Understanding Commercial Animation: A Nigerian Perspective

TOLUWANI TAIWO DAVID[1], PROFESSOR AMIFOR JOHN[2]

[1]Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State Nigeria

[2]Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State Nigeria

ABSTRACT- In this paper, the origin of contemporary animation practice is traced from the renowned Tom and Jerry animated series, created by American animators William Hanna and Joseph Barbera at MGM Studios in 1940, to animations developed for product promotion, entertainment, and campaigns in Nigeria. The paper explores the use of dynamic imagery as a tool for product advertising and notes that it has undergone continuous evolution to set pivotal landmarks in the emergence of Nigeria's animatic journey, thus pointing to the evolving post-independence animation industry. Despite these achievements in Nigeria's growing animation industry, the paper observes a dearth of extensive literature documenting its evolution, particularly regarding commercial animation as a genre. It notes that most animated projects in Nigeria are tailored more towards animated films than product commercials, even though animation is a powerful marketing tool. This study thus explores the history of commercial animation in Nigeria and its role in shaping the country's product promotion landscape. It discusses the pre-independence history of product commercials, their connection with cartoon art, and how this evolved into animated media. The study also examines the impact of foreign influences on the development of animation in Nigeria, which contributed to the emergence of a homegrown animation industry. Anchored in the mediation of reality theory in advertising and brand identity prism theory, with desk research and observational techniques as methodologies, the study investigates the practice of commercial animation in Nigeria, how its influences are impacting the Nigerian product promotion space, and the animism and strategies employed in its practice to promote indigenous products.

Indexed Terms- Animism, Commercial Animation, Commodity Fetishism, Indigenous Content

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of dynamic imagery as a tool in visual communication and advertising design has continued to evolve in Nigeria courtesy of the influences from the celebrated 1899, *'Matches: An Appeal'* from British Arthur Melbourne Cooper to the *Tom and Jerry* animated series, created by American animators William Hanna and Joseph Barbera at MGM Studios in 1940. In recent years, notable animated projects and short films of Nigerian origin that attest to the industry's growing strength include *Adventures of Turtle Taido* (2015) by Muyiwa Kayode, *Skelebe* (2019) by Quadron Studios, *Iyanu Child of Wonder* (virtual intro, 2023), and *Malaika – Warrior Queen* (Pilot, 2019) produced by YouNeek Studios (see Plate 2) have emerged. Other notable projects include *Emeka's Money* (2020) by Setup Nigeria, *International Women's Day* (2021), *Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters* (2020) by 32AD Studios, *Ikenga* (Proof of Concept, 2023) by Uche Anisiuba of Quadron Studios, as well as *Sade* (2019), directed by Miller Luwoye and produced by Oba Owolabi. (IMDb., n.d.)

Furthermore, animated commercials, such as Mr Chef's Seasoning (2016), Dangote Salt (2017), a remake of the 1980s classic Visco Static engine oil ad (2014), and Hollandia Slim Milk (2020) (see Plates 1 and 3), along with *DSTV Ovie Wale* (2016) and *Nutri Yo* (2024), produced by Orange VFX Studios, further highlight the rise of a unique and emerging advertising language in Nigeria that is creatively and rapidly reshaping the promotional, cultural landscape and influencing new ways of l.iving in the world.

Since advertisements can be used to validate a way of being in the world as asserted by Lears, (1994), animation in advertising has continued to support the dissemination of products and media across

Africa and has developed into a potent tool for influencing consumers. Cook and Thompson (2019) asserted that the outcome of animated art conjures the potency to captivate our attention, invite our affection, influence our dreaminess, and linger in our memory by creating compelling emotions. Thus, these animated media can transmit values and cultures that continue to impact consumer behaviour.

In a similar vein, Anisiuba in an interview with *DW – Made for Mind* (2019) and Okupe (2020, as cited in YouNeek Studios, 2020), observed that there is a significant and growing demand in Nigeria for animated materials showcasing indigenous content, such as traditional symbols, motifs, and cultural icons. However, this demand remains largely unmet. Both creatives contend that embracing a pan-African animation genre—capable of rivalling foreign media narratives while drawing on the rich cultural heritage of African people—could inspire the next generation of animators. Furthermore, such a genre could bolster the creation of commercial animation content, thereby enhancing the promotion of Nigerian goods and services.

Plate 1: Hollandia slim evaporated milk commercial animation clip. Image source: Orange VFX, 2020
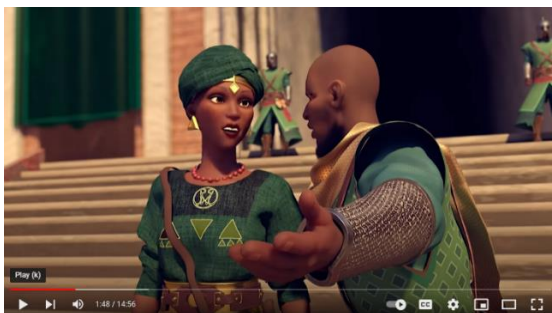

Plate 2: Malaika-warrior Queen animated short film, Image source: YouNeek studio, 2019
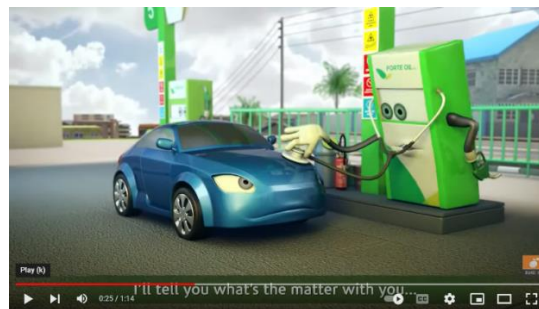

Plate 3: Super Visco statics engine oil commercial animation, Image source: Orange VFX, 2014

1.2 Background to the study

Jenkins (1898) asserted that long before the invention of the animation device in America, there had been the capturing of phases of a moving object, a practice that He called 'Chronophotography' from the Victorian era. Jenkins avowed that "…it is hard to visit any large American city without finding an advertising stand engaging moving pictures exclusively or partly as their attraction".Thus Cook and Thompson (2019) agreed that the story of commercial animation cannot be told correctly without advertising.

