

Storytelling Strategies and Cultural Representation in Nigerian Telecommunications Commercials on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling remains a central feature of advertising in Nigeria, yet systematic examination of its application in digital contexts remains limited. This study investigates the dominant storytelling strategies and patterns of cultural representation in Nigerian telecommunications commercials on YouTube from 2021 to 2025. Through quantitative content analysis of 19 purposively selected commercials from MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile brands, complemented by use of key informant interviews with seven (7) senior advertising professionals, the study documented the narrative structures and cultural themes that characterise the telecommunications' campaigns. The analysis revealed that linear storytelling was the most commonly observed approach, appearing in 73.68% of the commercials, often layered with emotional or dramatic elements. In terms of cultural representation, convenience and accessibility emerged as the dominant theme (89.47%), followed by innovation/technology and humour/entertainment. Traditional markers such as use of African indigenous proverbs and overt national pride were largely absent. These patterns suggest that brands appear to adopt a pragmatic hybrid style that blends modern utility with selective local cues. Drawing on Rhetorical Tradition Theory and the Narrative Transportation and Engagement Model (N-TEM), the study discusses how Nigerian telecom advertisers may be adapting traditional oral storytelling logic to the demands of a skippable digital platform. The findings contribute to ongoing conversations about narrative persuasion in African digital advertising. Practical implications for advertising practitioners and suggestions for future research are discussed. By documenting

observable patterns in storytelling strategies and cultural representation, the study contributes an empirical foundation for understanding how Nigerian telecom brands navigate the intersection of tradition, modernity, and digital platform demands. Practical implications for advertising practitioners and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Storytelling strategies, cultural representation, Nigerian telecommunications, YouTube advertising, linear storytelling, digital advertising.

1.1 Introduction

Nigeria is a pluralistic society with cultures that are steeped in storytelling traditions. Before the advent of Western-type advertising in Nigeria, older generations would gather children and young adults under the light of the moon and tell stories that were entertaining, instructive, and unifying. This practice seems to resonate in today's advertising campaigns in Nigeria, particularly on YouTube, where the country's top telecoms companies battle to get attention in an environment where everyone uses their cell phone. From 2021 to 2025, Nigeria's telecom leaders spent lots of money on online advertisements, aiming to make their messages more story-like and less sales-like. However, while academics have been well aware of the power of storytelling in African advertising campaigns, not many studies have focused specifically on the nature of these stories in YouTube ads, which is the most popular platform among Nigerian youth (Olatunji, 2018).

The present paper analyzes the predominant narrative techniques employed in Nigerian telecom advertising on YouTube within this time frame and the manner in which the ads portray, or covertly reconfigure, Nigerian cultural norms. Based on an analysis of 19 commercials, selected for their high level of engagement, from four major telecoms firms, supplemented by interviews with seven highly experienced marketing and advertising practitioners, it becomes clear that certain distinct trends emerge, which transcend mere creative technique. Linear storytelling emerges as a distinctive feature. According to Olatunji (2018), advertising in Nigeria has always relied on indigenous practices of communication despite new realities of emerging media platforms. Yusuf, Olatunji & Okunnu (2025) explained further that advertising practice has grown based on the advancement of technology and the development of a new world of consumer and socio-economic advancement changes and development.

Current research on rhetoric strategies in the context of Nigerian advertising provides additional perspective on using cultural and linguistic means for constructing persuasion and relationships (Ghevolor et al., 2023; Dauda, 2025). Methodologically, the study relies on two frameworks. Rhetorical Tradition Theory is useful for understanding the ways in which messages can be adjusted

to realities of audiences and culture to reach the desired effect (Foss, 2017). Meanwhile, the framework of Narrative Transportation and Engagement can shed light on why certain kinds of stories can have greater power of influence than others (van Laer et al., 2014; Martin, 2022); focusing on the immersive potential of stories. It also draws directly from the doctoral research conducted by Fatoyinbo (2026). At the same time, analyzing the case studies leads to certain observations. Is it a cultural continuation of oral storytelling practices or a conscious adaptation strategy that is reflected by the preference of linear stories with functional orientation? What is implied by the selected elements of local culture used in advertising messages?

