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Content Details:

<p>Abena Abokoma Asemanyi (Author) <i>University of Education</i></p>	<p>Social Media, Cultural Hybridity, and Ideology in Selected Ghanaian Produced Popular Advertisements</p>
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Abstract

This study fills the void of marginal attention given the considerations of a dual influence of hybridity and ideology in the portrayal of Ghanaian-produced advertisements on social media. The study seeks to: first, examine the dimensionality and discursive construction of hybridity and its ideological connotations of selected Ghanaian-produced advertisements; second, to interrogate audiences’ reception and perspectives on such hybrid content and the latter’s ideological constraints; and third, investigate factors that influence the construction and reception of the hybridized content. The study is hinged on the concept of hybridity as a post-colonial theory and the concept of ideology. The study is anchored on qualitative content analysis using social media ads collected from 10 companies selected from the top local and Global Marketing companies in Ghana (Ghana Club 100 ranking, 2022). In-depth interviews were conducted with some officials from the sampled companies and 10 selected postgraduate students of the University of Education, Winneba to find out the audience reception and perspectives on the advertisements. Data analysis revealed that all the social media advertisements consciously encoded hybrid materials in their content; second, that audiences lacked the sophisticated awareness of acknowledging the hybrid content embedded in the ads and third, it also showed a subtle ideological incorporation of the marks of post-colonialism. The study concludes that the regular utilization of hybrid content in Ghanaian advertisements has achieved permanence in media production and brand advertisements, more importantly; its acceptance by the local people has turned such social media products into an ideological imposition on audiences.

Keywords: Social media, advertisements, cross-cultural strategies, cultural hybridity, globalization, global markets, brands, marketing communication.

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Background to the study

The near ubiquitous presence of cyber media in contemporary society has many influences on individual experiences and social characterisation. For instance, advances in information and communication technologies have sought to deepen through cross-penetration through the flow of capital and ideas around the world. Simultaneously, these advances in communication have led to self-consciousness and social awareness about the structural imperatives of the globalisation process (Hoogvelt, 1997). However, reactions to foreign ideas and values carried across through mass communication and, especially newer digital and cyber spaces have had varying impact on individuals and groups. Using digital and cyber spaces as the emerging media for local response to foreign elements infiltrating the local culture may involve straddling different cultures and negotiation of differences which can lead to hybridity, a cultural action that accommodates in-betweens. Hybridity as a form of adaption is significantly facilitated through the flow of media texts and images (Ishak, 2011). However, the permanence utilization of a hybrid culture may become the way of life of a society or group whose dogmatic position may translate into an ideological imposition. In contemporary use of cyber spaces for advertisements, branding products as an outcome of hybridization has become the norm in digital ads to the extent of it assuming an ideology position.

Hybridity is a form of cultural intelligence which occurs as a result of negotiating the differences between local and foreign culture, this can also be understood as globalization. Hybridity is essentially a common theme in post-colonial discourse which explains cultural mixture and critiques cultural imperialism (Kraidy, 2002). Burk, (2009) observes that there is a tendency to either celebrate cultural hybridity particularly as emancipatory or to condemn it as ambivalent. Notwithstanding, hybridity as a concept has gained sufficient recognition and visibility in communication literature. It is a widely used concept in intercultural and international communication contexts mainly for describing local audience's reception of global media texts as sites of cultural mixture. Kraidy (2002) contends that rather than perceive hybridity as a mere description of local-global interactions, hybridity should be considered as a communicative practice with historical, socio-political and economic underpinnings.

The apparent prerequisite for hybridity is cross-cultural contact. This is because hybridity entails the fusion of previously distinct styles, forms and identities which may occur through physical movement or the movement of cultural commodities such as media programs. Mugu (2015) considers communication and transportation as the mainstays of globalised culture as a commendation for their role in cultural interaction which may lead to hybridity, but the former purveyor is the focus of this study. This is because there is hardly any society immune to the influence of foreign or alien cultural elements following the exchange of media texts across cultures and the transnational characterisation of media representations (Gentz & Kramer, 2006).

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The presence of foreign content in local media is no doubt shaping audiences' experiences through representation and cognitive processes of perception (Gentz & Kramer, 2006). The influence of foreign culture in local media particularly impacts audiences through consumerism which complicates local experiences, knowledge and traditions. Mugu (2015) views the power play between local and foreign culture in the media as a demonstration of adaption and dynamism which are both well-known characteristics of culture. As such, local tastes shape foreign culture in the media and foreign cultures also shape local experiences.

