive community. The paper while privileging visual culture as a dominant point of discussion is designed to achieve two major goals: First, it seeks to highlight how sound and music affect visual culture to exert preponderant influence on our reading, perceiving and understanding of images - whether of moving media, photography, paintings, architecture, landscaping, sculpture or carved works. It draws strength from the understanding of a world defined by Aristotle as being constantly in a state of flux, a world ruled by the emergence of the internet communication technology and a world where the pervasive influence of globalization has re-characterised the media landscape - redefining its culture and all its appurtenances - including structure and meaning-making.

Secondly, the paper seeks to engage relevant cultural study theories and philosophical tools of analysis to critically evaluate and examine the issues of meaning-making and the possibility of ‘reality and knowing’ in the visual cultural world. Although, there are many sides to understanding visual culture from a cultural and philosophical point of view, this paper lays emphasis on how the concept of ‘myth and ideology’ and that of ‘appearance and reality’ are employed to explain visual culture. For instance, in a mediated world of sensory perception, can a subject ever ‘know’ the object of contemplation? All these issues negotiate into a conclusion that seeks clear relationship between representation, meaning, culture and visual culture.

We will begin our discussion with a careful consideration of the concepts of sound, music and visual culture. We will thereafter consider culture in general term and then visual culture in particular before aligning the intersection of sound and music to visual culture.

2. Conceptual Clarification: Sound, Music and Visual Culture

Sound can be described as the sensation produced by stimulation of the human sense organs. These organs could be that of hearing by vibrations transmitted through the air or other medium. Any vibration of any type including vocal utterances, noise of any sort, radio announcement, musical tone, shout from the neighborhood, whisper, wind rustle, whistle, bang on the door or sound of the door bell can be considered as sound. On the other hand, the

definition of music is not steeped in technicalities like that of sound. Music refers sound, rhythm and movement or to a sonority, sonorous or musicality. Music is an art form that can be situated within the ambit of culture, context and society. Although, music has universal bearing, yet its contextual affirmation is culture based and defined. We can ascribe to music a combination of vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion. Music is embedded in the social life of the people. It plays a big role in the cultural manifestation of a particular group of people defining their mode of communication and lifestyle. For instance, most communities use certain music to communicate moments for celebration or alert for danger. Music can be used to define sobriety or joyful moments. It also plays a big role in their religion and pattern of worship. The definition of music differs depending on cultural tendency, inclination and ambience (Goehr, 2014).

In comparing sound with music, it could be said that Sound refers to anything that is heard through the instrumentality of the ear-drum such as painful shouts, human and animal growls, water clap, wind rustle, thunder, whispering, gunshot and other such outbursts. Music on the other hand is a rational, creative and meaningful assembly of sound generally, but not always played with manufactured instrument. So, music can be said to be organised sound. Sound alone does not imply music. Sound is any noise that has no beat or rhythm or any kind of pattern. Music on the other hand involves selection of beat, rhythm and patterns (Goehr, 2014).

A question can however arise as to whether music is organised sound, and to discover at what point sound becomes music. Although, this could be an issue for professional musicologists to handle, however, it can be inferred from previous statements here that, at the point sound becomes organised, rhythmical, harmonious and makes sense and meaning to a perceptive mind within a defined cultural environment, it could be said to have gone from sound to music. For instance, in the African context, music can be examined from its aesthetic representation and value. Agawu (2004) asserts that African music is categorized into traditional music, popular music and art music. Traditional music, he claims, refers to music nurtured by traditional institutions which include the ceremonial and ritual music that are performed in and around palaces and Kings' courts. Other forms identified are those music patterns associated with funerals including lamentation, invocation, dirges and various forms of sacred drumming. Popular music according to him is typically a fusion of European and African music. These include hymn-like harmony, memorable rhythmic sound and African oral poetry in form of highlife music as performed in most parts of West Africa, soukous in Zaire and juju music in mostly western Nigeria. Then, there is Art music, which Agawu explains is referred to as jazz music in contemporary likeness. Jazz music is less prominent in Africa and it is played mostly amongst the elite. So, what is the relationship between sound and music in connection with visual culture? At this point, the paper attempts to establish what culture is and then relate it to visual culture.

