

Chapter 6

Symbolism in Digital Space and Transitional Society: New Forms of Communicative Meanings in Africa

Melchizedec J. Onobe

Bingham University, Karu, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Communication is fundamentally a toolbox of symbols used to create meaning in society. Its existence is a necessity spawned by circumstantial and society's contingencies at every turn. It is the reason languages, cues, imageries, and symbols—the building blocks of communication—continue to evolve with the times. The ritual of this dynamism is precipitated by a number of factors like socio-cultural identity crisis, economic and political variables, etc. This transitional socialisation continues to surge in the digital space of multi-platforms and the internet. Thus, this chapter attempts to evaluate the tenses of communication in the digital space, its influence on cultural identity, and the place of Africa in the narrative. The study submits that although the global nature of communication is believed to have overbearing influence on the continent's outlook, Africa being a culturally strong entity can outsource to the rest of the world and into the digital space its numerous rich cues, symbols, and signs to give the cultural identifiers indelibility and relevance on the global map.

INTRODUCTION

Communicative symbols have always been like a flouting vessel in human existence and society. They have always had a condescending characteristic that is amendable to any user under any circumstance. Using Africa's picturesque analogy, they are like the servile donkey that waits to be burdened, shown where to go, told where to stop and squat, with innate unique intrinsic indifference to the rider of the thoughts who animates meaning as he/she pleases. Such portals and carts are what the communicative

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symbols and their traditions afford the living with here-and-there tinges of ethnicity, cultural mappings, attribution or prohibitions, coloration and biases; but they nevertheless carry the weights thrust at them.

Perhaps, symbolisms can be rigid and also dynamic at the same time. The meanings that are auctioned by them are reflective of society's political, social and economic mappings and acculturation (Parker, 2012). It is through them that power and dominance are decided and conceded. In clusters of any course, when linguistically arranged to denote power equation, they portend conquest or describe subordinates. This interestingly fluid nature of ciphers is the hub of power in ancient and modern society. Like the planetary system, they have a revolving circumference around human socio-psychological space and evolutionary interactivity. They serve as entrance as well as exit portal for some epochal developments of society (Cohn, Engelen and Schileroord, 2019) such as heralding new civilization and socialization, starting an era and ending another in an organic, discreetly overlapping style.

From symbols grow constant interactions, social relationships and meaning sharing. Berger and Luckmann (1971, p.114) observe that even in them the universe can be micro scoped, analyzed, understood and consequently animated.

The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of all socially objectivized and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place within this universe.

Thus, symbols are generally and always metaphorical in communicative context, giving them expressive three-dimensionality; a buffer for richer context of viewing issues. This "multi-faceted nature of symbols" as Luuk (2018, p.258) describes it is a flexibility that engages meta-communication/socialization. More often than not they have been used as the ladder of communicative evolution, overlapping cultures negotiated by either confab or happenstance (O'Reilly, 2017) on a wide range of splitter issues. In every civilization and culture, in Africa and elsewhere, they abound in arrays of rhetoric, text art and cultural science.

A little over a decade ago, Steen (2008) proposed a three-way model of language, thought and communication all sandwiched in deliberate metaphor theory (DMT). The DMT suggests that *deliberate* metaphors are linguistic metaphors that "explicitly invite the addressee to conceptualize one thing as another thing, often for rhetorical or persuasive purposes" (Steen, 2008, p. 213). A metaphorical interpretation thrives usually when there is reason to interrogate a literal interpretation because some element of falsity has been established in a narrative (Searle, 1993) resulting in withering stereotypes foisted on unsuspecting masses that consume, misappropriate the icons. The incomplete information and inaccurate knowledge, if left, breeds and ventilates indiscriminate misinterpretation from a pond of falsity. And in a market place of ideas truth and falsehood are wares that inadvertently and contentiously intersect and symbols act like a wolverine magnetic codes to denominate the two.

Nevertheless, literature makes a distinction between symbols. Generally, they try to draw a line between ornamental symbols depicted by personalized representation and linguistic denotation acknowledging though that the point of difference may be minor. In communal usage and quarters, for example, various degrees of iconicity are tacitly accepted into existence and symbols (e.g. the Christian cross, or onomatopoeic words like *knock*, *bump*, *crash*) such as they represent exhibit iconicity as well (Luuk, 2013). Not taking anything away from the concepts of many linguists, this chapter submits that the blustery nature of symbols or representational icons permits a duality, a mobility, and somewhat a vista for ornamental

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