

ADAPTATION OF NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL POTTERY PATTERNS AND MOTIFS FOR VISUAL DESIGN

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Abstract

This study attempts to synergise patterns and motifs on Nigerian traditional pottery into the surface texture of visual design with the aim of creating aesthetic “feel” with cultural influences to trigger cultural renaissance in visual design. Apparently, visual design tends to reflect dynamism by exploring ingenious and creative interface platform which ingrains the communicated information in the mind of the audience and consumers. Patterns and motifs are elements of aesthetics that are effective in attracting public attention. Cultural patterns can be blended into texture layers of design to give life into visual design with subtle elegance and style depending on the versatility of the graphic designer. The study is experimental by synthesizing some selected motifs and patterns adorning pottery motifs and patterns into prototype visual designs. Consumers perception was sought as regard the relevance of the incorporated patterns and its influence in appealing the instinct of design consumers. One hundred and thirty (130) students of Ahmadu Bello University were randomly selected as the sampled population of study and it was found out that consumers are often triggered to make consumption choices based on cultural affinities. It was therefore recommended for graphic designers and brand managers to endeavour to incorporate design elements influenced by cultural inclinations in to the visual content of their brands.

Introduction

Contemporary trends in visual design concepts are reflective of environmental influences. The conception and development of graphics design visuals are targeted at eliciting corresponding response from its consumers. People tend to be receptive to information design that explores elements of their socio-cultural inclinations. These factors are considerably captured especially in advertising campaigns designs. Patterns and textures make the actual surface of designs. They constitute the visual appearance of designs which audience can easily feel and appreciate. Rich layered patterns in design textures are medium of cultural interactivity in designs.

Pottery is believed to be one of the oldest surviving crafts ever practiced by man right from the earliest times to the present day (Agberia 1996). Pottery forms are produced by a combination of hand-building techniques

comprising of pinching, coiling, slabbing and moulding methods. Modern technology had however enabled the production of symmetrically balanced pottery to be achieved through mechanical and electrical processes with the aid of machines such as Throwing Wheels and Jigger-Jolly while a mass production of identical pottery forms are achievable through casting technique.

According to Okunna and Umunna (2009), the hand-building techniques mentioned above are basic to pottery making and therefore account for the universal similarities in pottery forms whereas differences in structural forms may be accounted for by differences in ethnic and cultural origin. As there appears to have been no culture or civilization in which pottery has not been used, there is bound to also be variations in decorative styles as well as in motifs. This assertion is equally of Nigeria where different communities and cultures have used pottery for different purposes

ranging from domestic to religious and commercial thereby producing pottery works with varying decorative designs, patterns as well as motifs.

Pottery has always been embellished with design patterns since time memorial. Pottery, also called ceramics or ceramic art - the creation of objects, mainly cooking or storage vessels, made out of clay and then hardened by heat - was the first functional art to emerge during the Upper Paleolithic age, after body painting. The earliest form was Chinese Pottery, which first appeared in Jiangxi, to the south of the Yangzi River basin. Like cave painting, as well as other types of prehistoric art, the invention and development of pottery is a reflection of social, economic and environmental conditions - many of which are still poorly understood - and a significant indicator of a society's cultural development (visual-arts-cork.com). Early potteries were significantly utilized for cooking and consumption of food. However, with the invention of the potter's wheel in Mesopotamia, between the 6th and 4th millennium BC, demand for the utilitarian wares such as storage jars for oil, water, wine, and grain, as well as bowls, cups, and mugs were so high that potters needed to increase production (Novin G, 2014).

Pottery functions as a vital utilitarian object of value across civilizations and societies. Cultural patterns and motifs are embellished on pottery, textiles, carved or painted wood, leather works, jewelry, amulets, and tattoos. Algeria's Kabyle women paint with their fingers on pottery and upon the walls of their village homes; many of their shapes and symbols have a marked resemblance to Neolithic pottery found in the region. These signs are symbols are believed to carry healing qualities or to embody magical attributes that guard against misfortune and the evil eye, these signs and symbols assume new forms and meanings in contemporary art (Salawa, 2004). Pottery surface reflects the richness in the cultural inclinations of people and traditions. According to Huffman (1980), ceramic style is complex; it can represent the repetitive code of cultural symbols in the larger, designed field, and can be used to recognize groups of people in the archaeological record". Egypt is sometimes credited with having produced the earliest

examples, in painting on glass, there is no doubt that luster was first employed on a large scale for ceramic decoration in Baghdad and Samarra (Enrst, n.d). Ahmed Cherkaoui one of the foremost abstract artists in Morocco, combines the repetitive Islamic style with abstract signs and symbols, and uses bright colors of greens, red, blue, and yellow to contrast with the white background (Mikdadi, 2015). Mikdadi (2015) further posited that similar brilliant colors are used by many self-taught artists of the Maghrib, now considered to have produced the most accomplished naive art in the twentieth century. The influences of pottery decorations in some African societies are cosmological and sometimes reflect social metaphor. According Nangendo (1994) decorations on (Kwura) pots from Western Kenya gives character, an undecorated pot, indicate "weakness, loses its soul, spirit, durability and shape". It is apparent that pottery patterns are essential in externalizing the cultural identity of a particular set of people. Patterns enhance the aesthetic appeal of pottery thereby enabling its usage. It is often assumed that what is beautiful is usable.