3. Culture and Visual Culture

In discussing culture Williams (1995) sees it from three major perspectives – Ideal, Documentary and Criticism. According to him, culture can come as an ‘Ideal’ in which “culture is a process of human perfection in terms of certain absolute or universal values” (p. 332). This way of looking at culture to him is basically to discover lifestyles and creative works that represent timeless values and revelation of the human condition. He also identified culture as we have it in ‘Documentary’ where culture is seen as the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded. He further posits that, the objective analysis and evaluation of such intellectual and imaginative work is the activity of criticism by which “the nature of thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued” (1995, p.332). Such criticism, he points out, can range from a process very similar to the ‘Ideal’ analysis, which is the discovery of the best that has been thought and written in the world, through a process which while interested in tradition, takes as its primary emphasis the particular work being studied. Beyond this seeming technical definition of culture, Hall (1995) went ahead to give a social description of culture as “a whole way of life” (p.338).

Lustig & Koester (2003) posit that culture is comprised of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people. Following this perspective, culture can be viewed from an all-encompassing threshold as - an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, action, customs, beliefs, values, and instructions of a racial, ethnic, religious, social group. Culture is learned, especially from the environment through various agents – family, media, church, school, social organisations and other forms of groups with the capacity to transfer knowledge on human behaviour from generation to generation.

How do these definitions relate to visual culture? We connect this to practices and experiences of the visual that have become a new ‘turn’ in the way of people’s everyday life. Visual Culture, Mirzoeff (1999), posits “is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology”. By visual technology, Mirzoeff meant all forms of instruments or apparatus designed for visual aesthetics or to enhance natural vision, from photography to oil painting, internet and television. To him, to say that visual culture is part of everyday life is an understatement. It is rather “your everyday life”. Mirzoeff’s definition of technology is interesting as it includes elements like paintings, photography and possibly sculptures. Rose (2007) asserts that visual culture is about the way in which images visualize social difference.

In spite of these clarifications by Mirzoeff and Rose opinions still differ on the constituent and the subject matter of visual culture. For Poster (2002), there is an issue with the term visual culture such that an attempt to define, clarify or give it coherence, produces difficulties that

constrains such attempt. He also disagrees with Mirzoeff who claimed in his book *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999) that ‘human experience’, is now more visual and visualized than ever before. Poster does not think that human beings use their eyes more now than in the past. He argues that, we do not now translate experience from other senses into the visual one. He illustrated his position by claiming that in the Middle Ages distance was usually measured by translating numbers into visual expression. He contends that, in some communities, part of the standard of measurement was how far people could see a red object in the forest. In Nigeria, for instance, it was a common practice in some communities to measure a plot of land for sale by the distance the buyer can sight the boundary. To the indigenes of such communities the designated distance would be something quite specific, as useful as saying a certain expanse of land is 30 yards. Poster used this illustration to emphasis his position that human experience is not more visual now than in the past. He further argued that the difficulty experienced today in the use of the term ‘visual’ is far more serious than it was in the past.

Meanwhile, the emergence of the new media resulting in the integration and convergence of sound, text, still, and moving images, in a digital field has redefined the cultural media space. Rodowick (1996) in his instructive contribution to visual culture insists rightly on the need to introduce the term ‘audio-visual culture’ because “Our era is no longer one of images and signs. It is defined, rather, by simulacra”. He affirms that following the convergence of text, sight and sound on major visual sites, our world has gone beyond signs and symbols but Simulacra – that is to say a world of image representations. It therefore becomes necessary that, making meaning out of the messages on these sites will require a different approach of interpretation. At this point I argue that, visual sites would produce meaningless messages when perceived exclusively - such that, meaning is made of them only when they are perceived in relation with other communicative modes, in this case - sound and music. The second point is that any form of music or sound finds full expression and meaning only when it is located within a specific socio-cultural environment. My argument builds on the understanding of how “the sound makes us see the image differently” (Chion, 1994). And also to affirm that contemporary cultural forms such as the Internet involve more than the perceptual system of sight and more than visual images as a communicative mode in a way that “meaning is made through an interaction of music, the spoken voice, sound effects, language, and pictures” (Duncum, 2004). So, how do all these collage into a cultural form?