The patterns documented in this study raise several pertinent questions worthy of reflection. For example, does the heavy reliance on linear storytelling reflect a continuation of Nigeria's oral narrative tradition that values clarity and resolution? Similarly, the strong emphasis on convenience, innovation, and humour alongside the relative absence of deeper traditional or nationalist themes invites consideration of whether brands are strategically prioritising functional relevance for a young, urban audience or inadvertently simplifying cultural representation. Ultimately, this paper does not seek to prescribe ideal practices but to offer a clear-eyed observation of what currently exists in Nigerian telecom advertising on YouTube.

By systematically documenting storytelling strategies and cultural representation, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital advertising practices in Nigeria and the broader African context. Such documentation remains essential as the industry continues to evolve rapidly in response to technological change and shifting audience expectations. This research aims at presenting an empirical picture based on real ads and views from practitioners. By doing so, it provides new understanding of narrative persuasion within the Global South digital environment and sheds light on important considerations for the creative community, telecom advertisers, and regulatory bodies such as ARCON. It can be said that the discussion concerning authentic narrative in Nigerian advertising continues.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Storytelling has played a vital role in Nigerian communications and persuasion techniques from time immemorial (Olatunji, 2018). The tales are used to convey information through advertisements and in everyday communication. With the rise of the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, telecommunication giants such as MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile are using the YouTube channel to connect with the young generation through commercials. However, despite the general assumption that tales create consumer connections, there is limited knowledge about their actual form in digital space.

Creative storytelling in the context of advertising is extensively studied across the globe, with researchers proving that narratives enhance the recall ability, affective appeal, and loyalty to a brand (van Laer et al., 2014; Martin, 2022). Regarding Nigeria, previous research has covered aspects associated with conventional media and general marketing communication practices (Olatunji, 2018; Olatunji & Thanny, 2011). Nonetheless, the majority of such studies are focused on TV and printed materials. However, there seems to be a paucity of research into storytelling strategies in telecommunication advertisements on YouTube from 2021 to 2025, a crucial time for Nigerian millennials. It remains unknown what types of narratives predominate in these commercials. Are businesses leaning toward linear narrative styles because this platform offers skip options, or are they playing around with different approaches? Just as crucial is the issue of cultural identity. Nigeria is a country where there is diversity in terms of values, cultures, and languages; however, advertisements appear to prefer easy, funny content about contemporary life, rather than going deeper into tradition.

Additionally, whereas practitioners have been vocal about the effectiveness of storytelling, studies that explicitly examine particular methods used by consumers to engage through stories on YouTube are scarce in the Nigerian telecom industry. Most studies either have a small sample size, concentrate on traditional media, or explore the use of indigenous storytelling within digital reality (Akaeze, 2025). Hence, there seems to be scarcity of evidence-based information for both practitioners and researchers regarding best practices and failures of branding storytelling on YouTube within Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this study analyzes existing commercials and viewpoints of practitioners in order to determine the prevailing strategy and culture in the process of branding storytelling on YouTube. Therefore, the specific objectives of this paper are to identify the dominant storytelling strategies employed in Nigerian telecommunication commercials on YouTube between 2021 and 2025; and analyze the representation of Nigerian cultural values in these commercials.

1.3. Literature Review

The use of storytelling has been widely acknowledged to be one of the best ways to link brands to consumers. According to van Laer et al. (2014), globally speaking, scholars have found out that through the telling of stories, audiences can imagine being immersed in that world, resulting in a message that is more meaningful and memorable compared to just giving out product facts. Martin (2022) notes further that due to the empathic process involved in storytelling advertisements, there are high chances that the audience will develop positive perceptions about the brand since they associate the character in the advertisement with their own lives. Storytelling in Nigeria stems from an even more ancient source. Advertising in pre-modern times was done through oral methods, town criers, and market shows, which were effective means of persuasion that entertained and educated at once

(Olatunji, 2018). Recent research confirms that Nigerian advertisements use humour, drama, and relatable contexts, particularly in the highly competitive telecommunications industry (Amarachukwu, 2025; Dauda, 2025). Although most of the international campaigns rely on storytelling with a global message, the advertisements in Nigeria emphasize common cultural issues such as family, hard work, and community life. However, many aspects have not been examined yet. For example, although many academic works concentrate on conventional means of advertisement, YouTube remains less explored.

