SCENOGRAPHY: EXAMINING A NEW MARKETING STRATEGY FOR CORPORATE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical overview of the recent development by both public and private institutions in Ghana as regards the application of scenic design concepts as an effective interpretation for the promotion of goods and services in the 21st century. Additionally, how these organizations have uncontrollably utilized the design concepts effectively to translate and communicate the values of their business ideas, products and services to consumers. The purpose of the study is to examine the synergy between scenography and business in relation to institutional identity and the role of the scenic design concept in business promotion and branding. Data for the study was collected using oral interviews and informal interactions. The research question that directs the discussions in this paper is how scenic design effectively promotes corporate business. Finding indicates that scenography is a visual statement that enhances business practice and presentation in Ghana.

Keywords: Scenography, scenic design, branding, corporate promotion, marketing strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the evolution of theatre is believed to be marked by different stages of human activity and endeavour in search for peace and security as developed from the theory that theatre emerged from myths and rituals. These were idealized enactments often performed either in the forest or identified open spaces lending its key features to nature and the environment for the act in those days. Brockett (1982) argues that amidst these performances, scenic interpretation as an art form and a means of enhancing and understanding the performance art was not of prime essence to the early ancient people. Rather, the spiritual interaction with the environment and nature in relation to their needs and wants were of interest to them. In line with Brockett's argument, Gillette (2000) also affirms that, before 1875, no one paid any great attention to

specifying the scenic design concepts (period, style, locale, socioeconomic level, personality of the characters, season of the year and mood among others) that most contemporary designers believe make up a well-conceived stage setting. Probably the spiritual interaction with the deities, atmosphere and nature was of more importance to them than the aesthetic relevance. For instance, Greeks and Romans production at that time were performed out doors with little or no scenery. Medieval drama was staged with a generic setting that represented the various locals needed for almost all productions. Most importantly, the style of a production is the key determinant factor of the production approach and this essential component was not evident in the early ancient theatrical productions. According to Fraser:

> All cultures go through the same ritual enactment to control their food supply and other determinates of existence. Having no clear understanding of natural causes, they attribute them to supernatural or magical forces. Next, they begin to search for means to win the favour of these powers. Over a period of time, they perceive an apparent connection between certain devices they have used and the outcome they have sought to bring about. These devices are then repeated, refined, and formalized until they become ritualized. At this stage, the entire group usually performs the rites, while the "audience" is the supernatural force. However, as people become more sophisticated, their conception of supernatural forces and casual relationships changed. As a result, they modified some rite*s* (Brockett, 1982).

Comparatively, during the 1950's in Ghana, West Africa, "Abibigro" the African folktales, ritual performances, ceremonial dances among others were some theatrical forms that learned their cultural setting to the natural engaging environment. The locale for some of these performances was either in the forest, courtyard or an identified open space that created the mood and atmosphere for the performance. The whole experience was quite engaging due to the ritual sentiments attached to the whole organization at that time. During such performances at night or day the perceived intricate backdrops that formed the environmental background suggestively was the ambience of the natural skyline, landscapes and trees that created the atmosphere and mood for the performance. These natural settings could be compared to the conventional scenic design interpretation as determined by the script. However, this form of naturalistic presentation in the application of the moon and "boom fire effect" as a source of illumination was the only lighting option available in those days. In fact, the purpose of the Ghanaian folktale was to entertain the family after a hard day's work and to unfold moralistic lessons meant to teach norms and values of the communities in which they are told. Interestingly, these storytelling sessions were done within the natural environment that represented the scenery which complimented the act.

