

Trends and Dynamics of Popular Culture and Media Messages on Public Transport Literature in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The study of popular culture and media messages on public transport in Nigeria reveals an intriguing intersection between mass communication, social behavior, and the broader cultural dynamics of the country. Public transport systems in Nigeria, ranging from buses (Danfo), taxis, to larger interstate vehicles (like the ones operated by companies such as Peace Mass Transit), serve as crucial spaces where various media messages, social trends, and cultural practices converge. The development of cars has radically transformed and revolutionized road transport system and affected the medium, channel, pattern and direction of mass communication, especially in Africa, Asia, North America, and South America where public transport vehicles are used as channels of advertisement, cultural communication, identity construction, and social reflection. This paper utilised secondary data to interrogate the trends and dynamics of popular culture and media messages on public transport literature in Nigeria. The paper adopted the Cultural Populism Theory. The theory represents activists' opposition to the ways in which dominant forces in capitalist society shape people's behaviour and ways of thinking. The literature on the trends and dynamics of popular culture and media messages on public transport in Nigeria demonstrates the importance of this seemingly mundane space as a site of cultural production, socialization, and political discourse.

Keywords:

Dynamics; Literature; Media Messages; Popular Culture; Public Transport and Trends

I. Introduction

Culture of transport literature which involves the practice of writing visual messages on public transport vehicles is very common in South Asian countries especially India, Nepal and Pakistan. Public transport vehicles present an entirely different insight into life by their visual messages which reflect the feelings, beliefs and social history of the vehicles' owner or driver. For example, in India there is a popular culture of writing textual and visual messages on public transport vehicles. Some of these messages are basically alert to the approaching vehicles, some are creative and others are philosophical. Santosh (2009) argued that Indian public transport drivers or owners reflect a healthy sense of patriotism and social responsibility through their various messages. He identified some of the most popular road literature on Indian public transport vehicles: Horn Please, Slow-down, Genius It Is Just a Journey, A Father's Pride, Use Dipper at Night, Truckers are Unfailingly Polite, Always have a Friend, See You Later, True Bride Earns the Love of Her Beloved (Santosh in Ya'u, 2016).

Ya'u (2016) observed that Nepal is one of the South Asian countries where road literature is flourishing. Almost all commercial vehicles are inscribed with either visual message which in Featherstone and Urray's (2005) view reflects creativity, pride, ideology, romance, philosophy, social responsibility, etc. Some of the messages on public transport

vehicles in Nepal include; King of the Road, Road Hero, Road Life, RoadStar, Love is Life, Wait for Signal, Keep Peace in Nepal and Please Smile.

Moreover, in Pakistan, Elias (2011) noticed that messages on public transport vehicles are established culture. Vehicles are painted with colourful floral pattern and creative depiction of heroes with calligraphy of poetic verses. The vehicles are considered as moving art, jingle art, and a means of social communication. The pattern and style of message carried by a vehicle is a factor of the geographical region and particular socio-economic history or identity of its driver or owner. Elias (2011) studied and analysed the painted trucks in Pakistan and argued that although road literature exists in South America, Asia and Africa, nowhere are the messages as elaborate and ubiquitous as they are in Pakistan. He observed that the messages are humorous, religious, creative and aesthetic.

Scholars like Klaeger (2009) and Ya'u (2016) argued that public transport messages are so appealing and captivating to the extent that scholars, journalists and even casual observers have tried their analytical skills on them. For example, Lawuyi (1988) used interpretative approach to study the world of Yoruba Taxi Driver in Nigeria and Burke (1996) did a similar study in Brazil and Van-Der-Geest (2009) studied lorry inscriptions in Ghana. These scholars conducted their studies by discussing the contextual meaning of the texts with either the drivers or the owners of the vehicles and the readers. Dan-Asabe in Ya'u (2016) maintained that transportation is one of the most popular economic activities engaged mainly by young and old men in Nigeria. The development and expansion of the road network, according to him is an important component of this development.