The evolution from conventional storytelling to digital storytelling in advertising has been one of the biggest changes in recent times. Initially, digital ads tended to copy TV ads, yet social media websites such as YouTube needed something else, more concise, more engaging, and geared toward a distractible audience capable of skipping at any second. Academics note that effective storytelling through YouTube ads today is achieved through capturing the viewer's attention immediately, through rhythm and emotional appeal (Martin, 2022). Moreover, interactive and episodic ads are increasingly gaining popularity.

This transformation is especially pronounced within Nigeria's cultural framework, where telecom marketing rapidly evolved alongside YouTube's algorithm and preference for mobile viewing. This adaptation entailed the transition from traditional lengthy television commercials to shorter videos that seamlessly incorporate humor, music, and realistic scenarios. Some popular strategies include linear structures divided into three acts (conflict, climax, and conclusion), narrative character development, and realistic scenarios that reflect the lives of Nigerians (Akaeze, 2025).

While digital technologies have brought about more opportunities for creativity, there are still limitations. The need for skip-ability means that marketers must emphasize simplicity and instant appeal rather than sophistication. New research demonstrates the effectiveness of video narratives on digital channels such as YouTube when they combine vivid imagery, culture, and authenticity (Mohamed, 2025). Yet not all tactics translate equally well across different mediums. While some tactics might prove effective in longer content, they may become ineffective in shorter digital media environments. This study aims at exploring how this challenge is addressed through advertisements by telecommunication companies in Nigeria in the YouTube context, thereby providing insights into successful strategies for capturing the attention of young people. While the results are yet not fully clear, one thing is obvious – stories should be both culture-specific and platform-sensitive.

Advertising in Nigeria has always had its culture battles. Traditional types were based on culture practices, town criers, praises, and market shows that integrated messages within cultural values and traditions (Olatunji, 2017; Olatunji, 2018). The use of traditional culture components such as

proverbs, music, attire, and family customs used to be one of the strong points for persuasive techniques. However, there has been a change in recent years. Globalisation, urbanisation, and technological changes made advertisers move away from the use of traditional elements towards something new and different, including convenience, innovations, entertainment, and an aspirational lifestyle (Olatunji, 2018). As it is especially characteristic for telecommunications ads, their main message lies in the service being a means for development and progress, not in cultural symbols.

There is also some conflict around this approach. According to some academics, hybridization can lead to shallow engagement by relying on pidgin English, local jokes, or selective elements of culture without addressing fundamental principles such as communalism and respect for one's seniors (Dauda, 2025). But there are some scholars who see hope in the use of hybridization in their representation Olatunji (2019). If used judiciously, the use of this modern-hybrid combination allows one to speak to the aspirations of modern Nigeria while appealing to its ethnic diversities. This can be seen in telecom advertisements on YouTube. This leads to stories that have an air of modernity, but not by getting stuck in past practices. This has happened in line with shifts in the larger culture within Nigeria where tradition and modernity continuously fight for ground. It becomes important to understand these dynamics since the influence of advertising can be seen in the public sphere in how consumers behave. This paper examines how Nigerian telecoms find the balance on YouTube in this regard, thus making an important contribution to the discussion on cultural relevance in African advertising.

A recurring observation in both the reviewed literature and the findings of this study is the emergence of what can be termed “functional cultural modernity” in Nigerian advertising. This concept describes a pragmatic hybrid approach whereby advertisers selectively combine elements of contemporary Nigerian life, such as convenience, technological innovation, urban aspirations, and humour with subtle local cultural cues to create messages that feel both modern and sufficiently Nigerian.

Olatunji (2018) noted that Nigerian advertising has long negotiated the tension between tradition and modernity, often blending indigenous communication practices with emerging media forms. In the digital era, particularly on platforms like YouTube, this blending appears to have taken a more utilitarian turn. Rather than heavy dependence on traditional symbols or proverbs, many telecom commercials now foreground functional benefits and everyday relatability, occasionally incorporating pidgin expressions, popular music, or regionally relevant visuals (Dalamu, 2020; Kalilu & Alimi, 2023).