Parker, O. W. and Smith, K. H. (1974) posit that there are many other possible outlets for design that should not be overlooked, including film and television, trade shows or "industrials"(promoting a product or company) and general performance art. Looking at the Ghanaian landscape during the later part of 1980, there was an emerging phenomenon where scenic design and construction become very popular among corporate institutions as a platform for business exposure, attempting various creative ways in augmenting corporate profile and brand positioning amidst the ever increasing technological advancement to down slide major competitions in the business terrene. Apparently, the corporate setting was used to communicate information about products or ideas in relation to business development and promotion. For instance, this platform was usually created to launch products and display goods and service by business entities in Ghana for clients and prospective customers. This 21st century business initiative has remained a key strategy for the development of corporate identity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It has been observed that during the 1980s the concept for formulation and construction was based on designs fabricated in wood, perspex and fabric materials among others. During these periods the principal idea was to reveal three-dimensional constructed stage props in order to emphasize the visual forms, mass and characteristics of the product and service in focus for a better understanding with regards the perception of the audience. Imperatively, to reinforce the theme and tell the story of intent, lighting design and application are employed as a theatrical aesthetic element to reinforce the intent and overall visual statement with regards stage picture and setting. Lighting in general has the potential to animate form and create clarity to intended ideas since it is a forceful design element in a stage composition.

However, in recent times, technical theatre as an interpretative design concept has enviably served many purposes in the area of corporate image building, special events, weddings, funerals, religious and ritual ceremonies among others. Sometime past, this aesthetic element of visual communication hitherto was solely reserved for theatre: music, dance, and opera within the performing arts parameters in different parts of the world. With the introduction of digital formatting and production facilities, scenic design as an element of theatre has gained great technological recognition in Africa, Europe and the United States of America presenting contemporary work in a variety of performance design discipline and genres. Importantly, the corporate business world needs to become more conscious of using visual communications to reach its objectives and needs to articulate its position more clearly to government agencies, legislators, shareholders, employees and customers to mention a few.

Some corporate organizations have chosen this aesthetic window of strategic communication frame work globally to manage companies' visual output in the form of scenic and graphic

design as well as decoration in order to promote corporate branding, logos, packaging and values encapsulated within their core mandated activities. This approach has been seen to be innovative and its successful implementation adds value to a business entity in relation to growth. Emphatically, scenic design, graphic design and décor are used to manage a company's overall image and identity as well as for specific application areas such as creating a brand identity and expressing differing degrees of relatedness in a diversified organization.

Interestingly, scenography as a strong medium for corporate promotion has gained great recognition within corporate Ghana in the twenty first (21st) century as far as product and service communication are concerned. It has been observed in recent times that firms need creative strategic planning to survive in our increasingly competitive markets, hence the prudent application of scenography to augment product visibility and confidence. Indisputably, most corporate institutions that organize events in Ghana to support their marketing drives usually rely on scenic design and interpretation to project the corporate image through the idea of branding represented in the of MTN Ghana Foundation launch at the Accra International Conference Centre in 2003 as seen in fig.1 below.

Fig.1: *"MTN Ghana Foundation" set up*

The visual idea was to leave a lasting impression on the minds of the audience through an effective artistic visual education Perreault and McCarthy (1997) postulate that branding means the use of a name, term, symbol or design or a combination of these to identify a product. It could also include the use of brand names, trademarks and other product identifications. In view of this, corporate branding focuses on the entire institution as far as image building is concerned

as stressed by Hatch & Schultz (2003). Within a cultural context. Good branding practice rolls out appreciable brand recognition and brand preference. This implies that customers remember the brand and choose the brand over other brands because of the product value and the visual mileage output. This idea is an organizational tool whose successful application largely depends on attending to the strategic, organizational and communicational context in which it is used. In either case, corporate branding brings to marketing the ability to use the vision and culture of the company explicitly as part of its unique selling proposition as stressed by (Ackerman, Knox and Maklan, 1998).

Nonverbal communication model is a powerful medium utilized by designers to reach their audience. Hybels & Weaver II (1998) affirm that, 93 percent of communication is nonverbal with 55 percent sent through facial expression, posture, and gestures and 33 percent through tone of voice. This accession underscores the fact that great premium is placed on nonverbal communication as an effective vehicle in the transition of information. As a matter of fact, most corporate institutions have captured the stage and its visual impressions as a formidable platform in the promotion of products and services for their customers. Stage setting as a backdrop is primarily aimed at reinforcing the theme or style of a production within a given context. Most scenic designers communicate their messages through the scenic representation which is projected from the stage to a life audience in the form of scenic elements and lighting designs and aesthetics. In the presentation of a corporate idea in visual terms to a group of clients, the configuration of the stage however, must be in sync with the design concept and the director's intent.