Since the middle of the 19th century automobiles have become a central feature in the African road transport system and by implication the entire African culture. This is probably the reason why Kopytoff in Aondover et al., (2023) advocated for anthropological research into the meaning of car in Africa. He observed that what originated in Western culture had become too visible in other settings; schools, hospitals, factories, electronics and cars. He concluded that an anthropological study will reveal the extent to which these phenomena have assumed exotic features in new contexts and are subjected to profound cultural reinterpretation.

Bunza in Aondover et al., (2023) observed that in Africa, South America and South Asia a newly bought commercial vehicle is usually taken to a folk-artist to inscribe a textual or visual message on it. Some of these messages are commissioned by the vehicle owner or driver and in some cases the artists are given the freehand to inscribe the message on the vehicle. Empirical evidence by Ya'u (2016) showed that the ubiquitous culture of visual messages on public transport vehicles is not only evident, visible or popular to cultural anthropologists or communicators but to anyone who travels widely, especially in North America, Africa, Asia, South America and indeed in Nigeria. Textual and visual messages are inscribed on buses, Lorries, trucks, taxis and recently on tricycles.

Apparently, Ya'u (2016) observed that such messages are usually taken from an old proverb, a modern saying, a religious scripture, newspaper report, radio announcement and political or social event. The messages are directed to specific or general audience yet most people are not aware or do not understand the specific point or social referent of these messages, not knowing exactly to what or to whom it applies. The inscriptions tell personal history which is only known to the driver, owner, and few insiders. The message may be conventional but its

full meaning is unique and private. Within this context, this paper examines the trends and dynamics of popular culture and media messages on public transport literature in Nigeria.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 The Origin and Development of Transport System in Nigeria

The history of road transport development in Nigeria dated back to the period before 1910 when the existing bush paths were developed into motorable routes. According to Stanford Research Institute in Aondover et al., (2022) the growth of road transport in Nigeria was a later development, which did not evolve through the stage of animal, drawn carts. According to this Institute, roads were not developed until the advent of motor vehicles in the 1920s and 1930s. The end of Second World War (1945) actually marked the period when the country was served with adequate network of all season roads for lorry and passenger car traffic (Aliyu et al., 2023). According to Onakomaiya in Aondover et al., (2021) the roads were designed to serve two major objectives. First, they were meant to extend the commercial hinterlands opened up by the government railways by linking up the nearest urban centers with the major railway stations. The second was to reduce the strains thrown on the inland provinces in the provision of porters for the British Colonial Officers. The initial growth of road network was slowed down by the financial and labour constraints.

However, the total length of road constructed and maintained by the government and native authorities rose to about 51,000km in 1946 and 74,000km in 1960 (Onokomaiya, 1978). The need to open up the economic and settlement frontiers of the country was the major factor that influenced road network development in Nigeria. This began with the introduction of feeder road services to the Nigerian Railways to link the major railway stations along the Lagos-Kano line with the neighboring settlements, thereby increasing the supply of export products such as cocoa, palm produce, cotton and groundnuts that were moved to the ports by the railways and helping the rural settlements realize their productive potentials (Aondover et al., 2022).

As at 1960, roads linked all parts, although the concentration of roads is much heavier in the two Southern Regions than in the more sparsely populated Northern Region. The roads in Nigeria were classified into three (3) groups. Federal Roads or Trunk "A" 8,800 kms (5,500mls), this represented the skeleton on which the country's road system was built. This trunk represented the main North-South arteries and five East-West arteries. The Trunk "B" roads, of which there were 7,360 kms (4,600mls), connected the provincial network with the skeleton trunk "A" road system. Provincial roads of which there were 57,480kms (35,925mls) form the main network linking up with other trunk roads in the country (Ogunbodede, 2008).

As at 1960, the percentage of trunk "A" roads tarred to the total road surface in Nigeria was highest in the Western part of Nigeria with 82% followed by Eastern region with 30%. However, Lagos, which acted as the Federal Capital had the entire surface tarred. Similarly, 98% of trunk "B" roads in the Western region was tarred, 34% of that of Eastern region was tarred while 19% of that of Northern region was tarred. The period between 1976 and 1970 witnessed no growth in road network because of the Nigerian civil war, which took place during that period. This period and the financial resources of the country were devoted to the execution of the Nigerian civil war. The period between 1971 and 1975 coincided with the policy of the Nigerian Government to rehabilitate the war-torn areas. Thus, money was earmarked for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the road network in the Eastern part of

Nigeria, which were largely damaged during the civil war (Ogunbodede in Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2024).