Jenkins (1989), equally noted that the invention of the animation mechanism was destined to touch life at major points of beauty and utility, this study and previous works of literature on this milieu, show that advertising and animation have jointly established a strong promotional genre for product promotion in contemporary society.

In Africa, while little is known about the animated works of pre-independence Nigeria due to the paucity of literature, oral traditional pieces of evidence, show it is traceable to the rich culture and art of the African people portrayed through dynamic media like dance, poetry, storytelling, and festivals. Eko (2007, as cited in Jimoh, 2019), indicated that long before colonialism, satirical performances were created from images implied from African mythology and archetypes and used to illuminate complex communications as witnessed in Asian paper animation cultures. Callus (2018) also noted that animation practice in Africa might not have followed the cinematic path as observed in America, Europe, or Asia; but animated activities were expressed through other mediums in Africa. Thus, contemporary literature asserts that animation practice can be expressed within the context of diverse media and types, including:

I. 2-Dimensional (2D) animation which included:
- Traditional Hand drawn animation- This traditional approach entails hand-crafting each frame and is frequently employed in nostalgic or creative projects
- Vector animation- This technique makes use of vector graphics to generate smooth, scalable 2D animations that are typically seen in explainer videos and educational content.
- Cutout animation- A unique visual style is achieved by using 2D characters and objects cut from paper, cardboard, or digital elements.
- Motion graphics- Animated text, shapes, and abstract visuals that are commonly employed in advertising and information design

II. 3Dimensional (3D) animation which includes:
- Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI)- CGI gives images a realistic, three-dimensional appearance and is frequently used in feature films, computer games, and TV ads.
- Stop motion animation- creates a tactile, frequently whimsical style by physically modifying real things frame by frame.
- Claymation- a type of stop-motion animation that is renowned for its endearing and peculiar look. It uses clay characters.

Relying on Callus's (2018) assertion, the study opines therefore that if the above is the contemporary typology of modern animation, then animation practice in Africa was evident before now, but disguised in indigenous puppetry, caricature stick fights, satirical traditional dance, and dynamic wooden sculptural masquerades used symbolically to tell folklores, entertain and communicate cultural and religious norms among African people. This knowledge is therefore significant to this study because it bridges both old and contemporary approaches to the study of animation and its application to commercial animation practice in Nigeria.

Modern advertising has at its core the sway of the 1500s–1800s advertising history. *Animistic worldview*, which allows an "... absorptivity of boundaries between nature and culture, matter and spirit, and self and world", Lear (1994) believed that Animism as a central part of advertising provides a connection between the material and spiritual realms, thus birthing an Animated world. Cook and Thompson (2019), relying on Lear's authority, buttressed that the *animistic worldview* has found its way into today's commercial animation practice, enabling practitioners to tap into the realms of material and spirits (fantasy and magic) to exaggerate emotions that are incapable of humans and present them to the audience as make-belief media for product promotion and advancing a course.

Likewise, Cook and Thompson (2019) noted that modern advertising encapsulates visual and auditory senses and takes the form of dynamic cinematic, still, or animated media qualities that appeal to consumers, using mediated platforms such as tablets, mobile phones, and multimedia billboards; signs, shop windows, train screens, buses, websites, and other engaging media as advertising vehicles. As a result, Lear (1994) maintains that advertising confirms a way of being in the world, and as such, raises the conviction that animation in advertising can impact brand identification, influence product validation and promote product recall or brand loyalty.

Consequently, this study focuses on commercial animation practice from the Nigeria perspective.

1.3   *Problem statement*
In Nigeria, despite recent advances in the development of animation practice, there is still a dearth of scholarly documented commercial animation content and literature supporting its practices in Nigeria. Besides, the reliance on foreign animated commercials and studios for big projects, coupled with the value placed on animation for entertainment over commercial animation has continued to pose limitations to its practice in Nigeria. Cook and Thompson (2019) reiterated when they noted that "… historically, animation for entertainment has always enjoyed better documentation and patronage than animation for commercial purposes". Cook and Thompson (2019) traced this assertion to the overbearing influence of an age-long tradition in advertising that depends largely on *life-cast models* for product commercials, more so, the lack of contextual animated content that audiences can relate to, limited commercial animation studios and the low rendition and presentation of animated commercials which is a resultant impact of the paucity of skilled practitioners in the animation industry in Nigeria are gaps that influence the need for this study.

Thus, the study's decision to examine commercial animation practice from a Nigerian perspective, as well as its evolution from pre-independence to post-independence practice in Nigeria, to provide literature documentation on the milieu and make recommendations for its growth in Nigeria, is supported by the aforementioned challenges.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ANCHORAGE

This chapter reviewed the thematic literature and vital pieces of information about the study with the intent of obtaining broad-based information from renowned authorities on the subjects related to Commercial animation practice from a Nigerian perspective and discussed as follows:
- Conceptual Framework
- Theoretical Framework
- Summary of Literature Review

2.1 *Conceptual Framework*
2.1.1 *Commercial Animation*
Commercial animation, otherwise called animation for product promotion in advertising, is the engagement of kinematic image sequencing and lively characters for brand, goods, and service promotion, meant to influence consumer choice and consumer behaviour. Animation creates a world of fantasy for products and suspends disbelief so audiences can enter into the spirit of things in the animated world, (Baldwin, n.d., as cited in Cook & Thompson, 2019, p. 8). Cook and Thompson, (2019) equally noted that animation in advertising is a *powerful engine of commodity fetishism* - a concept introduced by Karl Marx in his critique of political economy that refers to the social phenomenon where commodities (goods or products) are imbued with symbolic or mystical qualities beyond their material utility and empowers products with a particular form of liveliness.

Building on the above assertions, Explain-Ninja (2022) further noted that commercial animation is a contemporary advertising trend that employs the use of animated videos to tell compelling stories about a product or service. It asserted that "Commercial Animation is an amusing, discreet, and innovative type of commercial that does not limit imagination or ideas and consists of a 15- to 60-second animated clip that narrates the function, characteristics, and benefits of the advertised product".