The scenic design concept as espoused by Gillette (2000) is one guideline that does apply to all scenic designs with regards stage settings and applications. The design should create an environment for the play or production that is supportive of the concept. Primarily, apart from the scenery, the designer is also responsible for designing the stage properties. Props are important elements of the stage picture and they automatically subscribe to the overall stage outlook. The integration of props into a production enhances movements and general stage business as far as understanding and stage composition is concerned which creates an important indication of the spirit of the production.

As an integral subscription to all productions, the design must be expressive of the mood and spirit of the play or event. In cases of corporate event production and management, the entire production must evolve around the organization's core mandate as far as the product brand and profiles are concerned.

Most institutions that organize events in Ghana to support their marketing drives of late solely rely on scenic design and interpretation as a model for effective visual communication during

stage productions. This has become necessary due to the competitive nature of advertising and marketing in most business sectors of the Ghanaian economy as a result of globalization, modernity and technological advancement. Differentiation in visibility of a company's mileage requires positioning, not only products based, but the whole corporation.

As part of the stage presentation for most corporate entities, a key visual element that is recognizable within the stage setting is colour which plays a vital role in corporate branding. According to Akwetey (2007) as indicated by Kemevor and Duku (2013), to Ghanaians, the beauty of a colour does not lie only in its visual value but also in its symbolic function. In this regard, corporate colours play a key role in entity identification and establishment as far as employees, products and services are concerned. As a matter of fact, the degree of brand familiarity is always the key hope for every company since it serves as a mechanism for inventory control as indicated by Perreault and McCarthy (1997). Additionally, brand recognition helps customers remember the brand in question because this can be a big advantage if there are many brands on the market of like products. Even if customers can't recall the brand without help, they may be reminded when they see the colours in the shops among other less familiar brands.

Some identified promotional and advertising materials usually displayed during events and incorporated into the set design are: corporate buntings pull up banners, fabric draperies, cutouts and silhouettes among others. In reality, stage design helps to create the atmosphere for a successful transmission of information that is significant to corporate branding and product awareness. 7

METHOD

This study adopted action research as the method for the study. Action research provided the platform that allowed the researchers apply intervention to solve the problem. Three companies were purposefully selected by the researchers because of their market holdings and the space they occupy in the Ghanaian market economy. The researchers applied the concept of scenography as a means of examining a new marketing strategy for corporate promotion and development in Ghana. The marketing managers and the sale representatives of these three companies were conveniently sampled to provide the needed data through interviews. Again, fifty users each of the products by these companies also gave inputs through unstructured interview and observations which shaped the designs created.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Intervention

To address the challenges associated with the marketing strategies as they exist in Ghana, the researchers adopted scenography as a model for branding the selected companies.

Tools and materials

The tools and materials employed in the designing and the execution of the work included pencils, pen, acrylic paints, plywood, glue, hammer, nails, camera, computer and accessories.

Design Concepts

A concept is a general idea, thought, understanding or the theme that drives one's activity. Burke (2001) considers it as a part of the creative process that presents development in conceptual thinking. The researchers were inspired by the environment and the shapes of the products from the companies in arriving at their concepts. Each of the product went through thumb nail sketches, selection of the best sketch, refinement of the selected sketch, production of models, and evaluation of the models before the final works were produced.

Application of Design Concept in Product launch

In the year 2001, a team of designers from the National Theatre of Ghana were contracted by the Carson Product Limited, Ghana, to design a set for the launch of a new hair product, "Restore Plus" a "Dark and Lovely" product, produced by Carsons Product Limited, Ghana. This product was launched in the main hall of the National Theatre of Ghana in 2001. The purpose of the event was to introduce a new brand of "Dark and Lovely" product in Ghana with the view to downplaying other competing hair products in Ghana and the West African Markets.

