Gendered Spaces and Miscommunication in Nigerian Digital Performances

By

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Abstract

Notably, Nigerian theatre extends beyond its physical location to the virtual space, emerging as digital performances. A layer of mediated performances overlays this virtual environment and is reinforced in many ways. It is interesting to note that within these mediated performances, there are references to women which could be interpreted as misconceptions about perceived bias and prejudices against women. Leaning on this notion, this study seeks to explore the prevailing themes in Nigerian Digital performances and interrogate the extent of objectification and patriarchal bias that exist within the performances. Through the lenses of feminist criticism, cultural ideologies and theories of digital media, this paper critically examines some of these digital performances with regards to their portrayal of women and goes on to discuss contending realities that have shaped this portrayal. Findings of this study reveal that *Mark Angel* presents a form of objectification that posits that women are bound to internalise the society's perspective as a view of what their bodies should be, while *Battabox* objectifies the woman sexually and defines her as a commodity with a price tag; a description that aligns it with sexual objectification. It advocates that, in order to overcome the miscommunication regarding women, a more profound and radical 'spin' is needed, as women's competing desires and realities are contained within these created terrains. Additionally, the paper presents pragmatic alternatives for the biased digital signals that are portrayed in the virtual space.

Keywords: **Digital performances, Feminism, Gender bias, Miscommunication, Objectification**

How to Cite this Paper

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Introduction

The arts of the theatre have grown beyond the traditional performance spaces because, like every other field, theatre has embraced the possibilities in technological innovations. However, the interface of theatre and technology has not invalidated earlier practices, rather the existing practices are made to interact with digital technology.

Marshall McLuhan (2004) argues that a new medium 'is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace; it never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them' (p. 158). Just as the invention of television brought entertainment into the living room, internet facilities make digital performances possible and now the audience can consume theatrical products anywhere and anytime via internet-enabled devices. Digital performances are simply theatrical arts that are disseminated using internet applications and other replication technologies. It is one of the latest genres that have emerged in the arts. Dixon (2007) defines digital performance to include:

> All performance works where computer technologies play a key role rather than a subsidiary one in content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms. This includes live theatre, dance and performance art that incorporates projections that have been digitally created or manipulated; robotic and virtual reality performances; installations and theatrical works that use computer sensing/activating equipment or telematics techniques; and performative works and activities that are accessed through the computer screen, including cybertheatre events, MUDs, MOOs and virtual worlds, computer games, CD-ROMs, and performative net.art works (p. 3).

Some studies have shown the beneficial effects of taking theatre to the cyber space while others show a deterioration in the presentation and imaging of the woman. This paper examines female objectification as a form of gender bias which brings about miscommunication in Nigerian digital performances. It argues that these performances seem to cement patriarchal narratives while perpetuating women's subjugation, thereby making the woman an object of male gratification.

Women in a variety of endeavours have received recognition for their efforts to accomplish remarkable life goals, but they still struggle to gain respect as human beings who can be the heroes of their own tales. In addition to the challenges that women confront, objectifying behaviours are being promoted through digital performances. Treating or dismissing women as commodities that can be acquired and discarded or presented as objects of manipulation at will is disrespectful to say the least. Some digital performances' storylines are patriarchal in nature, portraying women as objects in general. As a result, the way digital performances are portrayed based on gender demands careful consideration. Among other things, this paper argues that women's representation in the media ought to change as they are also key players in societal development and health and, on the other

hand, is the role media products play in moulding societal focus. As noted by Ekpe & Wekpe (2023), "media products have proven [sic] valuable tools for engaging and analysing human concerns… they have been appropriately situated to reiterate viable communication messages. They have also been employed as veritable moments of propaganda" (130).

Theatrical activities in Nigeria have been profoundly influenced by the operations of the virtual space. The changes are happening quickly and in a subtle way because of the ever-increasing number of internet users in Nigeria. Statistics from *Statista* as of October 2024 show that Nigeria tops the chart as the country with the highest number of internet users in Africa, with 108.27 million users; giving a reasonable gap to the second and third country which are Egypt (with 54.74 million users) and Kenya (with 46.87 million users). This figure is projected by *Statista* to grow to 152.28 in 2025. Further data by *Statista* reveal that internet usage penetration in Nigeria is on a steady rise, growing from 30% in 2013 to 32.6% in 2014 and then 34.8%, 37.1%, 40%, 43.1%, 61.4% and 46.6%, respectively, between 2014 and 2020. Still in line with reports on the huge number of internet users in Nigeria, *DigitXplus* (2024, p. 9) reports that Nigeria ranks 6th in the world for countries with the highest number of internet users. This is an indication that the virtual space is a striving concern for the Nigerian populace and a major destination for theatrical contents.

