

Media Entertainment and Commercialization of the Body

Abiodun Omotayo Oladejo¹

¹ University of Port Harcourt

Received: 8 April 2015 Accepted: 4 May 2015 Published: 15 May 2015

Abstract

The desire to accumulate material resources and to have good life-chance is rooted deeply in the sensibilities of human society. Every individual strives to ensure that he meets not only his essential needs of today and future but also accumulate well enough to gain social standing and be able to bequeath wealthy heritage to his children. This tendency predisposes man to looking for economic means with all intensity. And, whenever profit propensity is discovered in any endeavour or vocation, entrepreneurs (or capitalists) mobilize resources â?? financial, technical, human etc in that direction. This work, relying largely on extant literature which highlights the overarching influence of the mass media on society, media contents, profit goal of media investors and audience response, attempts to situate the roles nudity plays within the broad spectrum of media arts. The focus is on how media moguls profiteer from explicit media content involving the private parts of women and the aftermath connected with that.

Index terms— entertainment, media capitalists, profit, women, nudity, censorship.

1 Introduction

here is no denying the fact that the media (the Internet, television, motion pictures, magazines) have become an integral aspect of social life today. The media has taken a remarkable new dimension. As such, the electronic and print media appear to have altered the traditional ways by which people have perceived their world. Thompson (1995) argues that, "the development of the media have transformed in a profound and irreversible way, the nature of communication in contemporary society". Perhaps mass media, taken as an entity, is most influential in this age among the institutions of society that socialize individuals into proper social actors. Whereas some individuals may not have had the privilege of family life, school enrolment, and even employment opportunities (all of which are forums for acquiring the cultural expectations of society), almost everybody has had some degree of exposure to components of the mass media. Radio, Television, motion pictures, newspapers, magazine, cinema, novels and the Internet have widespread audience across the globe. The plethora of news the media furnishes us with is monumental, and this ranges from weather forecasts, stock market reports, politics, environment, entertainment and crime. Giddens (2006) opined that, "an important precursor to the advances in the mass media was the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, which made the high-speed reproduction of texts possible for the first time. This position thus suggests that the earliest, most primary function of the mass media was information and/or education. Posing further, Giddens (2006) argued that technological advances have played a crucial part in the development of the mass media. He also mentioned that the influence of social, cultural and economic factors must also be taken into consideration. The advancement brought in its wake many mass media constituents thus expanding the functions of the mass from the traditional role of enlightenment or education to entertainment, conferment of status, value orientation, consumption stimulation etc (Schaefer, 2005).

Entertainment has gained superseding influence in the mass media today. Movies, music, magazine, motion pictures and sitcoms now have quite an enormous patronage far more than what one could have imagined in the years gone by. Its influence can be felt even in other aspects of the media not openly directed towards creating amusement and engendering leisure. News, weather forecasts and sport reportage are now conducted in

a mass-friendly and entertaining manner. The costumes, sets, artistry etc are trimmed to catch the fancy of the audience. As Levinson (1999) submits, "in the world of media in motion, in which television was triumphing over books and newspaper is exerting profound impact on politics, entertainment, education and the general conduct of our lives".

As every economy is a system of production, distribution and consumption of specific goods and services, the mass media -deal with the business of sights and sound. The matrix of complex interrelationships existing in the industry reveals certain degree of interdependence, division of labour and/or specialization. But, at the heart of the industry is financing. This requires the intervention of entrepreneurs (capitalists) who invest their means with an expectation of returns. They, based on hands-on knowledge of the workings of the system or understanding acquired from expert advice, invest wisely. Consequently, they become involved in almost every aspect of the media business. They invest their resources in projects that have wide appeal and also promise greatest returns. For them, a viable project must have inherent values, prescriptions and contents that the audience will be willing to pay for. They also wield such a great capacity to lure audience into all sorts of things they want them to patronize (Ritzer, 2008).

Entertainment sector of the media business has come to be the fulcrum in the industry and it has massive consumers whose social conditions cannot be detached from the pleasures they derive from media entertainment. Mc Quail (2005) argued that "the largest category of media content can probably be labeled as 'entertainment' and it is the main reason why media are so popular." Entertainment has occupied a chunk of media arts because of its profit prospects. It has been argued in some intellectual quarters that rather than place too much emphasis on the effects of media entertainment, it should be considered as the outcome or creation of preferences of the parties -producers and audiences involved (Zillmann and Bryant, 1994). Entertainment is the real deal in present-day society; it offers pleasure to the consumers, and high profit to the investors. It is thus critical to note the current trends in media business. There is now large-scale display of nudity in the media. This is because media moguls, having been aware of the profitability of media products with explicit contents, take advantage of this.