Apparently, the launch of this peculiar product was designed to meet a wider scope of the product consumers and to accent the comparative advantage of the product over the other competing products on the Ghanaian market. The designer for the product launch for that matter was to design the stage and its props and construct a number of heroin replicas of the product to be launched on stage and to position a couple of them within the metropolis in Accra to create the awareness and existence of the product in the country and its efficacy. In reality, the original product was too small to be revealed on stage in a given circumstance of stage-audience sight line relationship which could possibly create visibility challenges leading to the concept of anachronism. This challenge therefore accounted for the increase in the size of the original product for clarity and appreciation for the audience. It was also to ensure adequate leverage in the country as far as communication and advertising were concerned.

To achieve the three-dimensional manifestation of the above challenge, a working knowledge of the elements and principles of scenic design was applied to create interest and meaning for the resized props. Additionally, conceiving a more appropriate way to increase the size of the

product, a cartooning application concept was applied to the original product to achieve the transformational attitude. Gillette (2000) confirms that exaggerating the height, width or depth of the natural dimensions of an object changes the character of the object which projects a stylized form of presentation and desired impact.

During the launch and reveal session of the larger than life product on stage, the envisaged result was achieved as a result of the change in size, form, mass and its three-dimensional nature coupled with the lighting ambience. In fact, the overall compositional effect was a simulation of light, sound and set amidst the emission of fog effect during the reveal session of the product which was a perfect artistic idea borrowed from theatre and working effectively for this corporate entity as a branding scheme. Artistically, the beam rays of spectacular lighting ambiance culminating from the display of intelligent lights, scanners and moving head lighting instruments garnished and climaxed the established fun fair atmosphere (mood) for the launch. Figure (1) as below represents a visual impression of the beige cylindrically designed larger than life "Restore Plus" products positioned at the centre of the stage as a sign of authority, confidence and stability. These heroin products were the key scenic element of the event which were constructed three dimensionally (3D) in wood based on the style of realism.

Additionally, figure (1) a representation the "launch of MTN Ghana Foundation" at the Conference Centre, Accra in 2003, represented an atmosphere of new birth, vitality and dignity as the profile image of the new product being launch. Symbolically, the colour blue represents coolness and freshness, whereas yellow represents dignity, kingship and wealth. The colour white also reflects purity, victory and success. Meanwhile, the corporate colours used for the design, symbolically underscored the production approach which was expressive of the mood and spirit of the event as indicated by Gillette (2000). Meanwhile, the colours adapted for the set were the MTN hues, strong and saturated in composition. According to Marvullo (1989), colour is powerful. We respond to it intellectually, emotionally, and physically. Colour lives and has moods. However, the conflicting colours of MTN however, resulted into a harmonious whole due to the collaborative nature of the other theatrical element. The intelligent application of the colours defined its essence and interest.

In furtherance to the form of the props, the contours of the shapes emphasized the concept of feminism which promoted the idea of the product to be launched of and gave adequate definition to the setting as in figure 2.
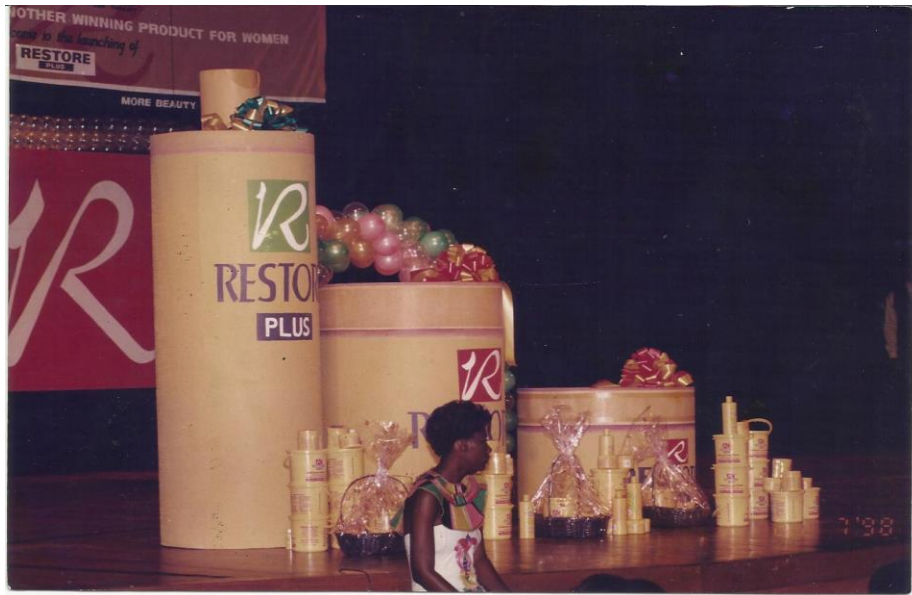
Fig. 2: *Re-designed larger than life "Restore Plus" props*