Also, within the last two years, giant operators of the virtual space have made visits and effected business plans to encourage and further aid the growth of internet usage in Nigeria. Such include the visit of The Chief Executive Officer and Founder of social networking app – Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, to Nigeria. *ThisDay* (2018) reports that the visit which was on the 30th of August, 2016, was Zuckerberg's first visit to Africa. Earlier in the year 2016, *Facebook* had announced that the population of Nigerians on Facebook was 16 million and, upon his visit, Zuckerberg announced that 'the figure has grown to 18 million and Nigeria still maintains its position as the largest market for Facebook in Africa'. Again in 2018, as stated by *The Guardian, '*Facebook deepened its investment and commitment in Nigeria by unveiling the NG_Hub in Lagos, Nigeria, on the 22nd of May. It was its first flagship community hub space in Africa'. Still in line with activities that recognise the strength of internet usage in Nigeria and the possible growth opportunities for users of the virtual space, *Channels Television* (2018) reports that 'Tech giant, *Google,* has launched its free *Wi-Fi* service for Nigerians, the *Google* Station, in Ikeja, Lekki and other parts of Lagos'. *Channels Television* quoted the *Google* Nigeria Country Director, Juliet Ehimuan-Chiazor as saying that the developments are aimed at helping more Nigerians and Africans to benefit from the opportunities the web has to offer. Also, 'the free Wi-Fi service will be launched in 200 locations in five cities across Nigeria by the end of 2019'. All these are pointers that internet usage in Nigeria will keep growing and thus provide a sustained market for operators that utilise the internet.

Review   of   Related   Literature

Digital performance is not entirely a new phenomenon, but rather a morph from existing art forms. It represents the adaptation and evolving trend of older forms of theatrical activities that now produce an exciting experience. This expression supports the assertion that 'we are engaged in a transformation of the entire world (and ourselves) into mere raw materials or standing reserves' (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 155). Ekpe & Okoronkwor (2024) add that 'digital performance is pervasive and encompasses various presentational and communicational facets of electronic daily life' (p. 29). They add that 'beyond the concern for change in space experience, lies the contents promoted' (p. 29). Notably, theatre is embracing the rapidly evolving media and by moving to the cyber space, there seems to be more patronage as the reach is expanded to meet different needs and desires. Also, the appeal feature is heightened as the process of digitalisation creates enhanced representation of the contents. The concept of digital performance is a pertinent subject of interest and research due to the fact that digitalisation of performances is getting more and more popular. This explanation draws inference from the Mediamorphosis theory which states that new media do not arise spontaneously and independently; rather, the earlier forms of media tend to adapt and evolve continuously rather than die, they either morph from something that already exists or emerge gradually from the transformation. Mediamorphosis is 'the transformation of communication media usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures and social and technological innovation' (Fidler, 1997, pp. 22-23).

The mediamorphosis theory recognises digitalisation as a main feature of the artistic communication and stresses its development as being important to the production, reproduction, distribution and reception of products. Fidler (1997, pp. 22-23) stresses that digitalisation has changed the way we manipulate texts, images and sounds. Blau (2025, pp. 23-25) acknowledges the tendency as well, arguing that theatrical practices are evolving into more favourably positioned forms and taking on a variety of shapes. He emphasises this point by outlining the distinctions between mediatised forms (digital performances) and live performances. He infers that both forms compete for audiences in the cultural marketplace, and that mediatised forms have gained the advantage with particular thanks to the features of technological innovations. In establishing the relationship between live theatre and mediated form, Blau (2025) states that:

> The theatre's status has been continually threatened by what Adorno named the culture industry and . . . the escalating dominance of the media. "Do you go to the theatre often?" That many have never gone, and that those who have, even in countries with established theatre traditions, are going elsewhere or, with cable and VCRs, staying home, is also a theatrical fact, a datum of practice (p. 76).