2 II.

3 Models of Audience Reception of Media Contents a) Hypodermic Needle Model

This model likens the media contents to a drug injected by syringe. Audience consumption profile is such that they do not sift, analyse and reflect upon the media message. They merely take it sui generis. This model also posits that there is universalism of interpretation among members of the society.

4 b) Gratification Model

This model posits that the media meet peculiar, wide range of needs of the audience. People turn to the media to fill a void or satisfy a need. Although, the consumption or reception of media messages is universal, there appears to be differentials in audience needs.

5 c) Mentorship Model

I have also developed this model of audience response to the media goods. Mentor model focuses on how media audience perceives the actors in the media economy. Their understanding or rather, their estimation of these figures resonates "idol status". Most of us have media-created idols that we aspire to be like.

These models have one commonality in their themes and that is the inestimable influence the mass media exert on all and sundry. Drawing from hypodermic needle model, rather than passively receive media contents and consider them on the bases of relevant and irrelevant messages, real and unreal realities, acceptable and unacceptable behaviours etc, we receive them with all intensity. Our value orientation is not what it used to be anymore; we have turned to the mass media to show us the way. Ifeanchio (2012) argues that 'there seems to be the conviction that what makes the print and electronic media must be true.' Therefore, there is no critical evaluation of sights and sound from the media; we accept them as true representation of reality.

Gratification model is quite useful when one considers the social tolerance of media goods that meet sensual needs of the vast majority of media audience. The sensual and sexual proclivities of humans have been forthrightly reinforced by the nudity that is freely displayed in magazines, motion pictures and on the Internet. Media nudity has continued to thrive because it arouses sensual and/or sexual sensibilities and meet erotic needs of many media audience today. It is actually an alternative to real sexual experience.

Mentor model can explain how individuals model their lives after media icons. American entertainers such as Beyonce Knowles, 50 Cents, Oprah Winfrey, Rihanna, etc have mentored people across the globe. The influence of D'banj, Tonto Dike, Genevieve Nnaji, Wizkid, Tuface (all from Nigeria) etc on the African continent cannot be gainsaid. These icons freely display women's bodies with reckless abandon and their sensual use of women's bodies has brought about the prevalence of indecent dressing among women nowadays. They are trendsetters, hence, their followers, trounced by copy-cat syndrome, imbibe their lifestyles. Resultantly, breast cleavages, navels, thighs and buttocks must be visible for females to be attractive and fashion-trendy. Only the visually impaired have to a considerable degree, escaped the corruption nude dressing can do to the innocence of the

human soul. Anywhere you turn, there is a good dose of nudity to go round; billboards, magazines, soap operas and movies can pride themselves in their ability to supply sights that can arouse erotic feelings. Recruitment for any media project is almost based on the willingness to reveal certain degree of nudity. Also, the very highly seductive, suggestive and mind-corrupting music has created an image in our minds leading to an aggravated desire to indulge oneself. The root of these conditions is the means of livelihood that made-for-the-tv nudity culture promises. Perhaps nothing excites media consumers today like nudity.

6 III.

7 The Media Economy

The production, distribution and consumption of media goods constitute a wide spectrum of structural activities which engender employment, profit maximization and a major earner of income in this age. The subsets of the media economy have been largely corporatized, thus expanding the capacity and reach of A mass media, especially media entertainment. Typical of any economy, media economy is also dominated by the people who command the wherewithal to control how the activities of media professionals are carried out. Ownership of media companies is increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Through mergers, acquisitions, buyouts, and hostile takeovers, a very small number of large conglomerates are coming to own more and more of the world's media outlets (Baran, 2010).

Media business has become an overly serious one. It has become an indispensable investment haven for both public and private interests. The monumental and momentous metamorphosis that the media have witnessed is such that the media business commands an unthinkable high wealth that makes it comparable to wealth of nations. Almost every country has a thriving media industry with large corporations which have huge capital outlay. For instance, according to Internet Movie Database (2004), the total gross revenue from 10 top rated movies in the US between 1993 and 2003 was approximately \$6.5 Billion Dollars. This figure is about one-fifth of the annual budget of Nigeria for 2014 which, according to Nigeria's Ministry of Finance was \$28.8 Billion Dollars (N4.6 Trillion Naira).