Similarly, in other parts of the country, a large proportion of roads were taken over from the state government by the federal government for construction and completion. The Federal Government took this step because of the advantages derivable from the construction of more road networks. These advantages include fostering internal trade between areas of the country, that were not accessible by any other mode of transport, and the development of natural resources of the remote areas of the country. The rehabilitation and construction of new roads were also undertaken in order to raise the standard of living of the Easterners because of the negative effect of war in that region. Other reasons for the take-over of some road networks construction by the federal government according to Onakomaiya in Hile et al., (2023) was the reduction in road traffic accidents, which had been achieved on many of the roads because of their improved designs in terms of width and strength.

Since 1975 and through the 3rd and 4th Development plans and rolling plans, the Federal Government used road construction as instrument to gain political points because its structures were better appreciated aesthetically and spatially. Thus, the military and civilian governments at centre, state and local government levels embarked on many road constructions that culminated in the present dense nature of Nigeria's road network (Ogunbodede, 2008). The issue of state creation, which had been on since 1963 when Mid-West was created from Western Region until 1996 when we had 36 states, made all the Urban Road Transportation State Headquarters to be isolated for developmental purposes. Thus, the State Headquarters became growth pole/foci point from where a lot of infrastructural development gained priority.

The State Headquarters created in 1967 and 1976 were given mobilization money. Certain percentage of the mobilization money was expended on compensation for houses which were demolished and used for construction of dual carriage way. The administrative system of Nigeria has changed many times since the creation of the country. The changes were due to a number of factors among which were those connected with the social systems, administrative convenience, spatial problems, economic considerations, official policies such as indirect rule, military and democratic rules. The creation of States, which was intense, therefore had many implications to transport facilities as well as the traffic management techniques adopted in the city centers. Thus, as the States increased, the administrative headquarters also increased thereby influencing roads, that were rehabilitated and constructed. Thus, by 1996, road networks in 36 major urban centers in Nigeria had undergone series of transformation in terms of construction and reconstruction (Ogunbodede in Idris & Msughter, 2022).

Similarly, commuting distance within the cities continued to increase because of rapid growth in population, housing and area extent. For example, commuting distance of Akure increased from 5.2km in 1966 to 6.4km in 1976, to 10.5km in 1986, 13kms in 1996 and 19kms in 2006 for the major artery (Ogunbodede in Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Similarly, the commuting distance in the city of Lagos increased from 20km in 1970 to 35km in 1995 while that of Kaduna increased from 6km to 10km during the same period. The increase in commuting distance has impact on trip generation, attraction and the public transport services that facilitated movement from one point to another.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

The theory that guided this study is Cultural Populism Theory. Cultural Populism Theory is a media sociology approach to the analysis of culture in which an active audience use the media for its own purposes and, in which the pleasurable consumption of popular culture is presented as having resistive and subversive political potential (Ya'u, 2019). The proponents of the theory (Fiske, Bourdieu and Marvin) argue that common pattern of behaviour, attitudes and values which persist for generations are the results of cultural factors, rather than biological. Bourdieu observed that the theory assumes that there is a comprehensive education, knowledge and connections available to any individual or group that give them a head start, confer status and assist in the pursuit of power (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a).

The theory represents activists' opposition to the ways in which dominant forces in capitalist society shape people's behaviour and ways of thinking. The theory also assumes that all structural maintenance and perpetuations of dominant values, norms and cultural forms and power relations, across generations, is contested through alternative media and challenged by an overwhelming portion of the population. The theory is criticized by McGuigan as being wholly illusory and ideological naïve. It is further contested as overplaying human agency and underplaying social, political and economic factors (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024b).