In the specific context of YouTube advertising, functional cultural modernity appears to offer telecom brands a workable compromise. It enables them to produce platform-appropriate content that is short,

clear, and engaging while still signaling a degree of cultural awareness. This study contributes to the literature by documenting how this concept manifests concretely in Nigerian telecom commercials and by highlighting its potential implications for both advertising effectiveness and cultural authenticity in African digital communication.

Empirical research on the topic of advertising in Nigeria's telecommunications industry has developed over time but is still relatively piecemeal, especially where digital technology is concerned. The work of Olatunji forms a solid basis for any research on the subject. According to Olatunji (2018), advertisements in Nigeria tend to use indigenous modes of communications such as redundancy, rhythm, and metaphors in order to increase their memorability and impact. In other studies, conducted by Olatunji and Thanny (2011), they analyzed the cultural context in which the youth culture and new media were incorporated into advertising in the telecommunications industry.

More recent works have concentrated on creative and dramatic methods. According to Akaeze (2025), an analysis was carried out on creative persuasion in Nigeria's telecommunications industry advertising with regard to television advertisements by MTN, Glo, and Airtel. It was revealed that emotions, humor, and celebrities are frequently used in advertising, which implies that advertisers utilize the peripheral pathway of persuasion. Another recent work by Azunwo (2025) explored the utilization of drama within telecommunication networks. In this context, MTN served as the case study. It was determined that dramas played an important role in increasing consumer engagement and enhancing brand loyalty.

The insight into the visual aspects of advertising was provided by Onyekuru (2024) via the Airtel Ovajara campaign. This work highlighted the importance of visuals and videos in terms of strengthening emotional and cultural impact. Overall, all the papers reviewed above contribute to proving the point that telecom advertising in Nigeria relies on narration, dramatization, humor, and visual appeal to make their products more humane. Nevertheless, there is one important limitation. Most of the empirical research focuses on TV or print ads. Moreover, very few scholars have conducted content analysis of YouTube ads to determine storytelling strategies and cultural representations in advertisements. Although some studies explore digital marketing or consumer attitudes (Akaeze, 2025), the need for a critical evaluation of story structures, such as the common use of linear versus non-linear storytelling and brand approaches towards incorporating conventional culture with contemporary hybrid culture through YouTube videos has been overlooked. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth content analysis of 19 highly-engaging telecom ads on YouTube (2021-2025), complemented by expert perspectives. Not only will this study go beyond

mere speculations but also reveal specific trends and propose a novel theoretical construct called “Functional Cultural Modernity” into the Nigerian and broader African digital marketing literature.

This study was informed by two different theoretical perspectives which complement each other: Rhetorical Tradition Theory and Narrative Transportation and Engagement Model (N-TEM). Together, they offer a comprehensive theoretical framework with which to analyze the effectiveness of storytelling in Nigerian telecommunications advertisements on YouTube. According to the Rhetorical Tradition Theory, communication is considered an activity carried out for a particular audience in specific circumstances and as such, it is meant to persuade people in a unique way. The theory does not see communication as an activity in which messages are transmitted objectively from one party to another but rather, it sees communication as a form of rhetoric that is adapted to fit an audience’s beliefs, values, cultures, and expectations.

According to Foss (2017), the success of rhetoric depends on its responsiveness to the rhetorical situation. The current study will use the theory to analyze the ways in which the selected telecom brands adapt their storytelling techniques to suit the cultural context of Nigeria and the peculiarities of the YouTube environment. As a theoretical complement to this study, there is the Narrative Transportation and Engagement Model (N-TEM) introduced by van Laer et al. (2014). The theory states that when people get involved in a story, an experience referred to as narrative transportation, they tend to experience emotional involvement, decreased counter-arguing behavior, and enhanced attitude changes. Narrative transportation is influenced by characters' identifiability, story structure, and emotional content. However, in digital advertisement videos, the described attributes are frequently in conflict with skippability and low attention span.