4. Relating Sound and Music to Visual Culture

The central tenet of relating sound and music to visual culture is fundamentally to draw meaning from visual profiles in the media of television, advertising, films, photographs, art works and sculptures. According to Duncum (2002), “If we turn down the sound of a TV program, we find out how important dialogue is to our understanding of the picture” (p...). In the same way, if we tune out the audio track used to back up a video game, we will be shocked how much difference in meaning that will create. Sound effect and music are critical to our understanding and experience of the game (Sullivan, 2003; Jagodzinski, 2003; Villeneuve, 2003).

This scenario is applicable to situations of blocking out the written text on a website or the sound track in a movie or soap. In these cases, it will be discovered that, while the images may look beautiful and appealing, they become rather difficult to state with any level of certainty what the pictures or images tend to mean. It will be seen that full meaning is derived when the images play alongside the sound or music as accompanying accomplishments. It, therefore, stands to be reasoned that each of the cultural sites – film, video game, television and others involves more than the perceptual system of sight and more than the communicative system of sound. The same applies to shopping malls, advertisements, magazines, theme parks and all the other sites of contemporary visual culture. A detailed examination of the Ikeja Shopping Mall (in Lagos, Nigeria) for instance, shows that most of the visual sites are also accompanied by sound and music of some sort to accentuate the message and meaning intended by the advertiser.

All over the world, around very prominent airports, restaurants and high rise buildings these sites driven by global capitalism use pictures and many employ sound and music as well to impact our everyday thoughts and decisions. As Chapman (2000) says, ‘the culture of consumerism is not just visual’. To understand the multiple dimensions of visual sites therefore requires the application of multimodality and multi-literacy – which refers to two phenomena that are of concern to this paper.

First, there is the post-structuralist insight that any cultural site, of any kind, can be understood according to multiple readings generated from the multiple positions from which one views, reads, or hears. Secondly, all cultural sites especially sites like television and the Internet, include a range of modalities particularly language, images and sound (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Multiliteracy is now employed to mean the making of meaning through the interaction of different communicative modes. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) describe it as ‘the multimodal relations between different meaning-making processes that are now so critical in media texts and the texts of electronic multimedia’. In each case, following their explanation, a different set of perceptual system is involved, separate communicative modes are employed and separate literacies are enacted. They posit that in multiliteracy, different communicative modes interact with each other to demonstrate how for instance, words or even music without words can influence the meanings we attribute to a picture.

On the other hand, the concept of multimodality describes all cultural sites - particularly sites like television and the Internet – as including a range of modalities, especially language, images and sound. However, beyond the issue of meaning making the idea of visual culture also raises the question of visual representations and reality. The issue of visual representations and the reality of visual sites raise major epistemological concerns. Epistemologically, it constitutes part of the problems of knowledge referred to as appearance and reality. The question would be whether the images contemplated visually - moving images on television, internet, films or still pictures, paintings and sculpture - do represent realities to the audience or the subject that comes in contact with them. What is the epistemic status of these images? Do they represent reality? If

they do, what reality would that be considering that most of the sites are mediated in the first place? And if they don't, what then is their praxiological and axiological status?