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 State's Involvement in Transport Development in Nigeria

Prior to the advent of motorized means of transport in Nigeria for the purpose of inland transportation, at the eve of the twentieth century, most movements were made along footpaths and bush tracks. In the savanna region, people were able to tame horses and donkeys for their movement needs, while those in the forest region relied more on human porter age, in the movement of freight. Logs, rafts, calabash and small dug out boats were also used across rivers, creeks and lagoons for moving passengers and freight (Maradun et al., 2021). The Trans-Saharan trade routes also provided the links between Nigeria and the Mediterranean region for several centuries and the network footpaths that connected the urban centres of Yoruba land (Mabogunje, 2011).

The sea voyages and explorations of the West African coastline, starting from the fifteenth century, made it possible for the Portuguese explorers to reach the Bight of Benin in 1485 (Burns, 2005). Since then, direct contact between Nigeria and other parts of the world by the sea route had widened, while the trans-Saharan trade routes declined in importance, to the point of total disappearance. When the colonialists took up the reins of government in Nigeria, inadequate transportation facilities constituted a serious handicap. This was in spite of the fact that the colonial administration required a fast and efficient transport system to traverse a territory, whose Northern boundary was about 1200 kilometers away from the Atlantic coast and about 1400 kilometers across at its widest area, in order to establish effective occupation of the territory (Mabogunje, 2011).

Consequently, the colonial government began the construction of the western rail line, from Lagos, in 1898. The eastern line was also constructed, starting from Port Harcourt, through Enugu to Kaduna, while branch lines were later laid to (Remi et al, 2009). The development of the railways accentuated the expansion of the city along sector pattern. A notable development at this stage was that of special nuclei along the hedges, which is the result of the decentralization of the functions of the Central Business District (CBD) and the

creation of minor ones such as state and local governments. Hence, impact of the state has been felt more in the area of bus service delivery, rather than freight haulage. However, when compared with private sector involvement, public sector involvement in the direct provision of urban bus services still remains insignificant. The public involvement dates back to the early 1930s when the native authority in Kano provided bus services around the city (Remi et al, in Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

Later on, the Lagos City Council set up the Lagos Municipal Transport Service (LMTS) in 1958, while the Ibadan City Council started the City Bus Service in 1964. This was later operated as a joint venture with the Oyo State Government (Adeniji, 2012). In the early 1970s, there was, for the first time, more public sector involvement in the running of both intra-urban and inter-urban bus services. Several state governments established their own bus undertaking, which included Bendel Line, Kaduna State Transport Authority, Kwara Line, Water Line, Lagos State Transport Corporation, North East Line, Plateau State Transport Corporation, among others. Unfortunately, most of them collapsed by the late 1970s or early 1980s (Remi et al, 2009).

The introduction of the Urban Mass Transit Programme in 1988 by the Federal Government due to the serious urban mobility crisis, occasioned largely by the depressed Nigerian economy, created a situation in which virtually all state governments established their own bus undertaking for direct bus service delivery (Adesanya, 2010). With respect to road freight services, the road haulage industry is entirely dominated by the private sector. Although in the early 1980s, the Federal Government established the National Freight Company, to compete with private haulers.

Unfortunately, its operating and financial performance led to its dissolution in the mid-1980s. The involvement of the state in direct transport service delivery is not limited to the road transport sector. The state got involved even in Air transport. For example, the Nigeria Airways limited was establishment in 1958 in partnership with Elder Dempster Lines and British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) in 1961, made the Nigeria Airways a wholly state-owned corporation. However, the Federal, State, Local Governments of Nigeria was much involved in road transport than in other modes (Fejoku, 2006).

3.2 Urban Mass Transport Operations in Nigeria

The urban transportation problem arises principally because of high concentration of population, economic activities and educational and social facilities in relatively small areas, particularly with poor land use planning. These activities generate demand for transport services far in excess of supply of such services (Bolade in Msughter & Idris, 2022). Arising from this, the Federal Urban Mass Transit Agency (FUMTA) was established in 1988 as Government response to the mobility crisis arising from the gross inadequacy of the various modes of public transportation in virtually all the urban centres in the country. With the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986, the cost of procuring vehicles, spare parts and fuel rose astronomically, to the extent that many car owners abandoned their cars and the demand for public transportation increased (World Bank, 2000). On the side of the transport operators, there was an equally rapid decline in the acquisition of new buses and the few buses that were available could not cope with the demand problem above.

