

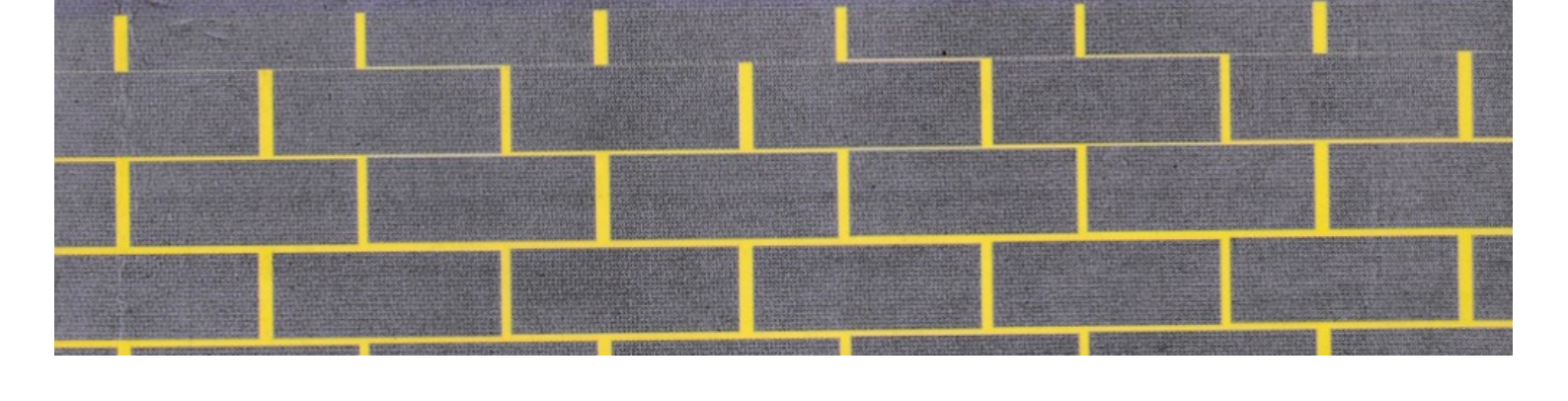


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# Broadcasting in a Sticky Way: Revisiting Creativity on the Airwaves

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## Abstract

The broadcast media have the advantage of conversational tone and informal relationship with their audience over their print counterparts. Like in interpersonal conversation, it is necessary for the communicators to employ a reasonable degree of creativity in order to *make the message to be effective, yet not boring*. In view of the importance of creativity in the broadcast media contents, this paper examines the strategies that should be adopted by broadcasters – producers and presenters – to enhance creativity on the airwaves and as well make broadcasting to stand the taste of the digital age. Founded on MuLuhan's theory of technological determinism, this paper offers the recipe for creativity, aesthetics and communicativeness of broadcast contents, which in turn make for a sticky communication experience. The paper thus identifies novelty, music, human voice, language, colour, tone etc as basic tools of creativity in contemporary broadcasting. In all that the broadcaster does to bring about creativity, environmental factors, such as culture, public taste and law must be respected so as not to defeat the very essence of broadcasting.

## Introduction

Human beings make conscious, creative choices in their daily lives in order to satisfy their needs. These choices are aesthetic decisions which are taken with a view to enhancing the quality of living. Zettle (1990, p. 1) captures these daily creative choices thus:

When you decide what to wear or clean up your room so that things are put back where they belong or choose what flowers to put on the dinner table or even when you judge the speed or distance of your car relative to other cars while driving, you are engaging in basic perceptual and basic aesthetic activities...when you select a specific picture to put on your wall, choose a colour for your room, or look through the viewfinder of your camera, you are probably more conscious of making an aesthetic decision.

Making creative choices implies that we are aware of the options available and also have guidelines, many a time unstated, in preferring one option to the other.