8 IV. Control Issues and Legislation

There are agencies of government charged with the responsibility of making sure that media goods are wholesome and reinforce the values that ensure systemic maintenance. In Nigeria, there are Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) and Nigeria Broadcasting Commission empowered by law to scrutinize media contents with a view to determining their suitability for public consumption. National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB, 2010 para.10) states that "censorship entails the examination of the contents of a film or video work to determine the age group of the target audience, based on the film's possible or inherent psychological, sociological and moral impact, among other factors." The NFVCB set up by Act No. 85 of 1993 is meant to contribute to the positive transformation of Nigerian society through the censorship and classification of film and video works, whilst balancing the need to preserve freedom of expression within the law, and limit social harm caused by films (NFVCB's mission statement). The Short Form of the Motion Picture Code (USA), inter alia, stipulates that: "indecent or undue exposure of the human body shall not be presented; illicit sex relationships shall not be justified. Intimate sex scenes violating common standards of decency shall not be portrayed; restraints and care shall be exercised in presentations dealing with sex aberrations; obscene speech, gestures or movements shall not be presented and; undue profanity shall not be presented."

Despite the gravity of their responsibilities, these censor agencies (in Nigeria) have not lived up to expectation. The days are gone when these agencies protected the sensibilities of Nigeria from the damage the unwholesome and obscene contents from the mass media are wreaking on the fibre of Nigerian society. Gone are the days when Hollywood had strict selfcensorship standards. Such standards as no cleavage, no navels, separate beds for married couples, no kisses longer than four seconds, cut to the clouds overhead if sex is imminent, now seem ludicrous. This accounts for why music and motion pictures that have never been screened can be found in the market. The facelessness of the business interests makes prosecution of these people very herculean."

V.

9 Nudity as Advertising Effect

Advertising, which is an integral part of the media system, has the function of stimulating consumption in the society. Schaefer (2005) opined that media advertising performs the following functions: it supports the economy, provides information, and underwrites the cost of the media. Advertising, which is the essential business of the mass media began with the printing press, and gave it the economic nourishment to function independent of government and its funding. It is deducible from this position that the function of underwriting the cost of the media is incontrovertibly one reason why the media use diverse strategies to obtain consumer attention and provoke their patronage. The resilience of the media in the business of commercializing human body has continued to fan the ember of sensuality fantasy it sought vigorously to establish. What now drives sales in the media industry is nudity. Products with sex appeal tend to sell more than the ones without. Promotion of new

products must have 'woman effect'. Even for products that have little or nothing to do with womenfolk, there must be a good-to-behold damsel that will facilitate a second look at the ads.

10 VI. The Creeping Naked Privacy: Publics versus Privates

Human existence involves two realms: one open to the glare of other members of society and the one protected from the knowledge of society. The act of passing excreta, bathing, act of sexual intercourse and the nakedness of the human body etc are examples of activities private to or at least should be, to all individuals. These are private phenomena that social sensibilities do not permit to be exposed. Most cultures do not tolerate publicizing naked privacy owing to the sanctity attached to the human body, and its proclivities such as its ability to arouse sexual stimulation. For instance, African culture prescribes modest dressing that does not provoke sexual drives. Likewise, most Volume XV Issue II Version I Prior to this age, erotic thoughts would not attend to a man merely by sighting a woman but the case is different nowadays. More and more, on a daily basis, the realm of naked privacy is creeping to social life. Sights that provoke sexual and erotic desires are everywhere around us. Sights that should be seen behind closed doors have come to stay in our public spheres. This situation, owing to the nudity culture transmitted by the media, portends great danger to the sanity of our society. Parents and guardians now allow their wards to follow media trends without checks. Resultantly, the society is full of near-naked people. The case is more precarious in the tertiary institutions (in Nigeria) nonetheless a rule system that stipulates punitive sanctions for indecent dressing. One of the factors accountable for why this goes unabated is that the sights meet our erotic desires and offer momentary sexual transcendence. The nudity culture has reached an all-time peak in the society such that religious organizations have been forced to enact dress codes. Some of have had to post pictures of acceptable and unacceptable dressing at their entrances. As corrective and deterrent as this measure intends, it rather subtly gratifies phonographic desires of some sort for individuals with phonographic tendencies who will still derive gratification from looking at the unacceptable dressing. These dress restrictions legitimized in some quarters suggest the cataclysmic dilution of the public and private spheres. There is an indication that the continued tolerance of the fusion of the two realms will forge an inevitable transition to an age where there will not be any distinction between what can be done in public from what can be done in private.