This research utilizes both theories simultaneously. Rhetorical Tradition Theory serves as a framework for studying the adaptation process of advertisements within the Nigerian cultural environment and reality of the communication channel. On the other hand, N-TEM reveals the dynamics that determine how particular narrative forms facilitate or hinder the absorption of the story by viewers. This project promises to contribute significantly to these two theories. First, they will demonstrate how RTT (Rhetorical Tradition Theory) functions within a rapidly changing digital environment in Africa, where advertisers use universal models but incorporate local “functional cultural modernity” elements. Second, by examining the limits of N-TEM within short-form skippable ads, they find that whereas linear structure can help create an easy entrance into the story world, it does not necessarily result in the emotional transportation predicted by the model. Through the introduction of the idea of functional cultural modernity and the use of strategic conservatism in the

creation process, this research makes both models more relevant to Global South digital advertising studies.

3.0 Method and Materials

The current study adopted a mixed method approach in the exploration of narrative forms and portrayal of culture within the advertisements of telecom companies in Nigeria on YouTube between 2021 and 2025. This included the adoption of content analysis and key informant interviews. Triangulation was used to improve the validity of the data obtained using the two methods. The population of the study included all advertisements of telecom companies on YouTube channels owned by MTN, Airtel, Glo, and 9mobile between the period of study. Out of this population, 19 advertisements were randomly selected.

The sampling procedure enabled ensuring that all the commercials which attracted the viewer's attention were included in this research. It is worth noting that the coding schedule that was employed during analysis included such topics as storytelling techniques (linear, emotional, dramatic, etc.), themes, linguistic features, cultural issues, and branding. Moreover, the tool was subjected to the content validity procedure while the test for inter-coder reliability was carried out via the use of a pilot study and agreement percentage. Interviews with seven experts were conducted with the participation of the top advertising managers responsible for developing advertising campaigns for the four mentioned telecom companies. Purposeful and snowball sampling procedures were applied for conducting the interview with the informants due to their practical experience in strategy development and implementation. Semi-structured interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and covered the following topics: storytelling techniques, cultural issues, constraints of the platforms and their effectiveness.

The data collection procedure for content analysis involved viewing advertisements repeatedly, coding, and referencing sources by using quotations or description. Interviews were carried out between late 2025 and early 2026. Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the entire process. The research participants participated voluntarily; they fully understood what they were signing up for, and confidentiality was guaranteed in interviews through code names like Inf. MBNA. All ethical considerations expected of Lagos State University research were adhered to. While content analysis helped in getting quantifiable information, interviews revealed the underlying stories that numbers could not capture. In retrospect, it is evident why the methodology was necessary for the study, being an exercise in both creative and academic pursuit in Nigeria's thriving digital advertising industry.

4.0 Results

4.1 Dominant Storytelling Strategies

The Dataset analysis uncovers a self-reinforcing relationship between the two variables – the preference for linear, emotional, and culturally relevant story structures is evident among Nigerians who create commercial advertisements in the telecom industry on YouTube. Linear storytelling proves to be statistically the most popular approach (73.68%), and this finding receives qualitative validation from creative experts regarding its ability to convey clarity and cultural relevance in digital advertising.

Table 1: Storytelling Strategies Used in Commercials (n = 19)

Storytelling strategy	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)	Total ads-	Total %
Linear storytelling	14	73.68	5	26.32	19	100
Non-linear storytelling	2	10.53	17	89.47	19	100
Problem-solving storytelling	4	21.05	15	78.95	19	100
Testimonial storytelling	3	15.79	16	84.21	19	100
Emotional storytelling	9	47.37	10	52.63	19	100
Dramatic storytelling	8	42.11	11	57.89	19	100

Linear storytelling was the obvious winner, taking up a dominant role in storytelling among advertisements. According to Table 1, linear storytelling was used in 73.68% (14 out of 19) commercials that have been examined. The second position was taken by emotional storytelling, accounting for 47.37% of all commercials. Dramatic storytelling occupied third place with 42.11%. Non-linear storytelling was used in only 10.53% of commercials, problem-solving in 21.05%, and testimonial storytelling in 15.79% of cases. The above is well captured in Figure 1