Alongside its good aspects, digital performances are equally full of misrepresentations of

women, which is a recurring subject. As entertaining, informing and widely distributed as it may be, there seems to exist an obvious gender bias because the performances tend at some time to objectify female characters and at other times pass generalised judgment on women. The objectification and commodification of the woman's body in digital theatrical performances reflect a norm and appear to sustain a culture that abuses woman's sexuality. On the other hand, the woman's body has become a trophy used by some artists to place themselves in the spotlight. This study leverages on the concept of technological determinism which advocates that a society's technology defines the development of its social structure and cultural values. In this context, the objectification of women via the media showcases the patriarchal placement of women in society, while at the same time encourages the widespread of such placement. The treatment of women depicted in a society's media can influence the developmental imperatives of such society. This appears to be in line with Karl Marx's perception that changes in technology affect social relations and organisational structure, and that social relations and cultural practices ultimately centre on a society's economic and technological foundation. As society develops 'new production forces like technology, material life and class order become mutable' (Eze, 2014, p. 70). Relatively, technology is seen as the basis for all human activities, it is believed that technology is the key governing force in society (Smith & Marx, 1994, p. 174). The media is a very powerful and explicit determinant, and our use of particular media may have subtle effect on us (McLuhan, 2004, p. 158). The view above explains the trend and possible effect contents of digital performances are likely to evoke especially as they record widespread involvement and keep growing at an alarming rate. The increase is adjudged by the number of content providers emerging in the digital performance field.

The Gendering Concept
The digital performances selected for this study represent diverse forms of gender bias which include the ten types of female objectification identified by Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton. These forms of objectification range from: treating the woman as a person lacking in boundary-integrity; as lacking in autonomy and self-determination; treating the woman as something that can be bought or sold and also identifying women with their body or body parts. Also noted in the Nigerian digital performances is the emphasis on promoting the patriarchal nature of men, reducing the women to something less than human, forgetting that women might be better portrayed because they have their own opinions. Women know what they want and so should be recognised in that light rather than have their options fine-tuned to suit someone else or a defined gender imbalance. The prevalent gender bias in Nigerian digital performances is firmly rooted in sexual objectification and extends to a determination of what a preferred woman's body size should be. Counihan (2018) suggests that 'the pressure on women to mould their bodies to please men is directly linked to women's economic dependence and lack of self-fulfilment, whereas men's cultural power manifest in their caring less about their weight and being defined as the pleasers' (p. 190).

Men are not disturbed about their weight the way women are; they are not continually confronted with an ideal image of how they are supposed to be. Men are allowed to be normal; it is the women who have to be perfect. Relating these with Frederickson and Roberts' Objectification theory shows that the act of making something/someone (that is not an object) an object which can be used, manipulated, controlled and known through its physical properties defines the presence of objectification. Objectification theory attempts to explain the extreme and pervasive tendency to equate women with their bodies and why this can have negative consequences for women's body image and beyond. Specifically :

> Girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring, which, in turn, can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reduce opportunities for peak motivational states, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states. (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 173)

Adding to what Frederickson and Roberts propose, Bartky (2015) explains that objectification 'goes in line with creating stereotypical image for the female and this is capable of threatening self-determination', and can ignite a war between a "true" and "false" self or . . . the form of an often coerced and degrading identification of a person with her body' (p. 23); mystification, the systematic obscuring of both the reality and agencies of psychological oppression so that its intended effect, the depreciated self, is lived out as destiny, guilt or neurosis.