The history of commercial animation in Nigeria cannot be well-chronicled without tracing back the origin of animation and the global dialogue surrounding it. Documented literary evidence on animation history shows several short *trick films,* as the technique was then called -motion pictures created for product promotion before 1908, giving rise to the first successful animation device called the Phenakistoscope, invented by Belgian Joseph Plateau in 1832, - it was a revolving cardboard disc device that gave the illusion of movement.

This was followed by the Zoetrope device developed by William George Horner in 1834, which comprised drawn still images within a rotating drum that gave the illusion of movement, by displaying a sequence of drawings or photographs showing progressive phases within the rotating drum. This became the first projected animation for a theatrical audience device and was improved upon by the Praxinoscope- an invention of Frenchman Charles-Emile Reynaud in 1876, (Kehr, 2021).

Animacam (2017) and Popova (2011) stated that James Stuart Blackton founded a motion film bureau as early as 1897 for commercial advertising and directed the first stop motion animation for Thomas Edison in 1900 *The Enchanted Drawing*, which became the first animated short sequence film in 35mm, "The Humorous Phases of Funny Faces" in 1906, and "The Haunted Hotel" in 1907. However, documented literature on animation history confirmed the work of Frenchman Emile Cohl's (1908 *) Fantasmgorie,* as the first full-length animated picture ever created, - a series of scenes without much narrative structure, but morphing into each other. Thus, earning Frenchman Emile Cohl (1908) the title "Father of Animation" (Cook and Thompson, 2019).

2.1.2 *Pre-independence and post-independence advertising practice in Nigeria*
Contemporary animatic history in Nigeria can be traced to the foundational efforts of foremost illustrators, cartoonists, and advertising agencies who provided the platforms for today's animators. It is believed that as early as 1928, West African Publicity Limited, the innovation of United African Company (UAC) and Lever Brother International, which later became "Lever International Advertising Services" (LINTAS), was already servicing colonial brands both home and abroad as

advertising contractors, with a base in Lagos (Olatunji, 2018) and (J. Amifor (Personal communication, April 20, 2024)). Olatunji and Amifor maintained that the advertising landscape was dominated by foreign advertising agencies then: "Ogilvy, Benson, and Mather (OB&M), Graham and Gills (G&G), Advertising and Marketing Services (AMS), Grant Advertising, Auger & Turne, and S. H. Benson".

Jimoh (2010, as cited in Fasunon, 2018) recounts that Akinola Lasekan (1916–1972), one of the "Fathers of Contemporary Art in Nigeria", pioneered Morden 2D cartooning, a key component in the animation genre, through the West African Newspaper established by Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937. Fasunon (2018) likens this first political cartoonist to a "solider whose rifle was the pencil". As a graphic illustrator for the newspaper house, Lasekan's political cartoons echoed the agitations of the people and became a vehicle for critiquing the oppressive policies of the colonial masters pushing for Nigeria's independence.

The West African Publicity Company (WAP) now "Lever International Advertising Services" (LINTAS) later discovered Erhabor Emokpai in 1958 who was a prolific painter and designer; he joined LINTAS as a creative visual artist and rose to the position of creative director in 1973. Amifor (2016, as cited in Toluwani, 2018) refers to Erhabor Emokpai as "the first Nigerian visual art director who helped indigenized indigenous content, environmental symbolism, and African value system in advertising practice in Nigeria". Other post-independence cartoonists after Lasekan included: Joy Ajiboye, Ade Ogundero Bayo Odunlana, Mooyiwa Original, Kenny Adamson, Mooyiwa Collins, Chins Nworjih, Sanmi Abejide, Femi Jolaoso, Tayo Fatunla, Cliff Ogiugo, and Dele Jegede. (Ogunlade, 2011).

Unlike what was obtainable in neighbouring Niger where Moustapha Alassane whose political animated short film *Bon Voyage Sim* was traced to 1966 shortly after Nigerian independence and Kokoa in 2003; successive socioeconomic and political upheavals and military coups that greeted post-independence Nigerian, pushed illustrators to intensify using cartoons as a tool for addressing Nigeria's sociocultural, and political challenges, and for protesting against oppressive military and civilian regimes (Jimoh, 2019; Momaa, 2023). Lesser controversial themes soon evolved after the Civil War (1967-1970) and expanded to action adventures and multiple cartoon panels called comic strips that partly told indigenous stories and advertised products. Notable were "Kaptain Afrika" by Andy Kman, "Terror Muda" by Kola Fayemi, and Jossy Abiboyes cartoons and gag panels with Daily Times Newspaper which also featured in the Vanguard Daily Newspaper in the 1970s and 1980s, (Fasunon, 2018) and (Pijnaker, 2018). Coupled is the pioneering work of Wale Adenugas', "Ikebe Super" cartoon series, Super story television series, Bembella and Lulu, and Binta cartoon magazine which featured prominently during the golden age of Nigeria's illustrative cartooning and comedy show with minimal showcase of traditional 2-dimensional animated graphics.

2.1.3 The emergence of animation studios in Nigeria

Although mostly outsourced, prominent animated television commercials like the Super Viscos Static Oil, Michelin tyres, and Elephant detergent commercials which aired on Nigerian television in the early 1980s, established the affinity between animation and advertising practice giving rise to the second wave of commercial animation which begun in Nigeria by the late 1980s. Around this time, the Seven-Up Bottling Company Limited Nigeria released the animated Fido Dido commercial used in the West for the 7Up brand. This was positively accepted by Nigerian audiences and was employed by the company in 1995 as their official mascot to boost sales - The Fido Dido character was a cartoon illustration doodled by Sue Rose on a cocktail napkin in 1985 and named by Joanna Ferrone, it was later animated by Khylin Woodrow and Preston Gibson and created by Closer & Closer and Partizan Studios in 1991. (Heather, 2018; Osaigbovo, 2022 and Gibson 1991)

Although made by a foreign animation studio with no indigenous content, Ogunlade (2011) claimed that this advertising experiment popularised romanticising animated characters for product advertising in Nigeria, resulting in a boom in animated cartoon character merchandising and design. This influenced others such as Yole Akinnawo, a self-taught animator known as the

"First Animator" of Nigerian descent (Fasunon, 2018).