The rail system could not help much because the NRC was ill equipped for urban mass transportation. Ferry services in the riverine areas could not help because it only existed in Lagos and Port Harcourt. It is sad to note that none of the major cities had an effective traffic management system; thus, the Task Force on Urban Mass Transit was therefore

established in January 1988 to ameliorate the frustrations and hardships being experienced by workers and communities in all the major cities. This was backed up by a proposed budget of N700 million for implementation of various urban mass transit projects. The report of the task force, which was presented on March 4, 1988, contained recommendation on programs and projects designed to relieve the situation and institutional machinery for implementation. A Mass Transit Implementation committee was formed on late March under the chairmanship of the then Minister of Transport (Bolade, 2005). The committee was dissolved in September 1988 and a sole Administrator was appointed to continue with the implementation process under the Federal Urban Mass Transit Programme (FUMTP) in 1989. The 1988 Federal Government intervention further drew inspirations from such federally organized nations like Federal Republic of Germany and the United State of America. In these later countries, the development of strategic urban heavy transit system such as the metro lines, bus ways and public transport improvement measures in the bigger metropolis are often financed with Federal grants.

Similarly, operating subsidies on some of the systems are granted annually by the Federal, State and Local Government equipment on the basis of some defined parameters. Suffice it to say that the Federal Government interventionist activities over some time and through FUMTA were categorized into four groups as outlined by Remi et al (2009) as follows:

a. Facility Support and Infrastructural Improvement Project

At the commencement of the FUMTA's programme, the State-owned transit companies formed in the then 21 States and Abuja and later 30 States with the creation of 9 additional states in 1991 and 6 more states in 1996, were the target groups for improving the public transport at the State and Local levels. Thus, for the smooth take-off and/or growth, FUMTA has been offering grant-aided facilities in the form of maintenance; workshop equipments; mobile workshop and tools; traffic improvement measures. In the case of Lagos; construction of coastal jetties and inter-state terminus at some regional urban centres and institutional support and training were also supported.

b. State-owned Mass Transit Schemes

This involved a programme of injecting of over 2000 Federal Assisted Buses into the public transport service network. About 85% of those buses were given to the state-owned companies under concessionary loan conditions (including no payment of advanced deposit, payment of cost of buses over 3-5 years of 3-6% gross interest rates). The balance of 15% was allocated in the form of grants to Federal Colleges, Universities and other Tertiary Institutions and specialized Agencies (Remi et al, 2009).

3.3 Understanding Transport Literature

Transport literature, popularly known as Bumper sticker, is a genuine North American product or culture which evolved in post-World War II experimentation, especially of the maturation of commercial screen painting (Schwab in Ya'u, 2019). Schwab in Ya'u argued that that culture overlapped from the tradition of advertisement on one's mode of transportation during the era of horse-drawn carriages where horse-fly nets were sometimes imprinted with the name of an advertiser. Moreover, Elias (2011) observed that in pre-industrial society people used textual and visual messages to decorate their horses especially in South Asia.

Baker in Ya'u (2019) argued that America's post-war obsession with automobile, and the freedom it afforded, influenced the popularity of bumper stickers. He observed that the earliest bumper stickers were used to advertise tourist attractions, provide public safety

initiatives, advance political sympathy, identity and ideology, advertise radio and television stations, as well as to express political and personal viewpoints. They are equally used to document social and historical events and trends (Msughter et al., 2023).

In the mid-1960s, bumper stickers began to feature opinions and social statements that were often reflective of the turbulent times, such as the popular Make Love, Not War signs. The bumper stickers became a form of folk advertising, allowing anyone who owns a car to send messages to anyone who happened to read it. Bearing diverse messages from the usual to the bizarre bumper stickers appear not only on bumpers everywhere, but are also among significant cultural heritage collections which document American history and support research and scholarship in cultural communication (Baker, 2011).

