Journalists’ perception of the communicativeness of selected Nigerian hip-hop contemporary songs: A Port Harcourt City survey

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This study sought to ascertain the communicativeness of some top Nigerian hip-hop songs, as perceived by journalists practicing in Port Harcourt, bearing in mind the fact that music is a form of expressive communication. The study design was predominantly survey. Out of a population of 420, a sample size of 197 was drawn at a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5 using the sample size calculator. The questionnaire was the primary research instrument and it comprised 10 closed-ended and 6 open-ended questions. Administration of the questionnaire was through Research Assistants. The hit songs studied were purposively selected based on their popularity as manifested in the frequency and consistency of play in social gatherings. The consistency test of reliability showed a cumulative score of 81% and analysis was done using simple percentage and weighted mean score. For the hit songs under review, findings revealed a preponderance of rhythm over lyrics. Data further revealed that respondents could hardly tell the central themes/messages that underlie these hit songs. It was therefore recommended that the Nigerian hip-hop genre should be used to express ideals on cognate socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic issues with a view to providing a platform for concerted advocacy.

Key words: Communicativeness, hip-hop, journalists, music, themes.

INTRODUCTION

Communication has been described as an integral aspect of human existence. Central to the definition of communication is sharing. Meanings and ideas underlie the notion of communication. The imputation therefore is that meaning is shared in the process of communication. Meaning in this regard assumes the form of an end product of interaction among interactants. Viewed from the social system parameters, communication manifests as a social process through which human beings are able to interact in a meaningful way within a system of shared values. In practical terms, communication to occur both a source and a receiver are...
needed and for the communication to be human, either the source or the receiver must be a person.

DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) have pointed out that there are two critical reasons why it is necessary to understand the process of communication:

...First, mass communication depends upon the basic principles of human communication and secondly, the communication process is fundamental to all our psychological and social processes (p.115).

Communication as a process is complex because it contains so many variables. Among these variables are the many aspects of human personality that each person brings to the encounter, the diverse forms that messages can take, the various channels that a message can use and the influence of the context and environment on communication. The communication process involves sending, receiving and interpreting stimuli embellished in interactions among many elements.

The concepts of communication and culture go hand in hand. Communication in this context functionally serves as the vehicle for expressing the cultural norms of a society on the one hand and on the other hand as a purveyor and custodian of culture. Central to this is the perspective of viewing communication as the expression of cultural heritage bearing in mind that meanings are products of culturally agreed upon symbols.

McQuail (2010) in the foregoing context notes that:

The most general and essential attribute of culture is communication since cultures could not develop, serve, and extend and generally succeed without communication. Finally, in order to study culture we need to be able to recognize and locate it and essentially, there are three places to look: in people, in things (text, artifacts) and in human practices (p.119).

This is where music comes in. Music is an inseparable aspect of human communication as well as culture. Music according to the Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary is the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in a combination and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity. In order for music to be in a position to express something, Garavaglia (2012) notes that a communicative process must be established. According to him, in this way,

The creator of a certain type of music (generally, but not exclusively, the composer), delivers through a process (the musical performance, meant here in a broad and generic way), a musical discourse containing the main intentions, which will be finally perceived by a human recipient (p.114).

McQuail (2010) further notes that while “the cultural significance of music has received sporadic attention, its relationship to social and political events has been recognized and occasionally celebrated or feared” (p.38).

The imputation however is that music provides a peep into the culture of a people. Within the past decade, however, the Nigerian music industry has grown in leaps and bounds. The Nigerian hip-hop genre has no doubt been the most prominent on a scale of hierarchical value. Since culture finds its expression through communication, music which is an aspect of culture should equally be expressive.

Music and songs emanating from a socio-cultural system must in the simplest instance express the sensibilities and ideals of the people. Music being a form of expressive communication must in composition demonstrate the propensities of communication from a synthesis of the foregoing.

This study therefore provides a peep into the communicativeness of some top hit Nigerian hip-hop songs as perceived by journalists practicing in Port Harcourt using the expressive ideals of music as corner stones.

**Statement of the problem**

Music is a form of expressive communication. What this means therefore is that underlying the bowels of music must be a central theme or ideology. As an integral aspect of culture, it must hold a veritable insight into the cultural dynamics of a people.