Fasunon (2018) wrote that Wole Aduwo established an animation studio called "Minds Vision" and, with his team, produced their first animation in 1996, which became a model for other emerging animators. The same year, Ibrahim Ganiyu of "IC Studios" created the first-ever animated musical piece of Nigerian origin for musician Lagbaja's song titled *Surulere*, a satirical meme on Nigeria's political melees since independence (Inmolorogun, 2009). Stanley Ohikuare, who mentored under Ibrahim Ganiyu, produced an animated future film called "Lifespan", while Obinna Owuenwu produced Artiste Adesola Adesimbo's (Weird Mc) hit song *Ijoya* animated classic music video in 2006 (Weird Mc, 2011). Other pioneering animators include Nnamdi Nwoha, Remi Olutimeyin, Shina Ajulo, Ekene Ape, Niyi Akinmolayan, Genesis Williams, and Eri Umusu. These pioneering efforts helped sustain and promote the animation industry in Nigeria up until the 2000s (Fasunun, 2018).

With the advent of social media platforms like Facebook in 2004, WhatsApp in 2009, and Instagram in 2010, the sharing of animated skits and short videos became viral. Tayo Fasunon and Richard Oboh collaborated in 2012 to create *Ovie and Wale*, a 3D commercial animated character designed to push product advertisements and attract big-budget animation deals from corporate firms. This found its way to the internet, including Google Nigeria in 2013, and marked the coming of age of commercial animation practice in Nigeria. Thenceforward Fasunon, (2018) noted, that it became commonplace for animated commercials to be developed by Nigerian animators and studios for global brands and indigenous products to date.

Modern examples of contemporary commercial animation projects include: Super Visco Statics for Forte Oil (2014), Mr. Chef's Seasoning (2016), Dangote Salt (2017), Hollandia Slim Milk (2020), *DSTV Ovie Wale* (2016) and *Nutri Yo* (2024), produced by Orange VFX Studios- these further highlight the rise of a unique and emerging advertising language in Nigeria that is rapidly reshaping the cultural landscape and influencing ways of living in the advertising space.

As noted Baldwin (n.d as cited in Cook and Thompson, 2019) explains that the reasons animation campaigns are so appealing are based on the following premise:
a) People enjoy cartoons, which play a role in addictive attraction.
b) Animation creates unique identities through brands.
c) Animation possesses the capacity to interpret complex ideas with simple forms.
d) Animation creates a form for abstract ideas such as detergent eating stains.

While there are several definitions of commercial animation in Nigeria, Ogunlade (2011) attempted to define it as an animistic phenomenon that helped boost commercial advertising practice in Nigeria in the 1990s, while attributing to the success of the 1995 *Fido Dido* animation commercial animation. Fasunon (2018) corroborated by noting that the Super Visco Static oil, Puritop disinfectant, Michelin tyres, and Elephant detergent animated commercials of the 1980s that aired on Nigerian television were significant steps towards describing and documenting commercial animation practice in *Nigerian phraseology*. Moreover, the centrality of animation to advertising remains pungent, its framework has continued to be investigated through the lenses of other Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) media (Cook and Thompson, 2019). Thus this study reiterates commercial animation's position in media theory and research.

2.1.4 *Product branding and media*

McLuhan (1964, as cited in Libraries, 2016). envisaged that the advent of the internet and easy access to information technology and mass communication media in diverse forms would create a cultural convergence and migration that would promote media applications that provide entertainment, fantasies, information, advertisements, education, and escapism in contemporary society. Young and Ogilvy, (2018), corroborated McLuhan's position by maintaining that the internet is today a global force that acts as a databank, generator, and transmitter of digital information in today's digital age, they argued that contemporary advertising, which rides on the digital revolution like commercial animation, influences human experiences and migrates consumer

behaviour based on digital media exposures and disruptions.

The study noted this disruption by observing in plate 4 below that as of April 2024, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Tik tok topped the chat with; 3,065, 2,504, 2,000, 2,000 and 1,582 respectively as the most popular social network worldwide by number of monthly active users in millions. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest and Linkedin had 68.39%, 9.86%, 9.47%, 7.52%, 3.62% and 0.61% respectively as market share in Africa between October 2023 and October 2024.

Plate 4: Social media statistic in Africa- November 2024. Image source Statista.com, (2024)

Building on the above, the study emphasises that modern advertising and product branding practices have significantly evolved since the advent of the World Wide Web and its ongoing development. Many brands have embraced Web technology and animated media. Others have equally reinvented their brand identity, brand name, brand visibility and brand personality in alignment with the Internet of Things.

In their publication, *Advertising: Principles and Practice*, Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2009) suggested that when it comes to branding or rebranding, brand owners, advertisers and creatives should ensure the core concepts and values that the brand seeks to communicate to consumers are emphasized. They argue that brand positioning aims to promote brand identity, personality, position, loyalty, image, promise, and preferences and that a brand identity must be uniquely distinctive to ensure its brand image (the mental impression consumers form of a product), remains valued regardless of the promotion platform.

If *the medium is the message* as postulated by McLuhan, it purports that image branding formed a key part of the commercial animation created by the 7 Up bottling company (Fido Dido) – which launched the advent of romanticizing with animated commercials in the Nigerian advertising landscape

in the 1980s. This further suggests that the Nigerian commercial animation pioneers got motivated by their bid to create a homegrown animation brand for clients' products which featured indigenous semiotics capable of aiding local acceptance and promoting more global product visibility and reach online. Sadly only a few evidence of such strides could be seen except in animation for the entertainment genre which has grown much global audience.

Plate 5. 7Up Fido Dodo commercial Advert (1989). Image source: Cerealmad (2023) Youtube.com

Furthermore, the study aligns with the aforementioned assertions and Young and Ogilvy, (2018) postulation on the direct effect of new media and how advertised content relies on media to influence human culture and society using both online and offline, Out-of-home (OOH) and Digital-out-of-home (DOOH) promotional platforms. It advocates for a master plan that will channel the same energy seen in the animation for entertainment genre in Nigeria into commercial animations for indigenous products and services to boost local sales and win more global reach for made-in-Nigeria goods.