5. Visual Culture, Representation and Reality

Visual profiles which consist of television scenes, pictures or photos, art works – painting and sculptures, internet, films/movies and others are composed of images. These images are representations of works using various visual platforms. However, these representations raise epistemological issues and concerns of appearance and reality. They also raise issues of myth and ideology within a specific socio-cultural and politico-economic context. In the case of appearance and reality, philosophers of all ages including Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle have contested the possibility of human beings knowing anything as of certainty. They contend that sensory perception is illusory and are not able to offer certain knowledge. Plato was emphatic in denying that anything we see here on earth is real. Following his concept of the 'World of Forms', the things we see here on earth are mere imaginations and imitations of the things in the world of forms. This means that the art works – sculptures and paintings we comprehend by sight are mere appearances whose real nature are unknowable. Plato used the allegory of the cave to illustrate the view that the people in the cave only saw images of the objects which the people out of the cave saw clearly. On another level, he used it to illustrate that a philosophically liberated mind sees and interprets objects differently from a simple mind incapable of comprehending abstract knowledge.

In the specific case of television, scholars confirm that it is a carrier of culture and ideology. In photography, a subject that contemplates a picture/photograph might think that a photograph is neutral and finds meaning in the mind of the person gazing at it. But pictures are known to be 'meaning makers and ideology constructors'. Every picture is taken from the photographer's point of view. She decides what message she wants to convey and promptly takes the picture to fit into her predetermined message. This comes close to the idea of media framing and priming, where the news reporter takes his story from a particular angle, slant or perspective; and this shapes how the audience of such news report interpret or make meaning of the news story. So for the photographer the picture is not a neutral image but an image mediated to serve a particular purpose. This is to say that visual sites are mediated through various media platforms including language.

Arguing from a structuralist perspective, Ferdinand de Saussure distinguished between *langue* (system of language) and *parole* (act of speaking or writing) and explains that language is meaningful only within a social context. This means that language does not possess a fixed essential meaning outside of its social construction. For a message or image to make meaning communication has to be involved – whether verbal or nonverbal - and this communication is decoded within a cultural framework. This position is also supported by Derrida (1976), a post-structuralist scholar who proposes that "all meaning is textual and intertextual, and that there is nothing 'outside of the text'. This emphasises the position that everything we can know is

constructed through signs and symbols and they are all governed by the rules of language, whether spoken, written or demonstrated via attitude. For Derrida (1981, p. 253), therefore, 'polysemy is infinite'. This means that two viewers of a television program will perceive, make meaning and understand the scenes differently. The concept of polysemy has had wide acceptance amongst cultural theorists and Volosinov (1973) argues that signs and symbols as represented by images on television and other visual platforms do not have essential meanings beyond those ascribed to them in a 'polysemic' fashion by the viewer or audience.

Classical Marxists and by extension critical scholars, particularly of the Frankfurt School, view cultural products including mass media, movies, arts and paintings and all forms of accompanying images as ideological from the perspective of myth and ideology. Marx and Engels (1970, p. 64) writing in *The German Ideology* argue that "the ideas of the ruling class" (including owners of means of production, the intelligentsia, governing and professional elites) "are in every epoch the ruling ideas". For them, cultural products which include but not limited to the mass media, creative art, films and movies and every other form of entertainment product are platforms used by the ruling class to dominate and circulate their ideologies to the masses. They affirm that newspapers and other forms of mass media make the social relations of domination and oppression in a capitalist society appear natural and not political. Even though the Marxian position seems real in the Nigerian case, especially with the emergence of private media ownership and the obvious bias by state owned media organizations, it has been criticised for laying too much emphasis on studying the economic conditions to the detriment of other areas such as the effect of culture on people.