Interestingly, all these were made possible through a well contrived method of the application of scenic design and interpretation as a strong medium for visual communication. More importantly, to achieve an effective stage setting for an event, adequate reference must be made to the primary sources: that is the script of the play or the brief of company or product in focus, besides the theme and the product brand type which happens to be a key feature in the determination of the colour code for the scheme of the composition. Fig. 3 below also shows a section of the launch of the Barclays Bank, Bancassurance Promotional event setup in 2007, at the Ridge office of Barclays bank, Accra.

Fig. 3: *" Barclays Bank, Bancassurance Promotional Event" setup*

In the composition is the cutout cyan eagle in a half inch plywood and superimposed on the right wing of the eagle are two female portraits in full colour featured on an almost rectilinear box form with a replica of the eagle and a horse which are representative features of the corporate visual intent. The idea of the reveal launch was conceived on the concept of mechanical contraption reveal system which is likened to the up thrust of the theatre orchestra pit which places prominence on the object. The two well-built men in the body painted outlook in navy blue and green in an almost linear position to the other man in sea blue and white representative colours adopted the theatrical body painting stage makeup technique which promoted the company's corporate colours. The dais on which the dignitaries sat was draped in sea blue and white coloured fabrics emphasizing the corporate colours. The dais again exhibited a white backdrop with embossed two-dimensional sea blue eagles which indeed reflected the corporate colours and logo which was an eagle. The whole event was actually based on the concept of theatrical symbolism.

Apparently, the designer for the stage was the scenic designer and technical director of the National Theatre of Ghana, which presupposes that there was a fusion of theatre and business as far as conceptualization was concerned. The essence to fuse theatre into the event according to the marketing team of the headquarters, Barclays bank, Ghana was to ensure adequate visual communication impact and awareness. More importantly, in recent times, most corporate settings have similar design principles that are applied to the stage design to enhance their vision and prospects.

More importantly, as part of the strategic plan adopted by Carson Products to heighten its visibility drive during the event, the company applied series of communication techniques to augment publicity and branding landscapes to enhance the product's image. For instance, the venue ground of the National Theatre was draped in the corporate colours of satin fabrics to ensure adequate brand positioning and exclusivity rights. An idea which has occasionally been abused as an "advertising over kill" by some corporate institutions in Ghana, referred to as an overdone decoration. According to some media specialists who were with Carsons Product, some corporate institutions utilize this decoration branding technique to primarily establish adequate brand awareness. On some other event platforms, minor sponsors could also exhibit their publicity materials alongside major sponsors even though prominence will be given the major sponsor.

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the recent development in corporate entities as regards the application of the scenic design concept as a formidable approach for image building and branding and looked at how the corporate institutions utilize the scenic production approach in the interpretation of corporate image, and branding. From the foregoing exposition, it has been noted that these institutions employ the aesthetic values of scenic design as a major component in promoting theatrical elements as a leverage for corporate enhancement in the ever-changing business terrene. In view of this, it can hardly be denied that scenography as a platform to enhance and promote corporate image and branding has played an enormous role in the face of business development in this twenty first century. As such, it is important to underscore the fact that graphic design, visual art, modeling and decoration are primary inputs for corporate stage design and face lift. In furtherance to this assertion, the efficient application of the scenic and visual elements ultimately establishes the desired environment of action (locale) for visual communication and aesthetics for a better and sustained corporate interest.

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