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The overall aim is to ensure that options or decisions so taken would contribute to the psychological fulfilment of the person who made the choices. The same applies to mass communication, particularly the broadcast medium, where the demand for creativity is ever increasing because of the options made available today by ever emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The technology of broadcasting, improved everyday by ICTs, is a major factor in creativity in the broadcast medium. No wonder Griffin (2000, p. 313) asserts that “the new electronic media have radically altered the way people think, feel and act. We’re in the midst of a revolution, yet most of us have yet to understand that the world will never be the same.” Since the broadcast medium has altered the way we think or feel, it becomes imperative for broadcasters to explore and exploit ways of enhancing people’s appreciation of the message communicated through the medium. This calls for creativity on the part of the media workers, so as to heighten the understanding of the broadcast contents. To ensure that communications through the broadcast medium make sense to the audience and remain memorable for a long time, producers and presenters should apply creativity and aesthetics in their production and delivery. As a concept, creativity is sometimes “mysterious” and nebulous. With this in mind, Meeske (2006, pp.7-8) says that:

In its simplest form, creativity is another name for finding new combinations of ideas...Finding new idea combinations may be a simple definition for creativity, but the act of creation is not so simple. For one thing, creative thinking doesn’t just happen. It requires hardwork and discipline, especially when the ideas don’t come quickly.

Coming up with new ideas may appear difficult. Yet one must be willing to learn in order to achieve the goal of communication. Akpan and Etuk (1990, p.31) state that “all communication has one major goal – changing the consciousness and behaviour of the message encoder and decoder to the extent that the decoder responds with feedback to the sender.” This situation is more assured when there is meaning-sharing between the communication participants, who engage in selecting, organising and interpreting cues.

Creativity in communication is not a product of happenstance. It almost always requires hard work and discipline and perhaps patience, particularly when the ideas are not flowing in quickly. Creativity are of degrees since individuals’ ability to conceptualise differ. Creativity can be learned from others by observing them or emulating their creatives styles. Meeske (2006, p. 8) gives the following tips on how one can develop one’s level of creativity:

- i. Gather information, study it and analyse how it relates to the assignment on hand.
- ii. Visualise how you intend to communicate the information.
- iii. Evaluate the benefits or proprietary of what you are saying.
- iv. Analyse the characteristics of the receivers so as to tailor the message to suit them.

A creative writer is one who is interested in trying new approaches to communication. The sense of enquiry in him constantly searches for new

approaches. He has to be focused (discipline) and must have a good knowledge of the language of communication. This article discusses how novelty can be captured through the creative use of music, human voice language, colours and tone to enhance effective message delivery and increased impact on the audience.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work is anchored on Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism. This theory hinges on the impact of technology on human communication. McLuhan postulated that technology will turn the whole world into a global village. This "oracle of electronic age" further propounded that technological inventions invariably cause cultural change; that it is changes in the models of communication that shape human existence. This is contrary to Karl Marx's view that it is changes in the mode of production that determine the course of history. McLuhan believed that "we shape our tools and they in turn shape us" (Griffin, 2000, p.315). The implication is that the way we live is largely an outcome of the way we process information. That is why he put it succinctly: "The medium is the message" Griffin (2000, p.315). That is to say, the medium and the way it is used have a way of affecting the reception of the message by the audience. Hence, the technology of broadcasting does not only affect the way the medium is used, but also affects the way and manner the message is received, with the latter dependent on the former. Griffin (2000, p.317) summarises the McLuhan technological determinism theory this way: "Be it oral, written, or electronic, the primary channel of communication changes the way we perceive the world. The dominant medium of any age dominates people."

Invariably, the way the broadcast medium is used can clarify and intensify the message disseminated through the medium and cause the message to be imprinted in the audience's memory. With the creative use of the broadcast medium, the messages disseminated can appeal to the audience just a little more.

### **Making the Communication Sticky**

The broadcast medium, like other channels of mass communication, performs many normative functions in the society. In the discharge of these functions, there are at least four specific objectives that the broadcaster seeks to achieve. These are: to get attention, to stimulate the brain (and the body), to stimulate the memory and to influence behaviour. Interestingly, the four objectives, which are the core of broadcast communication, are connected to each other, such that the attainment of one objective easily leads to the other. Broadcasting is sticky if the broadcast contents are so interesting, so well organised and so well delivered that the audience, stay tuned to the station and enjoy the broadcast contents for as long as they last. Thus, a sticky broadcast must first get the attention of the audience without which the attainment of subsequent objectives may remain elusive. To attain these objectives, therefore, the communicator should bring in creativity. Creativity, as stated earlier, demands novelty. for the new tends to attract while the old tends to bore. This is

a fact of life in many cultures. Novelty can be achieved through the artistic use of music, human voice, language, colour and tone.