To deviate from this emphasis on economic condition for the analysis of human condition, Theodore Adorno and Horkheimer expanded Marx's concept of 'commodity fetishism' by arguing that it is profit that motivates contemporary culture and determines the form of its production. They affirm that the mass media and all other forms of cultural products most of which have their manifestation in visual culture are no longer produced for their significance and use value, but that they are mass produced as 'commodity' for profit. They posit that this is propelled by branding and advertising to offer the people mere illusion and in the process alienate them from the reality of life. Althusser (1971) pointed out that Adorno's and Horkheimer's (1994) argument is elitist, idealistic and monolithic. He rather used the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to explain that religious institutions, educational, legal, political, mass media and communication, and all forms of art do not represent realities as people are deluded to believe. Instead, he argues that through the use of language and images (ISAs) are "recruiting us to their view of the world and constructing us as subjects within it". This line of argument however, positions the consumers of mass media products as passive and incapable of taking alternative options or unable to resist the dominant ideology sold to them through massive visual oriented advertising.

Meanwhile, with the emergence of technology, computers can be used to generate images in a manner that makes it difficult to know the real object from the mediated image. This creates

an epistemological challenge as to what constitutes the real image. Does it now mean that what constitutes the real image depends on interpretation and the meaning given to it by the recipient? In this case, the role of multiple devices, modes of interpretation and the coding and decoding environment becomes a critical consideration for meaning-making of what is termed visual reality. This brings us to the issues of multimodality, multiculturalism and meaning-making.

6. Multimodality, Multiculturalism and Meaning-making

At the heart of the complexity that characterises the interrelationship between sound, music, visual culture and meaning-making - in a multicultural society, based on the use of multimodality - is the issue of communication encoding and decoding. Therefore, meaning and meaning-making become a huge epiphenomenon in unravelling human relationships, especially as most human interactions are intercultural or take place in a multicultural environment. To underscore how meaning is generated from the complex matrix of communication via sound, music and visual culture (all these are forms of communication), various scholars including Hall (1976), Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Schwartz (1994), and Vaknin (2005) provided frameworks to demonstrate their observations on how cultures influence communication and ultimately shape meaning from communication. For instance, Hall (1976) identified culture context classifications that influence communication meanings such as High Context Cultural environment and Low Context cultural environment. According to him High Context Cultural environments, experienced mostly in locations like Africa and Asia, are demonstratively *Collectivists* in their tendencies (Hofstede, 1980). On the other hand Low Context Cultural environments like in Western Europe and North America (excluding some sub populations) are demonstratively more *Individualistic* where words mean what they say. For instance – ‘shut the door’. Message is explicit and conveyed directly.

Duncum (2004) acknowledges that “There is no avoiding the multimodal nature of dominant and emerging cultural sites” (Duncum, 2004, p. 259); while as Kress (2000) argues that the use of combined modes to make meaning highlights the point that some other features, cultural background for instance, contribute to the meaning of the text. For Scott (1994), “pictures are not merely analogues to visual perception but symbolic artifacts constructed from the conventions of a particular culture”. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking--ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus, the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they talk the ‘same’ language. Cultures are invincible and ever changing as people of different languages and backgrounds come to a communication encounter with their sum life experiences which cause change in cultural profiles.

In the case of advertising, culture also influences how meaning is decoded from multimedia materials which include sound and music. For instance, Benetton’s advertising copy showing a black woman nursing a white baby won awards for its message of unity and equality in Europe. At the same time, the same advertisement copy stirred up controversy in the United

States because many believed it depicted a black nanny in a subordinate role as a slave (Foltz, 1998)). This is how culture influences the interpretation and meaning-making of advertising visual materials. De Mooij (2014) argues that it is a misconception to assume that visuals are universally understood across cultures. Pictures fit into the schemata people have, and schemata vary by culture. A picture, meant in one culture to be associated with freedom (e.g., a lion), may be known in another culture to represent strength. De Mooij went ahead to illustrate how a Benetton Volkswagen ads showed a black sheep in a flock in Italy in order to portray the VW Golf owner as an independent self-assured person, but the black sheep doesn't carry the same symbolism in many other cultures. De Mooij argued further that whereas a black sheep in Italy is the symbol of independence and authenticity, in some other culture it is a symbol of the outcast. The relationship between visual communication and culture is intricate and complex and requires multicultural communication skills to construct and decode it.