The earliest examples of pottery making in Nigeria were found in Afikpo in Ebonyi State. A British archaeologist of renown, Professor Thurstan – Shaw was known to have excavated some material remains of pottery at Iwo-Eleru in Yoruba land which were older, the same is true with ritual pottery at Igbo-Ukwu in Igbo land which he also excavated in company with some National Museum professionals (Vanguard 2011). Pottery is an ancient craft which is still being practiced in most parts of Nigeria and enjoys enormous patronage in the market. This is simply a vindication of utilitarian purposes and economic significant of this local craft. In Nigeria like any other African countries where this craft flourishes, pottery seems to function beyond domestic purposes. Surface embellishment of pottery reflects the traditional signs and symbols of the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. The tradition of the Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria finds expression in their local their local crafts. This same tradition applies to other tribes in Nigeria. In essence potteries are medium of showcasing and communicating the richness of these cultures and traditions. Indigenous signs and symbols are designed into motifs

which form repeated patterns in decorating both inner and outer surfaces of local potteries. Decoration varies from one ethnic group to another or from one area to another or from one potter to the other, to show – case the culture of the area or tribe. Thus, the patterns of decoration of pottery at Afikpo in Ebonyi state are different from the patterns of pottery at Ilorin in Kwara State or Gwari in Niger State (Vanguard 2010).

Visual Design

Geometric patterns when used correctly can be highly flexible, visually effective and in some cases, very functional. You can use them to bring vibrancy and life to your designs or a softer elegance and style to them. Texture surfaces of trendy design are effective and functional; these elements accentuate vibrancy in visual designs. Bold patterns resonates aesthetics and visually effective in grabbing public attention. These elements infuse life into visual design with subtle elegance and style depending on the versatility of the graphic designer. Patterns are intrinsic in graphic design and they constitute the outlook of indoor and outdoor designs around. Stribley (2015) noted that patterns are used in a variety of ways, such as to organize, connect or separate elements and content use three simple but different geometric patterns and colours to create diverse, fresh and beautiful cards that look great alone and even better together. Motifs on local pottery in Nigeria are geometry in shape, sometimes curvy, and fascinating. Motif represents cultural identities create movement, provide depth or texture,

Geometric patterns when used correctly can be highly flexible, visually effective and in some cases, very functional (Stribley, 2015). Rhythm in the arrangement of motif patterns on visual designs enliven the mood and message of the disseminated information in the mind of the target audience. Motifs can be soft, curved, rounded, angled or sharp, and the appearance elicits emotional responses to the brand.

Methodology

The study adopted exploratory and experimental methods in its design approach. Some Nigerian pots embellished with traditional patterns were sourced online out of which four (4) were selected at random.

Similarly, visual designs of known household products in Nigeria were chosen on random to be redesigned with cultural patterns from the selected pots. Images of these pots were exported into CorelDraw graphics package then the patterns were traced using the 'bezier' tool in the tool box to achieve outlined shapes similar to that of the patterns on the potteries. Then the shapes were thickened by clicking on the respective shapes and increasing the point on the outline tool in the tool box.

The texture of this design seems to be busy (See Plates 1-4), but the pattern is visually effective and enables a sense of balance in the design. This design also showcases the value of geometric bold patterns in enlivening images of products when creatively integrated into visual designs. Considering the repeating floor effects of this pattern, the cultural patterns create a depth of layers similar to that of the original design. In fact the flexibility and dynamism resonated in the arrangement of this pattern makes the brand design ingenious. Compositions of this pattern include irregular curvy shapes and lines. Patterns elegantly blend with the splash effect and background colours. This pattern gives a touch of vibrancy by adding spice to the visual design. Vivid mirror effect of patterns makes the design fascinating and enhances the "feel" of the brand.

Roundish zigzag shape of this pattern (See Plate 4) enables its suitability for adaptation into this design. The simplicity and consistency demonstrated in the placement of the pattern gives a replica of the palm tree bark which is expressive in this brand image. Certainly, the subtle visibility of this pattern does not allow for an unnecessary clutter of the design space. The visual piece is classy and distinct.

Design adaptation

These outlined shapes were integrated into the surface texture design of the house hold products to enhance its brands. Interactive transparency tool in the tool box was handy in adapting patterns into the brand designs. Four (4) popular house products were also selected for this purpose. The products are Cadbury Bournvita (See Plate 5), Oral B toothpaste (Plate 6), Coca-Cola soft drink (Plate 7) and Peak milk (Plate 8). Interactive transparency

tool in the tool box was handy adapting patterns into the brand designs.