In Africa structural rigidity, low access to established mass media and the relative size and sophistication of information and communication technology and infrastructure have forced individuals and socio-political groups to use alternative communication media to disseminate news and information (Kayi, 2016). The use of road transport vehicles, buildings, rocks, clothes and other cultural artefacts by non-professional individuals, and subculture in the process of mass communication is popular and prevalent in most African societies. This development has forced a redefinition of the concept of mass communication from organizationally and technologically based which subordinated human conditions to a more expressive perspective which strives to maintain the society in time, represent shared beliefs and interpret our experiences (Ya'u, 2019; Msughter et al., 2023).

The development of the automobile and advancement in information and communication technology have democratized the process of information dissemination and liberalized the struggle between professional and non-professional individuals, as well as between corporate and independent bodies to use conventional or alternative media to satisfy their audiences in an environment full of possibilities (McQuail, 2010).

3.4 Transport Literature in Nigeria

In analysing the concern of the entrepreneur Neugarten in Ya'u (2016) identified the avoidance of mystical attacks, the desire to become wealthy, the care not to overstep the delicate balance of authority relationship, the complicated issue over the use of one's power as the personal continuities and discontinuities experienced by individual in their life histories. Based on this VanDerGeest (2009) argued that the personal experiences of the vehicle drivers or owner can be taken as an important index of their specific personality or character which shape the choice and selection of the most appropriate textual or visual message featured on the vehicle in reflecting or constructing their social history or experience. He observed that they remember according to their social background their encounters with the policemen, armed robbers, the frequency of accidents they had, their crisis with mechanics and reconcile it with their new identity in road literature.

In analysing the life histories of the transport entrepreneurs Lawuyi (1988) identified three stages of personal or business growth. He observed that the diversity of experience is largely a consequence of the entrepreneur maturity. He argued that the young ones, who optimistically write *The Young Shall Grow or I Am Still Young* are essentially less than thirty years old, are mostly driver owners, are more aggressive and more easily disappointed by failure and they particularly fear accidents and poor profit (Msughter et al., 2022).

However, older driver- owner are usually over thirty years old are more hopeful of a better, stable and prosperous future. They are familiar with the oddities of the transport business and can comfortably absorb the shock of failure. Despite their familiarity with the transport business, they are still troubled by competition for passengers and by unfulfilled expectations. They therefore selectively use slogans such as Struggle Continuous or Unlimited Promotion and the World Is Hard to reflect their socio- psychological disposition. Moreover, the slogan When There Is Life, There Is Hope is also frequently used or adopted to express hope for future wealth, enough money to buy several taxis and put-up new building.

Lawuyi (1988) captured the frustration and disappointment of a failed transport entrepreneur. 'Sometimes think I can make it. My father never did much before he died. He was not popular. He was poor. My mother took care of my needs. We are poor family struggling to survive. My taxi might bring a lot of money today. Tomorrow all may be lost to the policemen or to repair mechanical damage. If only I had the money, I will not care. But I need to have a roof over my head and my extended family. Five years ago, Mr. X was like me now he owns a big shop in Ibadan.'

He equally found that in Yoruba land wealth brings political power. Hence most successful transporters are politically powerful in the society. They afford luxury goods, marry prestigious wives, and promote their sphere of influence in public. They also contribute to the socio- economic progress of the society by assisting the poor, the needy and the destitute in the society. Their success is usually conveyed in messages such as Mother's Breast Is Sweet.

When fortune changes it challenges the Yoruba belief that individuals are spiritually endowed with the capacity for success. In their world view destiny or fortune is naturally good unless otherwise changed by laziness, man's character. Hence any failure in business transaction or in life must be attributed to sources other than god the creator of density. Change in fortune is frequently attributed to the influence of "Aiye" (a power or superior which must be begged). This is reflected in messages like World Don't Be Angry with Us or World Don't Change Our Fate (Ya'u, 2016).

In Yoruba society, social identities of taxi drivers and owners are carefully and selectively organized. Also, parent, employers, friends, and kinsfolk who have been benefactors are remembered in taxi slogans such as Mother's Benevolence or Father's Benevolence And Friend Benevolence. There are also several taxi slogans that mentioned god as symbol of positive identification and trustworthy authority God Is My Shepherd or God Is a Performer and through the God's Love, There Will Be No Danger.