## **Music**

Music is one of the three sound elements, the others being human voice and sound effects. Hardly is there any programme on radio and television that has no music element. Akpan and Etuk (1990, p. 46), explain the function of music in broadcast production:

Music can be used to establish a theme for a programme...music also can be used as a signature tune...music also can serve to provide something in the background which serves to ginger up the audience. Music used this way provides a useful atmosphere for the programme.

If music is to be meaningful, it should contribute to and support the overall theme of the programme. Straying from the theme is the most common mistake of the novice broadcast producer for which Hausman, Messere, O'Donnell and Benoit (2010, p.188) have stressed:

Every production element must support the theme, or it will detract from the message. The upbeat music in our fast food restaurant commercial conveys a specific impression: speed, excitement and vibrancy. This production element supports the theme of a message for a fast food establishment; it would certainly detract from a commercial for an elegant restaurant.

The production element of music can boost the message in many ways. It could create excitement, immediate identification, evoke an emotion or can even save several lines of dialogue, making the copy less pedantic. Music is such a tool of communication that should be used creatively. The type of music should suit both the occasion and the participants or the audience. It becomes necessary to ask:

- i. What type of music does the audience prefer?
- ii. What rhythms are the most memorable?
- iii. What combinations of instruments are preferred?
- iv. What are the connotations of the types of music selected?

Sincere answers to these questions and their subsequent application are very critical to the creative use of music in a broadcast production. If the music does not fit the occasion; if the part of the music used is not memorable; and if the audience gives an interpretation different from that of the presenter, then that music would have suffered a shipwreck.

Hausman *et. al.* (2010, p. 191) give some tips on the creative use of music:

- i) Use music to create a mood and reinforce a theme.
- ii) Let the music have a logical purpose and fit into the format of your station.
- iii) Don't use music as a reflex.

iv) Don't use music indiscriminately.

Music reaches deep into the human psyche. It has moved people to march to war and has waltzed couples into matrimony. Music is such an evocative tool that it adds value to communication.

### Human Voice

The human voice makes a deeper impact when it is 'coloured'. Voice colouring means modulating the voice naturally or with the use of technological devices. In their views on sound colouration, Hausman *et. al.* (2006, p.193) explain that it involves "the electronic compression and contouring of the signal...involves boosting the volume of softer sounds and using some frequency equalization so that the entire presentation has a specific presence." That is to say sound could be aesthetically manipulated to achieve certain effects. Colouration is more than an electronic compression of sound. As Akpan and Etuk (1990, p. 45) note:

In presenting programmes the voice can be consciously manipulated to produce communication that affects the mind of the audience member. Words can be expertly pronounced to create deep feeling and effective meaning sharing...Whereas a speaker does not consciously worry about his speed, tone, accent, pitch, stress and volume, a film or television narrator or radio narrator must show concern in these matters. He cannot transfer his style of speaking in everyday routine situations to his professional assignments. In fact, at times he has to exaggerate his manner of speaking a bit in order to stimulate predetermined response in his audience.

Akpan and Etuk's concerns are related to the voice quality of broadcasters. This denotes the overall image that an announcer's voice projects. The point is that a proper voice and delivery should be matched to the message at hand. A news anchor's voice calls for a measure of authority; a spot designed to convince young people to shop at a particular store might benefit from a young voice and an intimate, chummy delivery.

Another aspect of voice delivery is the lack of distraction. Voices used on the air, it is generally agreed, should not have defects that will detract from the message. Reference here is not made to pathological speech defects but such problems as improper breathing (unintended and unplanned) over breathing and gasping for air between phrases by the announcer which are exacerbated by the microphone. Hausman *et. al.* (2010, p. 195) offer a therapy:

The cure for this is to maintain generous breath support – a good tankful of air – instead of trying to talk until all your breath is expanded. Plan where to take breaths, breathe at natural pauses in the copy. Don't just read until you can't read anymore.

This recipe is really necessary for both the quality of the voice and the communicativeness of the message.

## **Language**

The use of language here implies a good knowledge of the medium of communication in terms of grammar and linguistic metaphors within the context of the audience with whom one communicates. These two aspects of knowledge of the language combine to put the broadcast writer on the pedestal of using language to achieve his aim. Language competence is a universal prerequisite in effective communication; the communicator must understand the rules of grammar of the language of communication or he may end up communicating 'noise' that only muddles up the message (Akpan, 2009). In the same vein, communication takes place within a cultural context. Culture here "includes all of a society's meanings for ideas, things and activities" (Mckerrow, Gronbeck, Ehninger and Monroe (2000, p.75). Therefore, it is needful for the broadcaster to understand and appreciate the use of language within a particular audience.