By implication, female objectification threatens the autonomy of women not only by virtue of their existence, but also by virtue of the message passed. The objectification of women via digital performances creates a virtually constructed definition of what the woman should be, what her choices should be guided by and how she ought to respond to life, thus presenting the woman as an object with no mind of her own but that which should live by the precepts that have been virtually constructed. These acts could, in other terms, be described as dehumanising because of how the woman is defined and how she is made to feel especially when she cannot live up to the virtually constructed image. The scrutiny of the woman's body and supposed role creates an imbalance of gender preference in the portrayals of digital performances. In a further description of objectification, Nussbaum (1995) suggests seven notions that define objectification. She discusses the notion of 'instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness and fungibility' (p. 257). Accordingly, they imply having the objectifier treat the object as a tool of his or her purposes, lacking in autonomy and self-determination, lacking in agency and, perhaps, also in activity as well as treating the object as interchangeable with other objects of the same type, and/or other types. There is also the notions of 'violability, ownership and denial of subjectivity' (p. 257), which suggest the objectifier treating the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, as something that is owned by another, can be

bought or sold, as well as treating the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

In tandem, Langton (2009) adds three more notions to those of Nussbaum, they are 'reduction to body, reduction to appearance and silencing' (pp. 228-29). These imply the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts; the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses and the treatment of a person as if they are silent, lacking the capacity to speak. The above listed forms of objectification define what it means to make someone an object and provide the needed explanation for deciphering theatrical contents in the light of what form of objectification is portrayed. Nussbaum and Langton illustrate objectification as being negative since it takes place within a context where respect, equality and consent are absent and create the basis for the understanding of women experiences which are structurally and systematically disadvantageous.

The advent of social media, coupled with the movement of theatrical activities to the virtual space, comes with diverse challenges in contents and perceptions. A major concern of this paper is to ascertain why the subject of female objectification in Nigerian digital performances has not got the much-needed attention to control its spread. Other challenges posed by un/wholesome consumption of social media contents - such as the continuous emergence of fake news – has been the focus of symposiums and campaigns in Nigeria but yet to be considered is a symposium or campaign to address the objectification of females in Nigerian digital performance. The Federal Government of Nigeria on the 11th of July, 2018, launched a national campaign against fake news via social media. The Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed described the phenomenon as a time bomb that can detonate with deadly consequences if left uncheck (*ThisDay,* 2018). Viewing the above from the theory of technological determinism, the depiction of women in a society's media can greatly influence the developmental trend of society and, if left unchecked, it could 'detonate' as bad as fake news could.

Methodology
This study adopts qualitative content analysis to identify and analyse themes of gendered spaces and miscommunication which manifest as objectification in *Battabox* and *Mark Angel* performances. Specifically, the performances are analysed through the lenses of objectification theory in which this study is based, guided by the objective of this study. Four episodes of Nigerian digital performances with themes of gender bias were selected for analyses. The selection was based on prior knowledge of their themes. The forms of objectification investigated include: denial of subjectivity, reduction to body, reduction to appearance, instrumentality, inertness, violability, ownership, silencing, fungibility, and denial of autonomy. Results of the theoretical analyses are projected in a schematic presentation that reveals, at a glance, the different forms of objectification identified in each performance.

Recognizably, there are limitations with regards to the methods adopted, as the performances were not randomly selected from a pool of digital performances but purposively selected because of their themes. This could be attributed to the non-availability of an archive that could be assessed for an inventory of performances themed on objectification, thus leaving the researchers to source for performances that fall within the focus of this study.

Analyses of Digital Performances

This part of the paper presents a feminine critique on the extent to which females are being objectified in digital performances using two YouTube channels: *Battabox* and *Mark Angel Comedy Series*. Two episodes from each of the handles are analysed; for *Battabox*, the episodes are "Two Angry Men: Angry at Nigerian Wives" and "Two Angry Men: Why Can't Men Love Two Women at Once?", while for the *Mark Angel Comedy Series* the episodes are: "Episode 69: Three of Them" and "Episode 79: Again". These channels and episodes were purposively selected because of how they have permeated the virtual space and garnered viewers. *Socialblade* in its 2021 rating of top 250 YouTubers in Nigeria graded *Mark Angel Comedy* A with 1st position; the *Mark Angel Comedy* handle has record of 7.36 million subscriptions and 1.7 billion video views. For *Battabox,* the grade is B with 336,000 subscriptions and 85 million video views. The contents of these handles treat the subject of objectification from diverse angles.

Mark Angel presents a form of objectification that posits that women are bound to internalise the society's perspective as a view of what their bodies should be. This perspective can 'lead to habitual body monitoring, which in turn can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reduce opportunities for peak motivational states and diminish awareness of internal bodily states' (Frederickson and Roberts, 1997, p. 173). *Battabox*, on the other hand, sexually objectifies the woman and defines her as a commodity with a price tag; a description that aligns it with sexual objectification which implies that 'a person is sexually objectified when her sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from the rest of her personality and reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her' (Barkty, 2015, p. 26).