2.1.5 *Impact of indigenous content and semiotics in commercial animation practice in Nigeria*
The study of how Indigenous societies communicate and convey meaning through signs, symbols, and various forms of expression is known as indigenous semiotics. Since myths, folklore, symbols, and historical memories and traditions significantly influence constructing people's sense of belonging, Indigenous semiotics help interpret these signs and symbols and focus on how these principles are applied. Furthermore, the use of symbols and visual metaphors is crucial in developing visual literacy or a system of representations. This interpretation of

signs, symbols, and geographical significations—whether iconic, indexical, or symbolic—can be understood as the signifier (any element that connotes or implies something) or the signified (the concept to which a signifier refers) - which Jansson and Falkheimer, (2006, p. 113-114) imply as the *meaning market* that not only connects people but acts in the domain of shared awareness as a *system of beliefs, values and norms* as well.

This shared awareness includes:
- Icons: These are literal representations of an object
- Index: Any image that indicates something
- Symbols – These are images that do not look like their meaning but are understood as something because of convention or tradition

In Nigeria, some iconic motifs, animals, symbols and signs like the Christian cross, dove bird, wooden comb among the Yorubas, cowry, and ofo among the Igbo; uli and nsibidi symbols hold cultural, sacred, social, political and traditional significance. On the authority of Nelson (2016), these symbols hold symbolic narratives and creatively structured representations that promote cultural and social integrations which become generally accepted after years of continuous usage. Nelson (2016) argued that in pre-independence Nigeria, visual codes were part of socio-cultural and religious syntaxes among social groups, hence the need to not allow their knowledge to get eroded by Western text.

Additionally, the iconic discoveries from the copper alloy head figures from Ife, which date back to 1938, the famous Benin bronzes of the 16th century; the Igbo Ukwu -19th-century ancient art culture and the Esie soapstone terracotta's tradition which dated back to over 300 years ago, are all iconic testaments to the impactful and dynamic potency of artistic codification in conveying indigenous communication, techniques, literacy and allegory that promoted peoples belongingness. (Smarthistory,2024)

These iconic art pieces, which often were decorated with traditional signs, symbols, and cultural motifs, corroborate the TianoAge project (2023) assertion that art (iconic and cultural semiotics inclusive) has been the foundation of the most important world civilization's achievements.

Plate 6: Ife Womonije bronze heads, Benin Bronze head, Igbo Ukwu Bronze pot and Esie Soapstone figures, Image source: Google.com, 2024

The adaptation of indigenous symbols in animation projects by Nigerian animators is mostly reflected in animation for entertainment projects like: the Adventures of Turtle Taido (2015) by Muyiwa Kayode, Skelebe (2019) by Quadron Studios, Iyanu Child of Wonder (virtual intro, 2023), and Malaika – Warrior Queen (Pilot, 2019) produced by YouNeek Studios; or Emeka's Money (2020) by Setup Nigeria, International Women's Day (2021), Lady Buckit and the Motley Mopsters (2020) by 32AD Studios, Ikenga (Proof of Concept, 2023) by Uche Anisiuba of Quadron Studios, as well as Sade (2019), directed by Miller Luwoye and produced by Oba Owolabi. (IMDb., n.d.) to mention a few. These elements reflect the global animation trend of promoting multiple identities and inclusivity, making the animated tale adaptation more relevant and approachable to Nigerian and African audiences.

This approach can be traced back to the influence of Disney films, which over time have played an important role in shaping cultural perceptions and promoting diversity and inclusivity through animated media, Souad (2012) refers to it as a complex process of coding/decoding and appropriating cultural meanings, noting that Disney animated films serve not only as entertainment media but also as ideological apparatus. Particular attention must be paid to recent intercultural collaborations with Walt Disney Studios that gave rise to animated films like Iwaju (2024) and the success of Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire (2023), which pioneered a new way of telling African anthologies and stories as a gain for the African and Nigerian animation industries. Furthermore, Disney animated films like Moana, Kobo, Coco, and Raya and the Last Dragon could be mentioned because they demonstrated how different cultures and ideologies can be adapted, as well as how powerful indigenous semiotic integrations can be in generating animism for commercial or entertainment animation practices.

The commercial animation advert for Nutri Yo yoghurt and the DSTV Ovie and Wale, both produced by Lagos-based animation studio Orange Vfx, provide a comparable example; instead of using foreign elements as was previously the case, the characters and animation environments are made to depict native Nigerian setting. According to Souad (2012), if the coding and decoding principle employed in animation is successful in conveying the interpretation of values and behavioural codes, this study opined that it could be useful in coding consumer behaviour towards promoted goods and services or in establishing brand image, loyalty, personality, and promises across market spaces.

The study's position, however, is that, unlike animation for entertainment, there are not many animation projects to support the documentation of commercial animation practice in Nigeria. Furthermore, the abundance of animation applications and limited skill sets in the Nigerian animated industry have hampered the freedom of creative exploration within the animation context, since many people use restricted animation apps with character content that exclusively feature foreign elements.

2.2 Theoretical framework
The study is anchored on the *Mediation of Reality Theory in Advertising* and the *Theory of Brand Identity Prism* (in this case codification through animated brand identity) and examines how visual design elements are integrated to impact changes and influence consumer behaviour using commercial animation.

2.2.1 Mediation of reality theory in advertising
The study of visual communication design and theories provides an understanding of how people use visual elements to communicate and convey messages, tell stories and evoke respondent emotions, either via still or dynamic media. Fleming in 1987 theorised that humans learn in four ways in his *Visual and auditory learning theory,* t\hese included; visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinaesthetic (VARK). Relying on the above postulation, King (2008) emphasised that the visual and auditory systems in humans synthesise to give identification and context to objects and events in the external world.

Price Waterhouse Cooper's (PWC), (2017) advancing the position above, submitted that mediation of reality theory in advertising which has its roots in the interdisciplinary theorem of mediation as postulated by Professor Jean Gagnepain, in the 1960s ensures the reliability of strong visuals to connect with the audience faster and with stronger emotions than words.

In Bhasin's (2021) view, the mediation of reality theory in advertising supposes that advertisements (the production of advertisements for commercial products) become more effective when they are incorporated with other media and environments in which they are completely submerged, connoting that the process of advertising goods and services is only effective by the way such adverts utilise media environments to convey advertising objectives since the context of the adverts in themselves are not sufficient until integrated with other media elements that present them as captivating, wholistic and enthralling to audiences. This implies that aside from the advertising text and sounds that are vital for animation designs, the visual environments in which they are designed and rooted (audio, visuals, colour, etc) are also important.