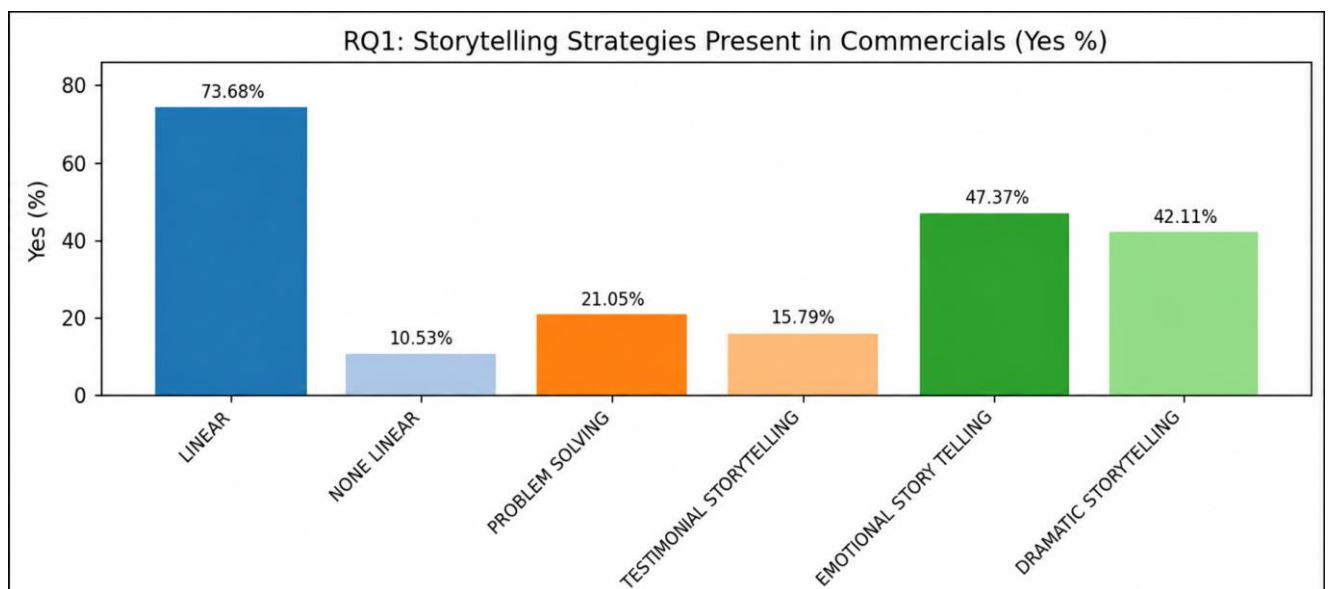


Figure 1: Storytelling strategies that are used in telecommunication commercials on YouTube

The overwhelming dominance of linear storytelling structures, where the storyline starts, moves forward, and ends, was consistently pointed out by practitioners. One interviewee (Inf. AdeIP) noted that “This is something that they have done over and over again.”. Another subject (Inf. MBNA) explained the practical need for such an approach: “YouTube is a skippable medium. If you do not get their attention within five seconds, they will be gone. You need to tell them something that makes sense very quickly”. It seems that the addition of emotions and drama to a more straightforward structure was widely practiced by professionals. This was viewed as a deliberate approach aimed at making content relatable and engaging emotionally while remaining simple in terms of the narrative structure. Moreover, character-based storytelling as well as slice-of-life videos were often seen as effective strategies.

4.2 Representation of Nigerian Cultural Values

As shown above, the findings demonstrate that Nigerian telecommunication advertisements on YouTube communicate the image of a culturally relevant identity with a modern twist. From the statistics, the prominence of convenience/accessibility (89.47%) and technology/innovation (52.63%), as well as the lack of communication regarding traditional or nationalist aspects (social responsibility/national pride is 0%), indicates the portrayal of telecommunication services as an enabler of modernity, while individualistic rather than national interests dominate. These statistics are supported by qualitative analysis in which the respondents reveal that culture is used as an instrument of authenticity and relatability, a practice that needs to keep up with the modern realities of Nigeria.

