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Graphical animation for education and public orientation – a necessity in the Nigerian society

N.K. Egun[a,]*, H. Dunkwu[b]

[a]*Department of Chemical Engineering University of Benin Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.*
[b]*Scroll Comics Company, Lagos. Nigeria.*

[*]Corresponding author; Department of Chemical Engineering University of Benin Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Graphical animation which refers to comics and cartoons has been shown to be a veritable tool for formal and informal education; and an effective medium for communication due to their popularity and easy accessible format. There is the necessity to bring to the fore the need to exploit the human natural attraction to graphical animation, in utilizing comics and cartoons as a medium for formal and informal education of the indigenous cultural, civic and social values in Nigeria for public re-orientation and exposing the economic potentials.

1. Introduction

Animation refers to the recording of any image which goes through changes over time to portray the illusion of motion. Before the invention of film, the depiction of figures in motion through static art existed as far back as the Paleolithic (Thomas, 1958). Because of the stylistic similarities between comic strips and early animated movies, "cartoon" came to refer to animation, and the word "cartoon" is currently used to refer to both animated cartoons and gag cartoons. While "animation" designates any style of illustrated images seen in rapid succession to give the impression of movement, the word "cartoon" is most often used in reference to television programs and short films for children featuring anthropomorphized animals, superheroes, the adventures of child protagonists

and related genres (Wikepedia, 2013). Similarly, the term "graphical animation" in this work refers to comics and cartoons and will be used interchangeably depending on the context and form of media.

Comics represent the synthesis of a broad range of visual communication devices: diagrams, info-graphics, narrative, explanatory sketches—all of which are used countless times by people in their everyday lives to explain concepts to others. Comics are not bound by a linear structure or chronological order. They can jump great distances in time and space from panel to panel. They can simultaneously juxtapose conflicting testimonies. And what's more, they can do so under the guise of a good-looking visual that lures the reader into reading a story that they might not otherwise read. (Morrison et al, 2002). The comic book has been a staple reading material for children and youths since 1930s; and a central aspect of the culture of the United States. Although it came under severe attack in 1954 for corrupting the innocent minds of the American youth; it served military purposes during the World War II, and as Americans fought for their civil rights it was developed as underground tools to champion social causes. Even today, comic books remain popular worldwide, and their scope continues to expand (Bunce, 1996; Chilcoat and Ligon, 1994).

A cartoon is a form of two-dimensional illustrated visual art intended for satire, caricature, or humor and in the early 20th century and onward it referred to comic strips and animated films. Comic strips, also known as "cartoon strips" in the United Kingdom, are found daily in newspapers worldwide, and are usually a short series of cartoon illustrations in sequence. In the United States they are not as commonly called "cartoons" themselves, but rather "comics" or "funnies". Editorial cartoons are found almost exclusively in news publications and news websites. Although they also employ humor, they are more serious in tone, commonly using irony or satire. The art usually acts as a visual metaphor to illustrate a point of view on current social and/or political topics (Becker, 1959).

At present the Nigerian visual media is filled with various foreign comic books; cartoon films and characters such as Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Ben 10, Cinderella, etc. telling stories that are alien to the Nigerian indigenous cultural content which has gradually created an anomaly in the society, as there is no link between acquired knowledge from instruction and that gotten from visual media especially in the context of social values and responsibility. The aim of this work is to bring to the fore the need to exploit the human natural attraction to graphical animation, in utilizing comics and cartoons as a medium for formal and informal education of the indigenous cultural, civic and social values in Nigeria and the economic potentials.

2. Animation and education

Graphical animation has been shown to be a veritable tool for formal and informal education due to their popularity and easy accessible format. Comic strips provide a perfect vehicle for learning and practicing language. Each strip's three or four panels provide a finite, accessible world in which funny, interesting looking characters live and go about their lives. And children with limited reading skills in acquisition, performance and fluency are not as overwhelmed in dealing with the size of a comic strip as they may be with a book of many pages and provide opportunities to acquire and practice social interactions that meet them where they are at (Kleefeld, 2011). It also positively enhanced constructive learning, cooperative learning and collaborative learning amongst peers (van Wyk, 2011). Comics exposes students to greater literacy exploration than they otherwise would; through the use of dialogue, dramatic vocabulary, nonverbal communication and prevents an important study content from being "boring and meaningless" (Chilcoat, 1993). Versaci (2001) through the intermediary quality of comics encouraged students to think critically about literacy worth of books.

3. Animation and social reform

Graphical animations are effective ways of exploring not only children's ideas, but that of adults also. They are strong alternate approach for determining individuals' perceptions and instruction on social unity and solidarity, fellowship, friendship and social relations (Yüksel and Adigüzel, 2012). Kabapinar (2009) suggested that concept cartoons can be beneficial in informal learning setting to promote public awareness, as they found out that their displayed concept cartoon in the London undergrounds were eye catching means of promoting thinking and discussion. Cartoons can be a terrific tool for teaching higher level thinking skills; as it covers a lot of high-level concepts such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, satire, irony and things that are harder to convey in text; which enables viewers to discuss and analyze them along perceptions of current events and cultural trends (McKenzie,

2012). There is an interesting trend coming out of India, where people are using comics as a tool of development communication in remote regions and villages (Gupta, 2004).

4. Results and discussion

The comic books industry in Nigeria is largely untapped and begging to be exploited. Supastrikas is the only visible company in this Industry. With a population of 140million, the youth in Nigeria constitute 70%, a large market indeed. Also, the indigenous cartoon industry is not exempted; as it is presently scarcely utilized mainly for product advertisement, musical videos and political manifestoes. At present there is no indigenous content cartoon series developed in the country.