Correspondingly, the above, reiterates that media is a key driver in mass communication because it pushes the advertised message to the fore and that, when overlooked, such advertised messages become silenced in the minds of the audience (Hanson, n.d as cited in Libraries, 2016).

By implication, this study infers that visual elements for animated commercials such as colours, text, photography, packaging, catchphrases, and audio, are essentially integrated into the animated content of brand identities and their visual surroundings to make the media richer, real and more appealing. Lears (1994, p. 1) supported this opinion when he positioned that advertising can signify a certain vision of a *good life,* implicating that the atmosphere of the media outcome of any commercial animation media may predict the feeling of a *good life* when the animated commercial is seen. This is because based on the *Picture Superiority Effect,* (Dual Coding Theory) spectators of advertisement pieces will remember what they see more than what they hear (PWC (2017).

Consequently, the mediation of reality theory becomes essential in understanding the perspective of this study and in harnessing the animism (product fetishism) of animated content in commercial animated brands.

2.2.2 *Brand identity prism theory*

Branding theories cover the principles and strategies employed to create, manage, and enhance a brand. Given that a brand's name greatly influences consumers and remains a unique selling point, it is crucial, to reinforce the application of elements that affect brand practice.

The Brand Identity Prism Theory outlines the components that define a brand's physical characteristics, personality, culture, relationships, reflection, and self-image, (Kapferer, 2008).

Jean-Noël Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism Theory (1992) provides a framework for visualising and comprehending the key elements of a brand and their interplay to establish a coherent brand image and communication strategy. In his book, *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long-Term* (2008), Kapferer argues that brands should possess unique characteristics and values that enable consumers to discover their own identities and self-worth.

Barrer (n.d, as cited in Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells, 2009) further supports the idea of brand personality, suggesting that a brand needs to embody familiar human traits such as love, competence, trustworthiness, and sophistication to become viable.

Jean-Noël Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism Theory, thus listed the essential elements of a brand as follows:

a. A brand has physical specificities and qualities: The physical characteristics and recognizable elements of a brand, such as the logo, packaging, and design.
b. A brand has a personality: The character and style of the brand, are often conveyed through communication style and tone.
c. A brand is a culture: The values, principles, and standards that guide the brand, often reflecting the company's origins and heritage.
d. A brand is a relationship: The relationship the brand seeks to establish with its customers, including customer service and engagement strategies.
e. A brand is a customer reflection: The stereotypical user of the brand, how the brand perceives its target audience.
f. A brand speaks to our self-image: How consumers see themselves when they use the brand, the internal mirror.

Since commercial animated media is equipped to push all of the above on consumers as seen in some of the commercial animation examples earlier listed in this study (see plates 1 & 3), it follows that the brand identity prism theory aided this study in identifying how it has helped in enhancing recall tendencies for band images within the Nigerian advertising and marketing space. The theory has also been essential in the build-up of new commercial animated acts, as witnessed in the media of 32ads and Orange VFX animation studios, which are front-liners in commercial animation practice in Nigeria, and in the pursuit of indigenous product marketing.

2.3 Summary of literature review

The literature review offers valuable insights into the evolution and potential of animation as a medium in Nigeria, particularly in the context of commercial advertising. It highlights animation's effectiveness in enhancing brand marketing and product recall while tracing its development from pre-independence times through the post-colonial era. The review acknowledges pioneers of animation in Nigeria and explores the emergence of indigenous animation studios, some of which have gained global recognition due to advancements in technology.

Despite these achievements, the literature identifies a gap in the application of animation as a robust tool for commercial advertising, particularly for indigenous products. This is attributed to a lack of skilled animators to rival foreign animated works and ill-equipped animation studios, emphasis on animation for entertainment, use of life-cast for product promotion and a limited focus on leveraging animation for indigenous brand promotion. To address this, the review stresses the need for integrating regional cultural elements into animated commercials to strengthen brand identity, reposition products, and achieve greater market visibility. By adopting such culturally rooted strategies, Nigerian commercial animation can preserve heritage while

enhancing the appeal and competitiveness of homegrown products in both local and global markets and compete favourably with international commercial animation studios.

IV. METHODOLOGY

In addressing the methodology used in this study, the researcher observed that despite recent advancements in the Nigerian animation landscape, there is still a drought of scholarly documented commercial animation content, practices and literature supporting its practices in Nigeria. Literature evidence equally shows the reliance on foreign animation studios for big commercial animation projects before the year 2012, coupled with dependence on life cast models for commercial adverts and the value placed on animation for entertainment over commercial animation.

These gaps influenced the researcher to select the *Desk Research* and *Observational* methodology which aided the collection and review of qualitative data from various secondary sources to understand the current landscape in the study milieu, fill knowledge gaps and verify observatory findings from notable published animated works by indigenous animation studios and practitioners in Nigeria. A comparative analysis method was also employed to identify differences and commonalities in techniques used over time in Nigeria's animation landscape.

3.1 *Data collection process*

This study, which adopts a descriptive essay approach and utilises secondary research methodologies, employed desk research and observational techniques to gather qualitative data on commercial animation practices from a Nigerian perspective, tracing their evolution from the pre-independence to the post-independence era for context and documentation purposes. Additionally, the observation method was used to collect data from commercial animated projects relevant to this research. These included 1980s product Television commercials with animated scenes such as Elephant detergent commercials, Super Viscos Static Oil, the 7UP Fido Dido advertisement and 1990s commercials such as Zip Bar Soap and Thermocool fridge adverts. Additionally, animated commercial projects from 2013 and post-2013, like "Mr Chef's Seasoning" (2016), "Dangote Salt" (2017),

"Hollandia Slim Evaporated Milk" (2020), the remake of "Visco Statics Engine Oil" (2014), "Nutri Yo Yoghurt" (2024), and the commercial animation characters "Ovie and Wale," launched by Orange VFX Studio in 2013, were also observed.