11 VII.

12 The Aftermath of Wrong Media Portrayals of Women

Nonetheless the contributions of the media to the social system, the dysfunctions are enormous. The massive nudity displayed in the media has continued to revise the value system and endanger the collective sensibilities. Our world is on a new course. The misgivings, wrong portrayals and misrepresentation of the human body create far-reaching and multifaceted problems. Some of the problems are discussed here.

13 a) Pornography

The New Addiction "You hear about 'pornography addiction' all the time, but people never tell you what makes it so addictive, or why it even matters. You rarely hear the fact that viewing pornography messes with your brain in the same way drugs do. Pornography is directly related to negative perceptions, attitudes, and aggression towards the opposite sex." Fightthenewdrug.org On the surface, cocaine and porn do not seem to have a lot in common but studies are showing that viewing pornography tricks your brain into releasing the same pleasure chemicals that drugs do (fightthenewdrug.org). Science has shown that pornography exerts the same pressure on the brain as cocaine. According to Fightthenewdrug.org, "what's more is your brain actually begins to rewire itself because of this artificial stimulation. It may sound crazy, but it's true." A national survey conducted in the United States found that 75 to 83 percent of adolescents reported having Internet access at home and that 70 per cent of them reported being exposed to Internet pornography ??Rich, 2003). Related to pornography is sexual violence against women. Media effect study conducted in the late 1970s found links between pornography and sexual violence against women (Giddens, 2006). Hypothetically, anyone addicted to porn is most likely going to have desire for the real sexual experience. Hence, if satisfying this urge cannot be achieved easily, individuals may resort to forceful sexual relations.

14 b) Language change

The decorum and moderation that used to guide discussions on sensual/sexual issues have disappeared. Unbridled bluntness and vulgar language used in the movies and music have corrupted the vocabulary of individuals in the society. Privates, which hitherto required guided constraints, are now articulated without caution. You hear such words as "shit!", "f*ck!", "motherf*cker!" etc. Ideas are unrestrainedly conveyed using 'private' vocabularies.

15 VIII. Objectification, Denigration and

Devaluation of Women Riesman (1950) pointed out that the mass media is full of stereotypes that misrepresent reality. The attendant consequences of the production, distribution and consumption of these media goods with

explicit contents are the mistaken antipathy about women. Feminist Vivian Gornick (1979) asserts that 'the depiction of women in the media reflects "innumerable small murders of the mind and spirit that take place daily.' The media have helped to fan the ember of women subjugation and devaluation through overt, unbridled hankering for profit. According to Straubhaar & La Rose (2008) "experimental studies show that when males are exposed to explicit pornography, they are more likely to express negative attitudes towards women, to think that relatively uncommon sexual (such as fellatio and anal intercourse) are widespread, and to be more lenient with rape offenders in hypothetical court cases."

Volume XV Issue II Version I Sex is demystified. Internet pornography and explicit scenes in motion pictures have advertently sent a message of sexual liberality. Promiscuity is so celebrated in today's world that scarcely can one find an individual who disapproves of sexual intercourse bereft of socially recognized union, that is, marriage. It is now a "vogue culture" to, without restraint, indulge in sex with multiple partners. It is "abnormal" to be chaste in this sex-happy society. b) Self Esteem Problems Basically, the target population that largely bears the strong onslaughts of commercialization of the body in the media is the female population. The media portrayal of female has the capacity to resocialize women into believing that they are not better than the next lying on their backs. It could also create inferiority/superiority complex in their relations with male counterparts. A related consequence of the misgivings of the media about the female body is the erroneous belief that may be held by male folk that women are just puppets for meeting sexual and/or leisure needs. c) Teenage and unwanted pregnancy "Recently, an article in China Daily reported that China Consumers Association called for a film ratings system to protect minors from inappropriate movie scenes because many parents bring their children to movies as a family activity and have expressed concern over violent and erotic scenes. Regrettably, the mass media of entertainment, which is centered to a large degree in Hollywood, has become not only the primary teacher of children, but also the primary parent. According to Cornell University, thanks to a great extent on Hollywood, 9 out of 10 children abandon the values of their parents."