Although language is universal, some metaphors, proverbs, idioms and expressions may have differing meanings to as many differing groups. This calls for a strict and narrow application of words as a result of cultural differences. A connotative meaning of a word or phrase to one audience society may connote something radically different to another audience. Hence, the broadcast writer should have knowledge of linguistic metaphors available within the cultural context of the audience. Knowledge here implies not only knowing the metaphors but understanding their meanings and usage. A misapplication can spell doom for the communication, the communicator and his organisation. And so the questions: what is the real way a group or audience speaks? What is the real slang that the audience uses?

Sometimes, people assume they have communicated when in reality that has not: they have not said clearly what they want to communicate. A message that is open to different interpretations compels many undesirable assumptions by the audience members. Ambiguity in words, phrase and sentences is the Achilles heels of many a broadcast writer.

Creativity in language combines with content to produce and achieve the A. I. D. A. formula – attention, interest, desire and action (Beeske, 2006). This is desirable in broadcast writing, production and delivery.

**Attention:** Getting started is as important as the whole work. First like a melodious piece of music can be detected from its tuning, a good communication can be judged from the quality of the beginning: is it attention-getting? Is it dull, drab, and uninteresting? Are people persuaded by the beginning? Does it start with something important, something humorous or something the audience is compelled to listen to? Smooth attention-getting beginning – be it in words, music, sound effects, pictures – compels the audience to stay on (Bielak, 1995). If the content does not attract attention, then it is not worth it.

**Interest:** Attention begets interest. And audience interest is inevitable for communication to stick. Meeske (2006, pp.91 – 92) gives some tips on building and sustaining audience interest:

- i. Stick to the main idea and relate same to the target audience, having gained attention.
- ii. Tell about the benefits of using a production service or adopting an attitude.
- iii. Explain selling points that will produce the benefits you describe.
- iv. Use "You" posture in your copy. Direct the copy to one listener/viewer, hooking his or her attention and interest.

**Desire:** Getting attention and sustaining interest are meant to create the desire or need for the audience to have a service, perform an action etc. Desire flows out of benefits. To create desire, you must succeed in making the audience want the good or service or state of being.

**Action:** A message is incomplete without telling the audience not just what you expect, but what you want them to do in a specific and direct way. It is necessary to stress the urgency of the situation, i.e. why that action is required from them.

**Colour:** Although there are colours which usage has universal application, different colours may have different meanings in different cultures. Colours tend to add dynamism to a communication context. Zettle (1990, p.55) stresses this when he says that "colour adds a new dimension to everything. It brings excitement any joy, makes us more aware of the things around us and helps organise our environment." However, colour is relative, both in the physical environmental and perception. A particular colour may not come out the same under all physical conditions, just as colours cannot be perceived or interpreted the same way in every communication context. An understanding and creative use of colour by the broadcast communicator is not only useful, but necessary. Wilson (1998, p. 46) emphasises this importance of colour:

The use of colours for the purpose of communication has remained for a long time a very important mode of human communication. All societies have had a relatively common symbolism attached to the different colours produced by human beings or present in nature. But while others have retained theirs, some have, through cultural imperialism, been deprived of their original nations or symbolisms.

Wilson (1998) further explains that in western societies, light colours are associated with pleasure, and dark colours with sadness. In some African societies, red expresses danger and spirituality; it is a favourite colour of secret societies and symbolises fire and blood. Some cultures, from a racial and stereotypic viewpoint, consider white to symbolise milk, purity, health, and good luck, while black represents gloom, faeces and other grim things.

It is important for the broadcast content producer to understand the symbolism of colours within the context of the society that the communication is taking place. This will enable him to communicate without offending the audience with colours. Colours seem to tell us more about a scene. For example, as Zettl (1990, pp.55 – 56) says, "we simply get more information from a colour



picture than we do from a black-and-white one...the red cross is so widely known throughout the world that it has become an almost universal symbol.”

Since communication is within a cultural context, colours can be creatively used to enhance message delivery to and impact on the audience. Therefore the communicator needs to ask, which colours are preferred by the audience members? What meanings do colours have? What colours attract attention best? And what colours could be avoided? In asking and answering these questions, the communicator would be able to select for use colours that best communicate his message to the audience and, would, at the same time, avoid colours that may not only impede his communication but can cause offence to the audience by reason of their cultural background.