3.2 *Method of data analysis*

The data analysis used a qualitative comparative analysis study of the animation techniques and styles employed in the creation of the 1980s; and 1990s product animation commercials with those used from 2013 onwards. This was vital in comprehending and documenting the progression of animation style before, during, and after 2013. The table below shows a similarity-differences comparative analysis of the different periods.

Table 1
Comparative Analysis of Pre-independence and post-independence Commercial Animation Practice in Nigeria

1	Examples of the pre-independence era (before the 1960's) commercial animation projects	Characteristics	Style/Techniques
	No literature evidence of the Western style of commercial animation practices in Nigeria	N/A	N/A
	Examples of post-independence era (1980s-1990s) commercial animation projects	Characteristics	Style/Techniques
	7Up Fido Dido	i. Limited Resources:	i. Traditional Cel -

commercial. AP/Forte Oil Super Viscos Static Oil animated commercial, Elephant Blue detergent advert, and later, Zip Bar Soap and Thermocool fridge adverts	Due to limited resources and technology, animations were often simpler and less sophisticated compared to later productions. ii. Foreign influence: Cultural themes were mostly absent as many of the animated projects drew inspiration from foreign animation studios iii. Commercial Focus: Most animations were created for product promotion and commercial purposes only iv. Early experimentation: Animators were experimenting with different styles and techniques, laying the groundwork for future advancements in the industry. v. Rigidity: Most animation	animation technique ii. Minimalist approach iii. Two-dimensional only iv Stop motion animation	effects were not flexible vi. Technical Restrictions: They lack the versatility and technical enhancements available in digital animation, such as 3D effects and complex camera movements. vii. Storage Challenges: The physical storage of celluloid sheets and artwork can be cumbersome and prone to damage over time. vii. Limited distribution of animation studios nationwide
	Examples of post-independence era (2000s-to date) commercial animation projects	Characteristics	Style and Techniques
	i. The animated characters design of "Ovie and Wale," for animated commercials (2013)	i. Focus on Entertainment: Nigerian commercial animations primarily prioritize entertainment value. They often feature	Exploration of computer-generated images (CGI) using 3-dimensional and 2dimensional software

ii. The remake of Visco Statics Engine Oil (2014) iii. Mr Chef's Seasoning" (2016) iv, Dangote Salt" (2017), v. Hollandia Slim Evaporated Milk (2020) vi. Nutri Yo Yoghurt (2024)	comedic elements, slapstick humour, and exaggerated characters to appeal to a wide audience. ii. Relatable Themes: Many animations draw inspiration from everyday Nigerian life, incorporating local customs, traditions, and social issues. This relatability helps connect with viewers on a deeper level. iii. Vibrant Visual Style: Commercial animations in Nigeria are known for their vibrant and colourful visuals. They often employ bold colours and exaggerated character designs to create a visually appealing and engaging experience. iv. Use of Indigenous Languages:		

		While English is often used, many commercial animations also incorporate indigenous Nigerian languages, promoting cultural diversity and accessibility to a wider audience. v. Use of indigenous symbols: Most post-independence commercial animation projects now adopt indigenous signs, motifs and cultural symbols to deliver and create affinity with the Nigeria's traditional heritage and values.	

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found a lack of documentation on early Nigerian animated product commercials, particularly those from before independence. While fully animated commercials were rare before 2013, examples of motion graphics using traditional cel animation techniques superimposed on live-action footage exist from the 1980s. These early efforts often involved foreign studios due to the nascent Nigerian animation industry. Notable examples include the 7Up Fido Dido commercial and the AP/Forte Oil Super Viscos Static Oil advert.

Furthermore, its historical overview of commercial animation in Nigeria highlighted key characteristics and stylistic trends across different eras and contrasted the early techniques with the more modern animated commercials produced from 2013 onwards.

4.1 *Pre-Independence Era (Before 1960s)*
From Table 1, the study observed a notable absence of Western-style commercial animation practices during this period. This suggests a limited or non-existent presence of such animation within the Nigerian cultural landscape before independence.

4.2 *Post-Independence Era (1980s-1990s)*
This period witnessed the emergence of commercial animation in Nigeria, primarily driven by the advertising and entertainment industry. Key characteristics included limited resources, foreign influence, and a strong focus on commercial objectives. Traditional animation techniques like cel animation and stop motion dominated, reflecting the constraints of available technology. The era showcased early experimentation and laid the foundation for future advancements in the Nigerian animation industry.

4.3 *Post-Independence Era (2000s to Date)*
A significant shift towards digital animation is evident, with the mediation of technology and exploration of CGI and 3D/2D software. This period saw a greater emphasis on entertainment value, incorporating comedic elements and relatable themes which were missing in early practices. Vibrant visual styles and the use of indigenous languages became prominent features, reflecting a growing sense of cultural identity within the industry. The incorporation of indigenous symbols and motifs further strengthened the connection between commercial animation and Nigerian cultural heritage.

Plate 7: Nutri Yo commercial animation advert clip: Image source: Google.com, 2024

4.4 *Limitations:*
- The research primarily focuses on commercial animation, neglecting other forms of animation in Nigeria, such as educational animations, animated movies or individual entertainment films.
- A more comprehensive analysis would require a deeper dive into specific projects and the individuals who have shaped the industry.
- The impact of globalization and international trends on Nigerian animation requires further investigation.

CONCLUSION

To this end, the Nigerian animation industry has undergone a remarkable evolution, transitioning from limited resources and foreign influence to a more sophisticated and culturally rooted industry. The increasing use of digital technology has opened up new creative possibilities and contributed to the growth of the industry with several animation studios springing up since the 2000's. The focus on entertainment, cultural relevance, and vibrant visuals has continued to help establish a unique identity for Nigerian commercial animation even though there is yet a heavy focus on animation films. This study thus provides a valuable foundation for further exploration of the evolving landscape of commercial animation in Nigeria and its potential for continued growth and innovation. It expresses the need for continued exploration of digital animation techniques for commercial animation practices in Nigeria; the study further encourages the promotion of indigenous content in commercial animation and advocates for more synergy between animators, filmmakers, and other creative professionals and animation studios in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

[1] ANIMACAM. (2017). *The beginnings of animation: James Stuart Blackton*. International Online Animation Festival (VI Ed.). Limala Productions. Retrieved from https://animacam.tv/en/1803-2/

[2] Belkhyr, S. (2012). Disney animation: Global diffusion and local appropriation of culture. *Journal of Human Sciences, 9*(2), 704–714.