The perceptions of consumers who are the target audience of these designs were sought through a close questionnaire. Respondents were selected randomly based on their prior exposure to the visual designs of these brands. Population of respondents was one hundred and thirty (130) students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. They were 70 males and 60 females. The visual designs were shown to the respondents and their opinions were sought thereafter.

Discussions of Findings

Question 1: Can you relate with these designs?

This question sought to know if the respondents had prior familiarization with the visual design of these brands. All the respondents 130 (100%) (See Table 1) are conversant with the brand the designs. This indicated that they fit to be the sample population of this study.

Question 2: Are you impressed with the cultural contents of the visual design?

The outcome of this feedback survey shows that a reasonable number of the respondents are impressed with the cultural "feel" of the visual designs. 83(63.8%) chose Yes while 47(36.2%) chose No. This is a reflection of the dynamisms resonated in the design synthesis.

Question 3: Do the pottery patterns enhance the brand design aesthetics?

On the aesthetic influence of the patterns, 71 respondents (54.6%) agreed that infused pottery patterns enhance the brands visual design while 60(46.2%) disagreed. This outcome could be attributed to the fact that some of the respondents are not used to seeing patterns in brand visual design. However majority of respondent asserted the pottery patterns.

Question 4: Does the integrated element cultural improve your perception of these brands?

When asked if the integrated cultural element improves your perception of these brands 87 (66.9%) were in the affirmation while 43 (33.1) disagree. This result proves that consumers are emotive to the visual design that targets their cultural inclinations.

Question 5: Are you encouraged to patronize these items based on the cultural "feel" of their brand designs?

75 respondents (57.7%) agreed to patronize these items based on the cultural content in their brand designs while 55(42.3%) would not be influenced by any cultural content. This shows that brand managers can improve the patronage of their products when cultural elements are creatively synergized in to the background texture of their brands' visual design.

Conclusion

This study has shown that cultural patterns are creative aesthetics elements in creating stunning visual design. Cultural patterns are bold, striking and sensational elements in visual design. They are strong in enhancing design contents with the simplicity of shape and effective in eliciting positive responses from the target audience. It is therefore recommended for graphic designers and brand managers to incorporate design elements influenced by cultural inclination into the visual contents of their brands. Consumers of are often triggered to make consumption choice based on their societal affinities. When brand visual identities find expression in the richness of cultural patterns they are poised to becoming household brands which the society can relate with. Visual designs represent viable medium of communicating the dynamism and versatility innate in Nigeria's cultural expression to the global audience. Hence, graphic designers have the mandate of leveraging on professionalism when interpreting and integrating cultural patterns into designs for it to be modern in look and feel.

Table 1: Presentation of Raw Data and Analysis

S/N	Questions	Yes		No	
			%		%
		130	100	0	0
1	Can you relate with these designs?				
2	Are you impressed with the cultural contents of the visual design?	83	63.8	47	36.2
3	Do the pottery patterns enhance the brand design aesthetics?	71	54.6	59	45.4
4	Do the integrated cultural elements improve your perception of these brands?	87	66.9	43	33.1
5	Are you encouraged to patronize these items based on the cultural “feel” of their brand designs?	75	57.7	55	42.3



Plate1: Bowl (Tara People of Wuyo, Nigeria)
Source: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com>

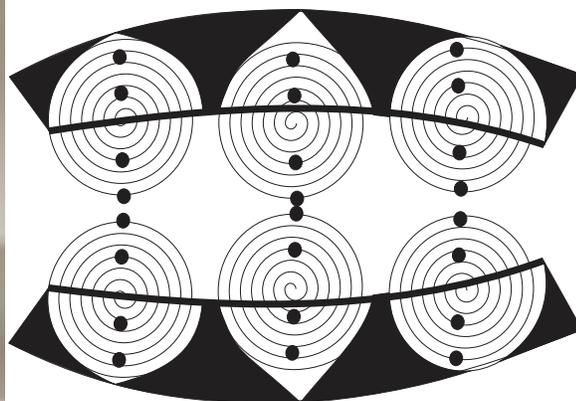


Plate2: Typical Nigerian pot
Source: <http://www.veniceclayartist.com>



Plate 3: Udu pot
Source: www.drumdojo.com

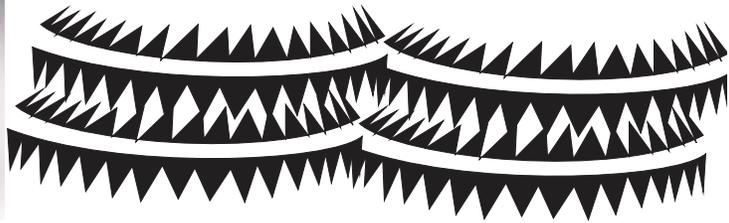


Plate 4: Igala pot
Source: <https://s-media-cache-ak.pinimg.com>



Plate 5: Bournvita adapted design



Plate 6: Oral B adapted design



Plate 7: Coca-Cola adapted design



Plate 8: Peak Milk adapted design

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