Cultural Values and Themes

Table 2: Cultural Values/Themes Represented (n = 19)

Cultural value/theme	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)	No (%) Total ads-	Total %
Family and relationship	5	26.32	14	73.68	19	100 %
Success and aspirations	8	42.11	11	57.89	19	100 %
Innovation and technology	10	52.63	9	47.37	19	100 %
Convenience and accessibility	17	89.47	2	10.53	19	100
Humour and entertainment	10	52.63	9	47.37	19	100 %
Social responsibility and national pride	0	0	19	100	19	100
Youth and lifestyle appeal	8	42.11	11	57.89	19	100 %

Based on the results of the study presented in Table 2, convenience and accessibility (89.47%) is the most prevalent cultural theme in advertisements for Nigerian telecommunication companies, followed by themes related to innovation/technology (52.63%) and humor/entertainment (52.63%). Success/aspiration and youth/lifestyle themes appear in about 42.11% of advertisements. On the other

hand, only 26.32% of advertisements contain family/relationship themes, while no advertisement incorporates themes of social responsibility/national pride (0%). These results show that the advertisements for telecommunication services in Nigeria focus more on empowering the individual and improving his/her lifestyle through innovations.

Cultural Markers

Table 3: Language Used in Commercials (n = 19)

Language	Frequency	Percentage %
English	16	84.21
Mixed (e.g., English + local/pidgin)	2	10.53
Pidgin	1	5.26
Total	19	100

To reinforce these points, the results depicted in Table 3 indicate that English language is used the most in commercials (84.21%) while only 15.79% of the commercials make use of language mix or pidgin. Likewise, the use of western music (68.42%) outstrips the use of traditional music (21.05%) and no proverbs are used (0%). Cultural icons like food (15.79%) and festivals (21.05%) are sparingly used in advertisements. In all, the above analysis paints a picture of a culture that communicates using a combination of its aspects.

Creative personnel did not regard this pattern as culture being ignored, but rather as a means of achieving authenticity. As one informant pointed out, “Culture is all about identity. When people see how she dresses, how things look, they know that MTN knows them. That means engagement goes beyond just advertising” (Inf. MBNA). Another informant highlighted the importance of relatability over cultural symbolism in advertisements: “You can’t do Amala in the East...Relatability is all-important. Or else people will see through it” (Inf. AdeIP). It seems that, in general, this kind of advertising reflects what could be considered functional cultural modernity, using current realities in Nigeria along with jokes and real-life scenarios, with an appropriate level of cultural elements incorporated selectively (e.g., through music, clothing, or regional nuances). Overall, it seems that these commercials focus on usefulness, modernity, and a sense of humor as opposed to deeply rooted cultural/traditional/nationalist messages.

5.0 Discussion

The results of this study provide some valuable lessons about the practice of storytelling in Nigerian telecommunication advertisements on YouTube; however, they need to be treated cautiously considering that the sampling technique was purposive.

5.1 Dominant Storytelling Strategies

Based on the analysis, the finding indicates that linear narration is the most commonly used narrative mode, as seen in about three quarters of the selected YouTube commercials. Such a trend might be explained by the conscious strategy employed given the nature of YouTube as a platform with advertisements that can be skipped, implying the need for clarity and quick understanding. The three-part story (introduction, middle, end) was cited by informants as the easiest means of conveying messages to viewers. Although such an emphasis on linear story form fits well within the oral narrative tradition (Olatunji, 2018), it could be due to production limitations.

More intricate and non-linear narratives, as suggested by some studies, might increase curiosity in digital media (van Laer et al., 2014). On the other hand, the fact that only linear narratives were found to be used in the current case study sample can mean that marketers placed more emphasis on ensuring that their ads would be understandable rather than intriguing. There are also possible alternative reasons why no experimentations have taken place; for instance, marketers might have been faced with time pressure. At the same time, the fact that many ads included emotional components might mean that advertisers aimed to make them more relatable.