### **Tone**

Tone is an important icing on the cake of a sticky broadcast communication. Generally, the tone of broadcast writing should be informal and conversational with the sole objective of delivering the message in a way it is understood. Akpan, (2009, p. 6) reasons that “the script should assist the receiver rather than confuse him. Therefore, words likely to confuse the listener should be dropped.” Hilliard (1997, p. 47) further explains this point: “The listener or viewer does not have the luxury of re-reading formal or intellectually challenging passages to better understand what is being presented.”

The tone of a message aids the reader in understanding the message in the way that the communicator intended. The communicator should be conscious of the tone he wants to use to deliver his message, so that the message would be understood in a particular way. One of the many tones available is humour.

Humour is one of the ways to achieve audience involvement because many people feel good about things that are amusing or funny. The humour should be real humour though, not humour when there is none. That will be communication wasted. The humour should also be within the audience experience so that they can relate to it. It should also be within the socially, and culturally accepted limits of the audience, or it may turn out to be an expensive joke that the communicator can ill afford. The communicator should ask, can the humour sell? Is it such that the audience will only remember the humour but not the message in it? Will the humour lose value and tire out listeners upon repetition on the airwaves?

Another important tone is emotional tone. Meeske (2006, p.78) defines emotion as “powerful, relatively uncontrolled feelings that affect our behaviour.” Naturally, the audience experience a wide range of emotions such as joy, grief, love, anger, sadness etc. The broadcaster often appeals to any of these emotions. Broadcast writers can generate positive (joy, love, pride, nationalism etc.) or negative (shame, guilt, fear, sadness etc.) emotions that can motivate the audience based on their subjective feelings, rather than logical, fact-based thinking. Broadcast writers can arouse emotion, reduce emotion or elicit a particular emotion.

Content producers and broadcasters capitalise on the emotional disposition of audience members to cause emotional arousal in them. While this

is rather easy to accomplish on television because of the advantage of sight, it draws extra creativity from the script writer for radio to accomplish this. The choice of words and the delivery should arouse the desired emotion of the audience to affection, joy pride or event to anger. The fact is that the audience is not easily persuaded by rational, fact based thinking; emotions do.

Audience members could sometimes be in an unpleasant emotional state such as frustration, unhappiness or jealousy, loss of appetite, shame, guilt, despondency or overweight. Content which could be of help to the audience to get out of the unpleasant situation is a emotional-reduction content.

Broadcast writers at the other times – and depending on the situation – elicit particular emotions. Content could be made to elicit friendship, romance, hatred etc.

Aside from emotion, broadcast writers and producers could use a threatening tone as in fear appeal, an informative tone which is instructive, traditional or culture tone which appeals to audience attachment to and belief in their culture, patriotic tone which evokes national spirit or pride, a moral tone which aims at the audience's sense of what is "right" or "wrong" or a rational tone which appeals to thoughts and decisions based on reasons.

## **Conclusion**

The discourse above re-visited and re-emphasized the essence of creativity in the air medium. Finding and adopting new ideas or a combination of ideas in broadcast programme production is imperative. First, the air medium is a creative one, constantly offering the user many artistic options in enhancing meaning-sharing. Secondly, other information sources competing for the attention of the audience make it necessary for the broadcast producer to go the extra mile in order to produce a captivating communication that transmits and shares meaning with the audience in a way that he intended.

Advocating the artistic use of a production element does not in any way overlook the operational circumstances of many radio and television stations in Nigeria, particularly government-owned stations that operate as an extension of the ministry of information of their states and therefore suffer deprivations in operational facilities as experienced in the larger civil service. This is not surprising though, for such broadcast outfits, on the scale of preference, exist more for the image-laundering of their governor cum masters and less for effective meaning-sharing with their audience through the artistic use of production elements. This does not foreclose a constant agitation by broadcast operatives in such stations for the provision and use of facilities that will enhance communication.

However, government-owned stations are just an arm of the broadcast industry in Nigeria. The other arm, the privately-owned stations, interestingly, spearheads the acquisition and use of facilities for the creative use of production elements. The private stations are accomplishing this with mush success which needs to be sustained and improved upon. This is desirable. In the present era of globalized broadcast content, it is only such content with creativity in the use of

production elements that can capture an audience that has become as sophisticated in programme content appreciation as the air medium itself.

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