Pix/Illustration 1. Benetton VW Golf Ads



In Nigeria, there was a case of an advertising television visual tagged 'Mama Na Boy'. In 2003, a telecommunication company in Nigeria, MTN, planned to exploit the inheritance culture which exists in most Nigerian communities to leverage the sale of their data products. To achieve this, the company created a television commercial titled 'Mama Na Boy'. This is a pidgin

translation of ‘Mummy, it’s a baby boy’. In most Nigerian communities baby boys are considered sought after, because of an age-old socio-cultural Inheritance tradition that privileges a male child over and above a female child. The male child inherits the wealth of the father as the heir apparent.

‘Mama Na Boy’ story line was interesting. It is a TV commercial, which went viral, about a man whose wife delivered a baby boy and the man called the mother who was in the village market square to break the news. The mother got excited as she sang folk songs to attract the attention of the villagers or the community. There was an instant outburst of jubilation by the villagers because the new born baby was a preferred child – a baby boy. Initially, this ads spot was admired by the people because of its signification in relations to the preferred male child tradition. Later on, and on a deeper reflection, people began to criticise the ads spot for its discriminatory and sexist orientation. Civil rights activists labeled MTN a corporate rebel - moving against the tide of equality and non-discrimination of sexes. The company was persuaded by a wave of public opinion to withdraw the advert. This shows that the cultural ecology of discourse plays a big role in the decoding, interpretation or mean-making of that discourse. See video link here (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9srw0_j-V4)

Pix/Illustration 2: ‘Mama Na Boy’

The picture below shows the man in the hospital Delivery Ward with the nurse who must have broken the news of the new born male child to him, as we see him in a joyous mood with broad cheek smile.



Pix/Illustration 3: shows the man putting a call through to the mother to announce the arrival of a preferred child – a baby boy.



Pix/Illustration 4: Shows the mother taking the call from her son.



Pix/Illustration 5: Jubilation at the Village scene



Illustration five shows the mother in jubilation as she breaks the news about the birth of the male child to the village/community. Here also is a YouTube link to the advertising visual where sound, music and visual culture (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9srw0_j-V4)

In this case, the different modes and the multicultural environment of discourse influence meaning made of the text or discourse. So understanding the meaning of sound, music and visual culture against the background of the cultural ecology helps in decoding the messages and making appropriate meaning out of it. Consequently, to be able to interpret discourse or text generated by a combination of sound, music and visual culture in Nigeria consideration must be made of the multicultural environment in which the discourse or text is produced. The same discourse or text might be interpreted differently and meaning derived differently, depending on the cultural background in which the discourse is produced and decoded.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay supports the position that orality and visuality predates writing and literature even though the privileging of the visual over literature came under attack in the past. The essay also identifies the point that what is being experienced now is the comeback of the primacy of the visual over literature. It confirms that sound and music are key elements in the understanding of visual culture and hence have a connection if meaning must be made from

cultural sites. The author highlights the fact that the nature of visuals make the use of multimodality and multi-literacy a necessary tool for understanding meaning in a visually pervasive world. However, the essay questioned the possibility of meaning making in a visually dominant world when that which appeals to sight is difficult to know considering the philosophical questions of appearance and reality. The author concludes that images are mediated objects that find meaning in a polysemic fashion, hence the cultural ecology in which discourse, text or any other form of communication is constructed and deconstructed determines the meaning that would be made of the discourse.

So, in multicultural environment like Nigeria, content developers and managers – advertisers, advertising agencies, brand communicators, political communicators and others - must take cognisance of the influence and the role of the cultural environment while encoding or decoding their messages. Similar messages do not bear similar meanings. Meanings are made of messages depending on the cultural environment in which the meanings are decoded. So sound and music have a relationship with the visual culture. In a multicultural society meaning is derived by interpreting visual culture through multimodal techniques.

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