5.2 Representation of Nigerian Cultural Values

These advertisements seemed to lean towards functional and modern cultural values with accessibility becoming the key cultural value that emerged out of these ads. Values like innovation, humor, and aspirational lifestyles were present as well, whereas traditional elements like sayings and national pride were missing. The tendency to adopt such an attitude in this research may lead us towards what this research refers to as "functional cultural modernity", which is a selective fusion of reality from modern Nigeria with local elements. The creative people involved in this process were keen to defend this attitude as necessary for authentic communication.

This conclusion is generally supported by previous findings that advertising in Nigeria has evolved through the adoption of indigenous features in response to evolving media and consumer environments (Olatunji and Thanny, 2011; Olatunji, 2018; Akaeze, 2025). From another point of view, however, this practice poses a risk of becoming superficial and utilizing cultural features only as decorations rather than for meaningful integration (Dauda, 2025). The apparent lack of broader cultural or national elements may be related to platform-specific considerations and a target market of young digitally-native users, although it might also imply caution against controversial issues. Therefore, the question remains unanswered – is this trend cultural progression or simplification?

5.3 Integration and Implications

In sum, the observations made might indicate how Nigerian telecom brands have been adapting their classical narrative principles to the realities of a dynamic digital medium. The integration of linear narratives with pragmatic themes seems to provide a viable compromise among simplicity, familiarity, and marketing goals. Yet, this strategy could entail some compromises, especially in terms of emotional or cultural significance. The purposive sample of engaging ads suggests that the conclusions may not reflect the diversity of telecom marketing on YouTube. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence provided on how the target audience responded to the selected narrative strategies in this paper, thus allowing room for the hypothesis that different sections of the audience may react in diverse ways. In general, the research indicates that narratives work in this setting under the framework of pragmatic accommodation. Although linear and functional narratives appear to be very appropriate for the YouTube platform, the question still stands as to whether they will prove efficient in creating deeper connections with the brand or sustaining more complex cultural messages in the long run.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research was aimed at studying major techniques of storytelling and the portrayal of Nigerian cultural values in communications advertisements broadcasted on YouTube from 2021 to 2025. Analysis of the content of 19 commercials and interviewing advertising specialists revealed some interesting trends that may be considered valuable yet hypothetical. In the first place, the analysis suggests that linear storytelling is currently the most popular technique used in Nigerian telecom commercials on YouTube, often accompanied by such stylistic techniques as emotionality and drama. On the other hand, cultural values are rather conveniently presented through the prism of innovation and fun. This approach leads towards what this research refers to as “functional cultural modernity,” which is an amalgamated and pragmatic method that incorporates the realities of modern-day Nigeria together with selected local references to create more relatable content for digital consumption. It is possible that this trend represents a conscious shift by these Nigerian telecom advertisers to accommodate the skippable and attention-deficient nature of YouTube, which prefers simplicity and a clear message over experimental and heavily traditional narratives. However, the underutilization of nonlinear and culturally rich approaches can be interpreted as a form of cautiousness within the creativity of these companies’ commercials. It is likely that such a trend can effectively contribute towards functional relatability but not necessarily result in more profound emotional connections and sustained loyalty to a particular brand. In summary, this study demonstrates how telecom brands in Nigeria are increasingly incorporating new trends into their storytelling approaches to cater to the

demands of digital media. Specifically, the linear narrative format and functional culture are used to produce effective content.

Based on the research outcomes, it is recommended that Telematics corporations and advertising firms should improve the narrative structures of their consumer engagements. Although the linear structure is clear, adding variety through episodic and emotionally driven story structures may serve to increase interest and engagement, particularly among YouTube youth viewers. Secondly, marketers should make ensure that their messages and style of presentation are more culturally relevant. By transcending superficial representations and engaging with Nigerian culture more meaningfully, creativity will not be sacrificed at the expense of remaining true to the times and universal. This approach could ensure representation across all audience groups. This will also be in tandem with the requirements of the Act No. 23 of 2022 (Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON)) on the need for increased local contents of advertisements designed, produced and disseminated in Nigeria. Promoting innovation that combines profitability and cultural sensitivity can contribute to the growth and development of the industry in Nigeria.

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The author(s) declare that it is not applicable.

Consent for publication

The author(s) declare that this is not applicable.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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