In an investigation of the negotiation of cultural differences in the Nigerian film industry, Onuzulike (2009) shows how cultural hybridity may be beneficial as suggested by Mugu (2015). In the observation of Onuzulike (2009), videos or films produced in Nigeria are attractive to Nigerians and other Africans in the Diaspora because such productions have elements of cultural hybridity. Onuzulike (2009) celebrates this form of hybridity and quipped that Nigerian cultural identities are preserved among Nigerians in the diaspora through such videos or films.

Advertising is another important site for hybridity as Martin (2014) points out that commercial advertisements of multinational corporations targeted at French nationals have both linguistic and cultural hybridity. Martin (2014) observes that messages, music and language disseminated through the media lead to the construction of hybrid identities among consumers. Media advertisements create idealistic representations to sell products. These media representations often include the use of transnational imagery for multicultural appeal. A simple act of inserting a stock photograph in a local newspaper advert for instance may give a different impression to local audience about the possibilities for their community. Television and film are even more powerful in this regard because of the repertoire of imagery, auditory and mechanical effects that can be employed to blur cultural and socio-political barriers (Martin, 2014).

However, hybridity in advertisement may be exploitative and it often is (Lorrente & Ruanni, 2014). Hybridity in advertisement also has implication for identity construction, but this is not necessarily transformative and emancipatory. Hybridity in advertisement is rather a third space for advancing specific economic agendas (Lorrente & Ruanni, 2014). This is contrary to the assertion of Onuzulike (2009).

In Ghana, some advertisements and other forms of mass communication may reinforce western ideals. The youth especially are developing new tastes for fashion, and lifestyles following combined force of post colonialism, globalisation and imperialism enhanced through mass media (Lule, 2012). Additionally, a longitudinal study of the content of selected Television stations in Ghana shows that there is high flow of global programs into the Ghanaian media landscape (Nuviadenu, 2005). The global or foreign content reported by Nuviadenu (2005) are in the form of news, sports, sit-com, soap/drama, and action/adventure. Suffice to say there is patent evidence of foreign elements in Ghanaian mainstream television and advertising. However, there is not

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much study on cultural hybridization in television advertisements and communicative practices of Ghanaian audiences towards such global and hybridised texts.

Problem Statement

Adverts are typically hybrid texts because they contain the language of social and political engagement and may involve the mixing of persuasive and narrative discourse. Advertisements may also contain imagery, descriptive language and slogans about the product, service or idea being advertised (Perucha, 2009).

Hybridity and its influences or audience reception is no longer a marginal area of inquiry in international and intercultural communication studies, but not much is known about the purposing of advertisement as sites of hybridity and its consequential ideological influences on audiences. Media researchers (Onuzulike 2009; Nuviadenu, 2005) investigating hybridity in the media tend to celebrate hybrid media texts as ripe sites for countering the subversion of local culture. For Kraidy (2007) such conclusions minimize the importance of structural issues because hybrid texts in the media are manifestations of historical, economic and socio-political factors that must not be overlooked. In an investigation of narrative discourse for the construction of advertisements as hybrid texts, Perucha (2009) reported that adverts are both persuasive and have ideological underpinnings which may lead to the construction of stereotypical personal identities. Ishak (2011) also suggests that although hybridity involves unequal power relations, hybridisations in cultural industries lead to the production of localised cultural commodities which are beneficial to subaltern groups. From the perspective of Ishak (2011) hybridity is commendable because it leads to the construction of new identities that are the results of the negotiation of cultural differences or in-between.

Studies (Onuzulike 2009; Perucha 2009; Ishak 2011) about media products as sites of hybridity seem to focus on the outcome of hybridity but have averted attention from the structural considerations that produce hybrid texts such as the economic considerations as suggested by Martin (2015). Studies on media as sites for hybridity fall short of situating hybrid text in their proper context for the disentanglement of the various links between communication practices and socio-economic dynamics. This is crucial because the hybrid media content such as television programs and advertisements have commercial considerations. Additionally, the increasing numbers of people defining themselves along lines of pluralistic attachments in Ghana's diverse cultural environment make it necessary for advertising research to assess the production and reception to hybridity in social media advertisement. Again, the emergence of cyberspaces as cultural product for the communication, the creation and maintenance of communities allows individual to engage in different forms of sociality. Advertisements on cyberspaces as means of providing information and directing product choices for audiences also becomes, ideologically, a form of controlling the choices individuals and communities make on cultural products.