-Baehr 2013 Baehr's (in movieguide.com, 2013) concern for children with regards to their large-scale exposure to media entertainment is a really important one. This is so especially when one considers the current sexual saturation of not only the mass media but also the society. Children now know and do what adults (mostly in marriage relationships) do. A major consequence of this is teenage pregnancy. Rich (2009) posits that media portrayals of sex as a fun, carefree, and common activity that does not warrant concerns, cautions, contraception, or consequences may cultivate similar beliefs and influence sexual behaviours among youth. In his research on the impact of viewing pornography film on violence of rape against women, Donnerstein (1978) found out that "viewing pornography, even for short periods of time, even by college student, increase the level of rape violence leading to unwanted pregnancy among women most times".

IX. Gate-keeping the Media: The Way Forward

One of the fall-outs of the untamed economic globalization is the capacity of corporations around the globe to influence and shape the social, economic and political events of states, without a commensurate influence on them by the government due to their vast capital base and the power of the media. The information power of the media and its inherent propensity to become a evoke behaviour modification, require a serious oversight of its activities. The logic of gate-keeping or oversighting the media-whether by the government through its relevant agencies; civil society, the church, international community or even the media themselves, is very apt. Information is like food or a drug, which requires inspection and certification before it can be made available to the public. To offer information unvetted is, on this reasoning, to risk poisoning the public, as it could be from spoiled food or bogus medication (Levinson, 1999). Therefore the following recommendations are drawn from the concept of gate-keeping.

X. Recommendations 1. The censor agencies should be revamped and properly funded so that they can perform their statutory functions. 2. Related to the first recommendation is the need to adequately apply sanctions on individuals who contravene the laws guiding media arts. 3. Education and/or enlightenment campaigns about the dangers of pornography. 4. Employment generation for the youth. 5. Value orientation and reorientation towards appropriate behavioural patterns.

16 XI. Conclusion

From the work, it is clear how important the roles performed by the mass media are. All and sundry depend greatly on the contributions of the mass media to the social system, especially in this information age. Conversely, mass media have now considerably become 'dangerous' to human sensibilities. Media entertainment can be likened to juggernaut for which human society has lost the steering. The responsibility left for us is to make sure that the steering is regained. Business interests should be subservient to collective sensibilities. ¹

¹© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US)



Figure 1:

-
- 269 [Schaefer ()] , R Schaefer . *Sociology* 2005. McGraw-Hill.
- 270 [Giddens ()] , A Giddens . *Sociology* 2006. Polity Press.
- 271 [Kilbourne ()] *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*, J Kilbourne . 2000.
- 272 New York: Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster.
- 273 [Levinson ()] *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millenium*, P Levinson . 1999. London, Routledge.
- 274 [Thompson et al. ()] 'Entertainment as Media Effect'. J B Thompson , D Zillmann , J Bryant . *The Media and*
- 275 *Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge, Polity Press 14, J Bryant, D Zillmann (ed.) (Hillsdale,
- 276 NJ) 1995. 1994. Erlbaum. p. . (Media Effects. 2nd edn)
- 277 [Ifeanacho ()] *Fundamentals of Sociology*, M Ifeanacho . 2012. Port Harcourt. University of Port Harcourt
- 278 [Gornick ()] *Introduction to Gender Advertisements*, V Gornick . 1979. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
- 279 Press.
- 280 [Baran ()] *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture*, S J Baran . 2010. New York:
- 281 McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- 282 [Mc Quail ()] *Mass Communication Theory*, D Mc Quail . 2010. California: Sage Publications Ltd.
- 283 [Straubhaar and Larose ()] J Straubhaar , R Larose . *Media: Understanding the Media; Culture and Technology*,
- 284 (Belmont) 2008. Thomson Wadsworth.
- 285 [Straubhaar and Larose ()] J Straubhaar , R Larose . *Media: Understanding the Media; Culture and Technology*,
- 286 (Belmont) 2008. Thomson Wadsworth.
- 287 [Riesman ()] *The Lonely Crowd*, D Riesman . 1950. Massachusetts: Yale University Press.
- 288 [Ritzer ()] *The McDonaldization of Society*, G Ritzer . 2008. Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press.