Discursive Analysis of *Battabox*:

Battabox is an entertainment channel based in Lagos, Nigeria. It operates on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and personal web page. Its website *battabox.com* describes *Battabox* as 'Nigeria's most exciting news and entertainment video channel'. The channel's contents cut across reports on Nigerian reality shows, underground documentaries and news, video features, Naija gist, Lagos fashion, SuperStar interview and more from across Nigeria. The website further describes *Battabox* as: 'the fact behind Nigerian movies fiction, Nollywood in real-life with a dash of Yoruba movie magic'. A quick view of *Battabox* performances reveals a direct representation of the woman as a commodity with a price tag and, upon being purchased, ceases to have a mind of her own

but lives according to the dictate of her purchaser. Based on the contents of its performance uploads; it will not be out of place to describe *Battabox* as a tool for male gratification.

Title One: 'Two Angry Men: Angry at Nigerian Wives'

In this performance, the message passed is that men are usually cajoled into marriage and, upon realisation, the man's first thought is always on how to set himself free from the union. The theme of the episode is an argument about whether women are entitled to half of their husbands' property. The two major characters in this performance (James and Harry) abuse the possibility of a woman ever dreaming to own half of what her husband has acquired. In his description of a wife, James says:

> A wife: before marriage, she is a brand-new car, after marriage, she is gotten [sic] accident, you fix her and bring her up again, so you don't expect everything to work properly. After first child delivery, she has been bashed by a trailer and few things have been patched.

Such description of the woman's body is a direct treatment of the female body as an object. For even though her body is a means through which the destiny of a lineage is carried out, she fails to attract respect for going through a process that should otherwise empower her more as a female. By implication, her bodily beauty is not necessary for her own sake and for her self-worth as a person, with personal right and autonomy, but for masculine appeal, to excite copulation which would in turn enhance reproduction for corporate society and then bashing for going through the process. It further implies that the body of the woman is constructed for masculine attraction and enhancement of amorous desire and thus subject to commoditisation at all times. To further drive such insinuation home, James remarks 'if the girlfriend needs half of a man's earning, it could be considered based on the role she plays, but for a wife? Why should it be considered when her value has depreciated?' Harry adds: 'why should a man give half of his worth to 'something' that has depreciated over the years'? Contrary to the position promoted by *Battabox,* Counihan (1999) argues that 'women can develop a positive relationship to their bodies and counter bodily objectification through pregnancy and birth' (p. 197). In birth, women use the body for the awesome creation of another human being and, thus, birth can provide a possible channel for learning to value one's body.

A further discussion on what percentage is worth attributing to the wife ignites the following response from James and Harry: 'It depends on the woman's skills and how intact the good is after some years; how wear resistant the good become'. At this point, it is pertinent to ask if all there is to a woman's value is a rating system that equates her with a piece of product that has its shelf lifespan as a determining factor for usefulness? James and Harry further declare that if there is any possibility for revisiting marriage decisions years afterward, it is only few women that could be worth going back to because a lot of women after few years of marriage fail to fit into the society's definition of beauty. They exemplify

the ideal woman as one who is of the slim status, shapely, sexily dressed and endowed with all forms of artificial endowments that defy the show of ageing. This expression buttresses the point made by Counihan (1999), who says that:

> The most 'beautiful' body is the most objectified, the most falsified and the most ornamental. To be beautiful, women are exhorted to a continual self-manipulation that involves their own fragmentation and objectification as they fix their nails, fix their hairs, compress their butts, push up their boobs, shave their legs, deodorize their armpits, paint their faces, perfume their wrists and so on (p. 196).