A survey carried out among children of ages 5 to 16 on their perception of graphical animation as shown in table 1, showed that they are attracted to reading comic strips and cartoons and eagerly look forward to subsequent episodes (parameter 1). They would welcome the increase of comic strips as part of their instructional materials (parameter 2). In a study comparing comics to text, it showed that comics visual quality increases learning and help to engage students of all learning disposition and multiple intelligences (Sones, 1994). This will improve the reading culture which at present is on the decline, as it has been observed that children tend to shift focus from their books to television screens and display gadgets as they get older due to the decrease in the colourful character contents of their books; which first attracted them to reading their books. There is a strong desire to see and watch animated series of Nigerian content (parameter 3); this in itself is a ready market waiting to be explored but they expressed fears and reservations about the ingenuity in scripting and continuity/ long stay of such series on screen and print media when compared to their foreign counterparts which has been in production for years.

Table 1
Children perception of graphical animation.

Parameters	Percentage (%) response
Which section of newspapers, magazines etc. are you first attracted to?	
Cartoon	80
Sports	15
Current Affairs	5
How often do you watch cartoon films?	
Daily	98
Not Daily	2
Do you like more cartoons to be present in your textbooks?	
Yes	95
No/ Undecided	5
Do you welcome a graphical animation series (cartoon) of nigerian content/ characters?	
Yes	90
No/ Undecided	10

Also adults and parents (Table 2) showed a strong perception of comics and cartoons as instructional materials, acknowledged its utilization as a teaching tool especially for children and young minds as it connects the visual, hearing and social senses together on a subject matter. They are also concerned about the absence of the Nigerian cultural value content in the comics and cartoons available in the market.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Education curriculum review

It has been shown that concept cartoons may take over several important roles in social sciences education. They prove to be a functional tool to support teachers in giving pupil- as well as subject-orientated instructions by creating connection between a certain practical situation and its scientific context (Fenske et. al, 2011). With the present on-going review of the National educational curriculum for primary and post primary education to the

meeting the societal demands on education; and students desirous to have more comic strips as part of their instructional materials (Table 1), there is the need to look at the benefits of graphical animation as a seamless teaching tool to support teachers in accessing a subject –based topic from an everyday life activity/ perspective and its inclusion into the curriculum content as a basis for assessing the standard of instructional materials. This will boast pupil's interest and motivation to schooling and contribute in reducing the rate of school drop-out in Nigeria; as a close connection between the everyday life concepts and the scientific concepts are essential necessities for sustainable learning processes (Meyer, 1992).

Table 2
Adults/ Parents perception of graphical animation.

Parameters	Percentage (%) response
1. Do you see comics and cartoons as Instructional aid/ materials?	
Yes	80
No/ Undecided	20
2. Do you use them as teaching tools for children?	
Yes	95
No/ Undecided	5
3. Are you concerned about the lack of the Nigerian cultural values content in cartoons/ comics available in the country and desire a change?	
Yes	80
No/ Undecided	20

The adult and parental concern about the absence of indigenous comics/ cartoons portraying and teaching the rich cultural heritage and values and their application in the present day society; and the strong desire to see and watch animated series of Nigerian content by the young has created a vacuum that need to be filled and exploited.

5.2. Concept cartoons and comics

There is need to design and develop comic strips and cartoon films reflecting the everyday challenges and situation in the country; ingenuity of her citizens and cultural diversity, with lead characters whose abilities, attitudes, appearances and strengths display the ideal behaviours expected of citizens of the country such as tolerance; love; good leadership; law abiding; selfless in service to humanity and abhors injustice; corruption; stealing and other vices prevalent in the country. Characters that that will exhibit and teach good parenting and mentorship for the younger generations as exemplify by the Superman character in "Man of Steel"; whose strength, morality, intentionality, humility and use of these abilities for good instead of evil were attributed to the proper guidance and teaching gotten from his fathers (All Pro Dad, 2013). Also, the Batman fictional character over the years has exhibited the importance of education and maintaining physical health in becoming a superhero (Everett, 2012). These characters will serve as role models to the people and children in particular.

5.3. Government and social enlightenment

There is need for Government at all levels in Nigeria to take advantage of the natural attraction to graphical animations in establishing a communication channel with the people for effective social informal education and reorientation. This will contribute immensely in creating a society knowledgeable in Government policies, civil rights, and social consciousness; as people especially children and young adults who were hitherto uninterested in societal dynamics of development will not only be reached but also develop interest and contribute to social debate. Also, the private, corporate and civil societies can also exploit this opportunity in connecting with the populace.

5.4. Economic benefits

The utilization of graphical animation by the government and corporate organizations will create a new market with numerous potentials and driven by the ideology of glocalization; that will engage the unemployed youths skilled in graphical design artistry; computer programming, script writing etc. as small scale industrial

enterprise operators in the Nigerian economy. Also, this created market can take advantage of the leading role of Nigeria in the sub-Sahara region and Africa; in transforming it into an export commodity to regional members.

At present in the country, a group of young and dynamic minds desirous to explore and harness the potentials of graphical animation founded the Scroll Comics Company in 2012. A company committed to the informative use of comics to educate the general public on socio-economic developments; with a prospect of reaching out to the sub – Sahara region and the continent, through effective communication of Africa's rich cultural diversities and values that would inevitably impact the society positively.

6. Conclusion

Conclusively, the strengths of graphical animation – motivating, visual, permanent, intermediary and popular can be harnessed practically at any grade level for formal and informal teaching (Yang, 2003). Therefore there is the need for it to be utilized as a tool for formal and informal education/ enlightenment of the Nigerian public on various societal subject issues, resulting in a more civic conscious society and also opening up the economic benefits.

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