Historically motor vehicles including lorries have been important agents of change, social reflection and identity construction in Africa (Gewald, 2009). Routinely traversing linguistic, political and cultural boundaries they have played significant role in the circulation of information and ideas. Schulze (2012) observed that in Nigeria public transport vehicles especially lorries are colourfully decorated and textually inscribed with witty comments on life on the road and beyond. She argued that the lorries are designed and positioned to be appreciated by fellow travellers and in particular those travelling behind. Their motifs drew from a variety of local content of ideas and practices. She observed the frequent reference to religion in the lorry visuals and textual messages as a means of identity construction.

Her approach to the study of lorry decorations and their interaction with local contexts in Nigeria was influenced by the work of historians of south Asian visual cultures

which is centrally directed by the concept of visual history where it is assumed that visual culture may provide an alternative to textual sources in the writing of history. The central argument in the thesis is that while textual sources primarily reflect the positioning of the literate elites, visual culture can inflect ideas and practices of wider cross-section of local populations (Pinney, 2004). She observed that in northern Nigeria lorry decorations motifs ranged from politics, religion and business to past and contemporary popular culture. It also reflects diversity of the community that evolved in relation to the road transport business and made it visible to the community and the society at large.

In view of the argument presented above she concluded that lorry art and visuals in northern Nigeria is the product of a community of practices that evidently values surface decoration as a means of presenting public face to the community and the larger society. She found that the choice of motifs and their arrangement is negotiated between the commissioning vehicle owner/driver and the executing artist and the design choices are framed by established practices which include individual preferences that reflect personal histories and identities.

In her study Schulze (2012) observed the frequent reference to Islam and rarely Christianity among the motifs of lorry paintings in northern Nigeria. Islamic motifs included the mosque, an image of two swords crossing in front of a palm tree and al-Buraq (the winged horse that carried the Prophet Muhammad on his night journey). There are also illustrations of Quran and portrait of individual religious personalities such as *Sheikh Ahmad Tijjani*, *Sheikh Ibrahim Inyass*, *Sheikh Nasiru Kabara*, *Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi* and *Sheikh Ibrahim Alzakzaky*. While the Christian motifs prominently featured illustrations of biblical scenes mostly from New Testament which centred on the person of Jesus Christ and unambiguous symbols of Christianity including the Cross.

She argued that the mosque is a generic symbol of Islam rather than a reference to a particular place of worship. To corroborate this argument Kendhammer (2010) noted that lorry paintings depicting mosque positioned the owner/driver and his business within the realm of Islam. It therefore carries connotations of virtue not only as a private person but also as an entrepreneur. It advertised the business as honest to fellow entrepreneurs seeking trustworthy business partners. It also identified the entrepreneur as a Muslim without associating him and his business with any particular Muslim group and their sometimes-conflicting ideas and practices. Kendhammer (2010) argued that like the mosque motif, the palm tree and swords impliedly situated the lorry owner or driver and his business as a Muslim. Moreover, it features Saudi Arabia as country which overcome social decay and moral decadence through adherence to Islamic doctrines and achieved public piety, political stability and economic prosperity (Taiwo et al., 2024).

Ostien (2007) observed that, according to the Saudi Arabian ministry of higher education, the swords symbolize strength and sacrifice rooted in faith while the date palm tree represents vitality, growth and prosperity. It is therefore an advocacy for the implementation of Islamic law and evidence of public piety as pre-conditions for political stability, social justice and economic development. From the studies above it is evident that most of the studies examined the semantic meaning of the transport literature in their respective environment (Obasi & Aondover, 2023).

IV. Conclusion

The literature on the trends and dynamics of popular culture and media messages on public transport in Nigeria demonstrates the importance of this seemingly mundane space as a site of cultural production, socialization, and political discourse. From music and films to advertisements and political messaging, public transport in Nigeria functions as a microcosm of the country's diverse cultural, political, and economic realities. Media messages in this context do more than inform they shape, reflect, and reinforce social values and collective identities. Understanding this dynamic highlight, the significance of public transport as a crucial platform for both communication and cultural exchange in Nigeria.

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