Bennett (2000) as cited by Matiniello and Lafleur (2012) notes that:

Musicologists look for meaning in the musical text, melodies and rhythmic passages. Ethnomusicologists phrase the issue in slightly different terms: music has to be studied as a human practice that takes place in a specific cultural context. For cultural theorists and sociologists, the meaning of music is a product of its reception and appropriation by audiences (p.181-182).

Distinguishing between the prescriptive and the self denying role of music within the context in which it is played, Stokes (1994) notes that “music provides a means by which people recognize identities and places and boundaries which separate them” (p.5). As further explained by Martiniello and Lafleur (2012 ), people use music not only to locate themselves in a particular social context but also to preconceive knowledge about other people and places.

When viewed against diverse considerations, music besides financial gratifications for the artiste must hold an ideological significance for its socio-cultural community. This ideological significance no doubt falls within the purview of communication ideals.

In the skyline of Nigerian music industry today, the hip-
hop genre seems to be the most pervasive and prolific. The problem of this study is therefore premised on the framework of “expression of concerns” as a communication phenomenon.

By implication, therefore, the thrust of this study revolves around the need to ascertain if contemporary Nigerian hip-hop songs (music) provide an expression into the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu. Communication in every sense underscores that expression. To this end, therefore, the widespread communicativeness of Nigerian hip-hop songs within the sphere of the Nigerian socio-cultural dynamics becomes the primary concern of this study, with journalists as the focus group.

Objectives

The focus of this study is on expression of concerns within a socio-cultural context using music as a communication form. It is in the light of the foregoing that this study serves to:

1. Ascertain how well Nigerian hip-hop songs convey central themes or ideologies that provide insight into the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu through lyrics.
2. Evaluate within the communication framework of sharing if these central themes or ideologies hold comprehensibility for a large spectrum of people as perceived by journalists.

LITERATURE REVIEW – MUSIC AS A FORM OF EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION

Music is a fundamental channel of communication. It provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings (Hargreaves et al., 2005). They further note that highly informational structures and contents can be communicated extremely and rapidly between people. According to them:

Music is something we do with and for other people and through which its communicative properties can provide a vital lifeline of human interaction for those whose special needs make other means of communication difficult (p.1)

Cross (2005) explicates this further. In his analogy, model of communication, “one can think of the sender as the performer, the receiver as the listener, the channel as the air and the information transmitted as the sonic patterns that constitute the music” (p.28).
Ploggner and Hill (2005), within the context of musicology, note that:

it is possible to master technical skills while lacking in communicative skills and vice versa because these skills have very little to do with each other. Today, musical mastery is often measured by the former skills not the latter, yet the greatest musicians are those who are highly skilled in both crafts (p.2).

Sense and meaning according to them come from grouping words and notes into meaningful phrases or gestures. Each note or word must be executed to emphasize the grammatical sense or musical meaning.

Anderson (2013) opines that music is “good when it creates meaning for the listener. Music is good when it allows its listeners to react; music is good when a listener can interpret the song” (para.3).

Sharma (2013) in corroboration notes that “in the field of communication, music is considered as one of the most universal of all arts because it works as a daily medicine constantly aiding for better communication with others and ourselves” (p.1). In terms of functionality, Sharma (2013) further notes that:

Music not only functions as emotional expressions, aesthetic satisfaction and symbolic representations of innermost feelings but also contributes in the continuity and stability of cultures and integrity of human society … words are wonderful enough but music is even more wonderful. It speaks not to our thoughts as words do, it speaks to our hearts and spirits to the very core and root of our souls (p.2).

Ethno-communicologists have according to Ball (2010) documented an abundance of social functions of music. As noted in this context, “music expresses emotion, induces pleasure, accompanies dance, validates rituals and promotes social stability” (p.11). As a vehicle of communication, he further observes that:

Music can be a vehicle for communication sometimes with exquisite precision. The talking drums of African cultures are legendary and may be used to convey quite specific information to intricate codes almost like Morse which seem to be tied to the pitch structure of African tonal languages. Villagers might burst into laughter during a xylophone performance as the musician uses his instrument to make a joke about a particular member of the tribe. Everyone gets it except sometimes the butt (p.12).