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This study shall attempt to fill the void of marginal attention given the structural considerations that influence the hybridity and ideology in advertisement on cyberspaces. The proposal seeks first, to examine the dimensionality and discursive construction, in cyberspaces, of hybridity and ideological connotations of Ghanaian-produced social media advertisements; second, audiences perception and reception towards such cyberspace hybrid content and its ideological constraints; and third, the inquiry shall focus on the forms of hybridity that occur in advertisements on cyberspaces and the factors that influence the construction of such hybridized content.

Objectives of the study

This study, generally, sought to assess how Ghanaian-produced cyberspace advertisements function as sites for hybridity and ideological imposition. Specifically, the inquiry, using Ghanaian-produced cyberspace advertisements, sought to:

- i. Analyse the forms of hybridity that occur
- ii. Investigate the factors that influence the representation of hybridity
- iii. Examine audience perspective and reception of the hybridity content

Methodology

This study employed the qualitative research approach. Qualitative data are in the form of text, written words, phrases, or symbols describing or representing people, actions, and events in social life (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). The qualitative research approach also helps to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). This study sought to understand the hybridity and ideology in the cyber space advertisements, the qualitative approach helped to explore meanings embedded in the advertisements. Again, qualitative research seeks to identify, explore and explain the attitudes, actions and perceptions of people within a social setting and the meanings they make of their actions - without subjecting it to rigorous mathematical computations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Data was collected from audiences to understand their conceptualization of cyberspace adverts, their utilization and experience of the phenomenon, and their interpretations of the hybrid concepts and modalities employed. The interviews were analysed to determine the inductive and manifest meanings by building from the particular to the general themes, and subjecting the data collected to scholarly interpretations (Creswell, 2014). The purposive sampling technique was employed to select ten (10) companies from among the members of the Ghana Club 100 ranking for 2022(selected from both local and global markets). The purposive sampling strategy was again employed to obtain the cyberspace advertisements for analysis. The sample included 10 unique social media adverts from 10 companies in different sectors. This was sufficient for observing and analysing the forms of hybridity and ideology that occur in social media advertisements. The purposive sampling strategy was also used to identify 10 audiences of cyber space advertisements from among students of a selected university in Ghana (University of

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Education, Winneba). In that, first year Master of Communication and Media Studies were the respondents for the study. The purposive sampling technique was also employed to select producers willing to participate in the study; this helped to select one respondent from the team behind the production of each of the 10 selected adverts.

Data collection

For the purpose of this study, a cyber-mining approach was carried out on both YouTube and Facebook to collect data. 10 top advertising of the top 10 companies of the Ghana Club 100 on cyber space from both local and global markets (specifically, YouTube and Facebook) were downloaded and analysed. Data was also collected through face-to-face interviews.

Data Analysis

Textual Analysis was employed to analyse the data that is collected for this study. Textual Analysis is a data analysis for researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and sub-cultures make sense of who they are, how do they use the text to make sense of their lives, and how do they fit into the world in which they live. Through textual analysis, I made meaning of the most likely interpretations that could be made out of the text as embedded with hybrid and ideological content, and how audiences create their social realities in varying forms by accessing the adverts.

Findings and Conclusion

The data analysis for this study revealed that all the social media advertisements from the sampled companies consciously encoded hybrid materials in their advertisement in varying forms that included a utilization of local and external material, especially euro-western cultural materials to appeal and attract audiences to their brands. This they did by including content that was easy for the local consumers to relate to. Especially with contents that resonates with their cultural beliefs as well as with songs, settings and traditional clothing. The study also found out that audiences lacked the sophisticated awareness of acknowledging the hybrid content embedded in the ads and had unconsciously assumed, received, appropriated and consumed the contents of the ads as originating from the local culture devoid of eternal incorporations. The research findings also showed a subtle ideological incorporation of the marks of post-colonialism, gender, history, religion, tradition, as part of the dominant frames through which hybrid contents are portrayed and that such ideological lines of portrayals in the advertisements persuaded, reproduced and maintained audiences leading them to unconsciously and regularly appropriate and consume the advertised brands. The interviews also revealed that companies incorporated the hybridisation and adaptation concept within the social media advertisements as a niche to attract diverse audiences to their brands. However, both officials and audience participants showed a lack of awareness on how ideology as a latent factor positively affected brand appropriation and consumption.

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