Retrieved from https://www.j-humansciences.com/ojs/index.php/IJHS/article/view/2229

[3] Bhasin, H. (2021). *Core concepts and theories of advertising: 5 main advertising theories*. Retrieved from https://www.marketing91.com/5-ms-of-advertising/ on December 19, 2020

[4] Callus, P. (2018). Animating African history: Digital and visual trends. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, African History*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.337

[5] Cook, M., & Thompson, K. (2019). *Introduction to animation and advertising*. Palgrave Animation. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27939-4

[6] DW-made for mind. (2019). Animations made in Nigeria. *The 77 Percent, Magazine for African Youth*. Retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/animation-made-in-nigeria/av-51221933

[7] Explain Ninja Studio's. (2021). 10 best animated advertisements. Retrieved from https://explain.ninja/blog/the-benefits-of-animated-commercials-animated-video-ads/

[8] Fasunnon, T. (2018, November). Animation in Nigeria. *ISSUU*. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/institutfrancaisnigeria/docs/animation_in_nigeria_vf on September 11, 2021

[9] Goibson, P. (2002). 7UP Fido Dido. Retrieved from https://prestongibson.com/7UP-Fido-Dido

[10] Heather, T. (2018, April 30). From sketch cartoon to brand mascot: How Fido Dido became the face of 7UP. Retrieved from https://popicon.life/how-fido-dido-became-the-face-of-7up/#:~:text=Created%20by%20Joanna%20Ferrone%20and,few%20squiggly%20lines%20for%20hair

[11] Inmolorogun, E. [Egbe Inmolorogun]. (2009, February 2). Lagbaja - Suuru Lere #Yoruba Music [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01zvnAivCbU

[12] IMDb. (n.d.). 10 popular short animated films of Nigerian origin. Retrieved from https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?genres=animation&countries=NG

[13] Jenkins, C. F. (1898). *Animated pictures*. The University of Michigan Libraries. H.L Mcqueen. Retrieved from https://ia902700.us.archive.org/17/items/animatedpicture00jenkgoog/animatedpicture00jenkgoog.pdf

[14] Jansson, A., & Falkheimer, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Geographies of communication: The spatial turn in media studies*. Nordicom Göteborg University.

[15] Jimoh, G.A. (2019). Masked in metaphors: Counter-narratives in the works of Nigerian cartoonist Mike Asukwo. *African Arts, 52*(2), 32-39. Retrieved from https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/725749

[16] Kapferer, J.N. (2008). *The new strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long-term*. Kogan Page.

[17] Kehr, D. (2021, November). Animation: Motion picture. *Britannica*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/art/animation

[18] King, A. J. (2009). Visual influences on auditory spatial learning. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 364*(1535), 331–339. http://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0230

[19] Lears, J. (1994). *Fables of abundance: A cultural history of advertising in America*. Basic Books.

[20] Libraries. (2016, March). Media effect theories. *Understanding media and culture: An introduction to mass communication*. University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing edition. https://doi.org/10.24926/8668.2601

[21] MOMAA. (2023, April 28). The magic of African animation: Bringing stories to life. Retrieved from https://momaa.org/the-magic-of-african-animation-bringing-stories-to-life/#:~:text=Early%20Beginnings:%20Pioneering%20Animators%20and,potential%20in%20the%20animation%20world on December 2024.

[22] Moriarty, S., Mitchell, N., & Wells, W. (2009). *Advertising: Principles and practice* (8th ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall.

[23] Nelson, E. (2016). Ibie'ka (Ideographs): Developing visual signs for expressing contemporary Niger Delta in an era of

petroleum oil exploitation. *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities, 5*, 136. https://doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v5i4.11

[24] Olatunji, R.W. (2018). Trends in advertising and cultures in Nigeria. Retrieved from https://communicationculturesinafrica.com/articles/10.21039/cca.5/galley/12/download/

[25] Ogunlade, B.A. (2011). Effective utilization of cartoon and cartooning animation for television product advertising in Nigeria. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Empirical Research, 9*(1), No. 1. July, 2011. Retrieved from https://globalacademicgroup.com/journals/empirical%20research/EFFECTIVE%20UTILIZATION%20OF%20CARTOON%20AND%20CARTOONING%20ANIMATION%20FO.pdf

[26] Osaigbovo, F. O. (2022). Advertising promotion mascots: Revisiting the adventures of "Fido Dido" as 7UP advertising brand ambassador in Nigeria. *Journal of Visual Communication Design, 1*(1). Retrieved from https://journals.futa.edu.ng/home/paperd/1429/84/19

[27] Pijnaker, T. (2018). African superheroes in the 1970s and 1980s: A historical perspective. *Africa in Words*. Retrieved from https://africainwords.com/2018/06/11/african-superheroes-in-the-1970s-and-80s-a-historical-perspective/

[28] PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2017). The power of visual communication: Showing your story to land the message. Retrieved from http://www.commslab2017.com/CreativeComms_WhitePaper_Apr17.pdf on September 11, 2021

[29] Popova, M. (2011). Before Walt Disney: 5 pioneers of early animation. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/07/before-walt-disney-5-pioneers-of-early-animation/241448/

[30] Smarthistory. (2024, November). The art of Nigeria. Retrieved from https://smarthistory.org/the-art-of-africa/west-africa/the-art-of-nigeria/

[31] TianoAge Project. (2023, October 24). Spiral meaning and symbolism. Retrieved from https://www.tainoage.com/spirals.html

[32] Toluwani, T. D. (2018). Visual communication design for solving street children's plight in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja [Unpublished Masters of Fine Arts Manuscript].

[33] Weird Mc. [officialweirdmc]. (2011, August 17). Weird MC – Ijoya [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5xiYjLF5Uo

[34] YouNeek Studios. (2020, April 28). Iyanu child of wonder graphic novel lunch [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/27GcevDG9DI

[35] Young, M., & Ogilvy, D. (2018). *Ogilvy on advertising in the digital age*. First U.S. edition. Bloomsbury.