In an ideal sense, the communicativeness of music has never been and can never be in doubt. Justifiably so, Hindemith (nd) as cited by Ball (2010) espouses that “music that has nothing else as its purpose should neither be written nor be used” (p.2).

Omojola (1989) in the same vein notes that “in addition to its aesthetic qualities, musical performance can transmit extra musical messages” (p.2). According to him,
**Table 1. Research clusters.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zones</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Town and Old GRA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Trans-Amadi, Woji and Elelenwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Old GRA D/Line and Rumeme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Ozuoba, Choba and Rumuosi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“this belief is based on the position that the factors which govern the selection and the ordering of structural elements (melody, rhythm) of a piece may be related cultural values which often transcend musical considerations. Thus as a means of communication, the meaning which resides in it may operate beyond the purely structural” (p.2).

In the genre of hip-hop, Westbrook (2002), as cited in Ajayi and Filani (2015), describe hip-hop as;

the artistic response to oppression. A way of expression in dance, music, word/song. A culture that thrives on creativity and nostalgia. As a musical art form, it composes stories of inner city life often with a message spoken over beats of music (p.128).

The imputation from the foregoing is that the central theme in hip-hop songs should be to fight against oppression as well as other vices in the society. Hart (2009) in tracing the history of hip-hop cites George (1998) and notes that this genre of music emerged as an extension of disco, Jamaican "dub", rock and R&B while rapping emerged from MC’s work who would talk over the music as DJ’s fused the various music genres for the crowd to dance. In an introspective description, Emielu (2006) sees African pop music and musicians as parodies of American and European practices. According to him, Economic considerations are at the root of the ever changing face of popular music in Africa and African music is fast losing its soul in a global environment. While Africans cannot be on lookers in the 21st century, there is the need to caution that African music and musicians must not sacrifice the African cultural identity on the altar of globalization and capitalism (p.33).

How the foregoing has played out in contemporary times is a yawning gap that only empirical studies can fill. This study therefore dovetails within that purview.

**METHODOLOGY**

Survey was considered most appropriate for this study based on demographic parameters. Survey according to Ohaja (2009) “is a study of the characteristics of a sample through questioning that enables a researcher to make generalizations concerning his population of interest” (p.11). The justification for this choice is however hinged on its ability to generate data that border on opinion and attitude.

The registered members of the Rivers state branch of Nigeria union of journalists (NUJ) constituted the population of this study. Records from the secretariat in Port Harcourt, stands the population at four hundred and twenty (Okon, 2014, p.100). Out of this, a sample size of 197 was drawn, at a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5 using the sample size calculator (an online software – www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html).

The sampling technique adopted was the cluster. This technique enabled the researcher to divide Port Harcourt metropolis into four zones. This however manifested in the form of multi-stage sampling. Babbie (2001) in this regard notes that to help control sampling errors, it is best to use small areas or clusters both to decrease the number of elements in each cluster and to maximize the number of clusters selected. The breakdown of clusters is shown in Table 1.

The predominant instrument was the questionnaire. The questionnaire transcribed the central theme of some of the hit songs so as to aid recall. The instrument comprised sixteen (16) items. Out of this, 10 were closed-ended while 6 were open-ended. Administration of the instrument was through five Research Assistants. The hit songs studied were purposively selected based on their popularity as manifested in the frequency and consistency of play in parties as well as other social gatherings. Reliability on the other hand was done using Cronbach’s alpha as symbolized below:

\[
\alpha = \frac{N \cdot E}{V + (N-1) \cdot \bar{C}}
\]

Where \(N\) = number of items
\(E\) = bar = average inter-item covariance among the items
\(V\) – bar = the average variance

Consistency test showed a cumulative score of 81%. This was considered highly significant.

Presentation of data was done in tables while analysis was done using simple percentage and weighted mean score (WMS) based on a five point Likert scale. The score of 3.00 was used as the criterion for decision. To this end, any mean response which is equal to or more than 3.00 was deemed positive while any mean response less than 3.00 was considered negative.

**Data presentation**

Out of the one hundred and ninety seven (197) copies of the questionnaire distributed, one thirty two (132) were retrieved thereby showing an 88% response rate. This was considered very significant and thus held validity for the responses (Table 2).

First these songs were transcribed and played for the respondents by the Research Assistants. However, the above listed songs are the songs under review. Respondents were asked if they have at one time or the other heard any of them. The responses so elicited show that they have. The proclivity towa the other hand was done using Cronbach’s alpha as symbolized below:

The status of Shoki by Orasi, Skelewu by Davido and Dorobucci by the Marvin’s crew was not in doubt as revealed by the data on Table 3. Knowing that listening requires some degree of attention, respondents were asked if they have ever taken out time to listen to the lyrics of these songs. Table 4 has the details.

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Respondents affirm that they could hardly tell the central themes/message that underlie these songs in the course of listening to them. More so, they affirmed that the rhythm of these
Table 2. Awareness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of response</th>
<th>Responses in mean scores</th>
<th>WMS</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 7: I have heard the underlisted Nigerian hip-hop songs:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Shoki by Orasi</td>
<td>500 136 60 20 10</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Skelewu by Davido</td>
<td>470 160 78 28 0</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Dorobucci by the Marvin’s crew</td>
<td>550 120 60 16 6</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Their status as hit songs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of response</th>
<th>Responses in mean scores</th>
<th>WMS</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 8: These are hit songs often played at social gatherings like birthday parties, weddings, child dedication, anniversary events etc</td>
<td>525 128 51 20 0</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Listenership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of response</th>
<th>Responses in mean scores</th>
<th>WMS</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 9: I have occasionally listened to these songs with rapt attention but can hardly tell their central theme/message.</td>
<td>460 108 90 20 15</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10: Their rhythm/beat seem to overshadow their lyrics</td>
<td>515 136 51 20 10</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Central words/meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of response</th>
<th>Responses in mean scores</th>
<th>WMS</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 11: The central words – Shoki, Skelewu and Dorobucci – do not seem to hold clear cut meanings to me.</td>
<td>545 100 45 20 20</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12: The composition of the songs do not follow an ideological sequence so as to convey an idea that one can relate to.</td>
<td>490 104 66 20 18</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>Affirm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Ideal nature of music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of response</th>
<th>Responses in mean scores</th>
<th>WMS</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 14: Music should be all about dance but meaning</td>
<td>80 80 114 60 70</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

songs seems to overshadow their lyrics. Explication was further given in Table 5. The data above show that the central words – Shoki, Skelewu and Dorobucci – as used in those songs do not convey a central meaning. It was further averred by respondents that the composition of the songs did not follow an ideological sequence that allowed for the central theme to be conveyed. The character and nature of these songs were further analyzed and presented. Table 6 shows the details.

Meta analysis revealed an overwhelming tilt in favour of music not just being all about dance. Respondents are of the view that music should besides the rhythmic beat, convey meaning.

Respondents affirmed that these songs hold appeal for them because of their beat and not the lack of a central message in their lyrics (Table 7).

DISCUSSION

It is not in doubt that the Nigerian hip-hop has within the past decade become very popular. Its popularity is further evidenced by the fact that the findings of the study
revealed that they are often played in social gatherings like wedding, birthday parties etc, with a weighted mean score (WMS) of 4.16 on a 5.00 scale. For the hit songs under review, data revealed a preponderance of rhythm over lyrics. Data on table 3 showed that respondents could hardly tell the central themes/messages that underlie these hit songs. When placed within the purview of communication, especially the semantic perspective of sharing, it becomes even more glaring that these songs may not be considered communicative in terms of meaning. This however tends to align with Emielu’s (2006) notion that “there is the need to caution that African music and musicians must not sacrifice the African cultural identity on the altar of globalization and capitalism” (p.33).

The implication however is that these songs do not in any way carry “soul quality”. Findings further revealed that the central words – Shoki, Skelewu, and Dorobucci-as used in these songs do not convey a central meaning. This no doubt may be routed to the issue of composition (Figure 1).

In analyzing the hip-hop genre, Okafor (2005) and Agu (2008) as cited by Forchu (2013) posit that “song texts are more important and influential than other aspects of music” (p.59). Viewed against this backdrop, it therefore becomes even more glaring that the songs under review have failed to communicate a central message.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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