By this, a woman with a beautiful body is constantly bombarded with leers, whistles and comments that further emphasise her body and detract from her individual personhood. Thus, as long as women continue to live under this condition, they cannot liberate themselves from subordination and objectification. Women cannot achieve self-esteem or power as long as they strive to fulfil an unobtainable ideal based on their passivity and commodification. By virtue of the contents promoted, *Battabox* vandalises the personhood of the woman through fragmentation of her person and body as well as likening her body functions to those of a commodity (car), with emphasis on the wear-out attribute associated with commodities. Counihan (1999) laments that 'turning women into objects is one central means of ensuring their subordination . . . the continual fragmentation of the female body into boobs, butts, legs, and crotches erases women's personhood and turns them into disembodied parts' (p. 196). And these dismembered and sexualised fragments are used to gratify and sell. *Battabox* capitalises on the commodification factors as James likens bride price for women to the price tag on a commodity on the shelf of a supermarket. He further states: 'paying of bride price is a buying and selling process; it is cattle market!' Implicit in above assertion is that the woman is nothing but a possession, an object with no control of her being and definitely not capable of any contention of her personality. Her body, then, is seen as a mere body, just like a car could be seen as a mere object. And having bride price paid on her behalf confirms her being an owned object with no form of independence but subject to whims and dictates of her owner.

Title Two: 'Why can't Men Love Two Women at Once?'
The claim in this episode is that men have the capacity to love two women equally at the same time. The bone of contention here is that variety attracts more to the taste buds. Here women are equated with mere products meant for consumption; devoid of any feeling or choice of how to be treated. The existence of the woman is tied to the gratification of the man. Woman here is likened to having a spare tire just to have a replacement where and when needed. Another illustration used in the episode likened women to having more than one car (women being interchangeably used with cars) of which each serves different purposes and can be used for different occasions. James and Harry further categorise women into two distinct groups: the first being the ones that could be showed off in public;

while the second are those kept at home, mainly for domestic affairs. Accordingly, the ones for the public need to meet up with the societal construct of beauty and must be well acquainted with the artificial attributes expected of such ideal woman. They further relegate the role of the housewife, which represent their second category, to domestic affairs, because by their assessment, she is not the posh type. To further stress this, they maintain that 'if a wife asks to be taken to the cinema, the response will be laughter because that is not where she belongs. For the wife, the movie should be rented and watched at home but for the girlfriend, cinema is the destination'. The views represented by James and Harry in *Battabox* are filters of what they gather from the society, thus there is need for an all-round change to the perception of women for a better and healthier society.

Battabox promotes claims that abuse the liberal nature of the virtual space and authorise contents that would otherwise be forbidden in controlled traditional broadcast. Specifically, the Nigeria Broadcasting Code (2010) specifies in section 3.8, sub section 3.8.1 that 'womanhood shall be presented with respect and dignity' (p. 34).

It is regrettable to note that *Battabox*, through its performance contents, paints the digital space as a celebrated platform for demeaning women. It infers that women's worth is directly linked to their ability to 'keep' a man and their success measured by how happy the man is. While emphasising that women are obligated to serve men, *Battabox* identifies men as those who should have no rules dictated to them and in whatever form they come; they are the centre of women's existence. The performances promoted by *Battabox* make objectification to be worse than what Karl Marx condemns in capitalism. Marx rather calls for the Socialist ideology which demands the assimilation of all human beings, rejecting the notion that any human category be considered an object, blending in with the democratic society and supposing no place for the "other". Relating this to the concerns of objectifying elements in digital performances, there is need for art practitioners to consider arts, not as a means but an end in itself. By this, there will be true representation of what the arts stand for.

Analysis of *Mark Angel Comedy*
Mark Angel Comedy is a comedy-producing company which, according to *markangelcomedy.com,* "started in 2012 with the objective of putting smiles on the faces of its audience'. The company releases comedy videos on YouTube every Friday; in addition, funny videos from the street are released via *Mark Angel TV* (online) every Saturday. Their contents are also shared via the *Mark Angel Comedy* Facebook page. The website adds that 'the company also performs on live stages when invited and have a cinematography and comedy school where kids are afforded the opportunity to develop their talents and passion for acting and cinematography'.

Mark Angel defines female beauty as being socially constructed. The message seems to be that the most important thing about being a female is the physical look; thus, females ought

to strive to look like the socially constructed image of an ideal female beauty. They add as an advice that women should spend time, energy and money to achieve this ideal figure and then feel ashamed when the efforts fail. Whereas the female body is expected to be flawless, a man's body is barely dismembered and devoid of scrutiny.

Title One: Episode 69: 'Three of Them'
The episode opens with a lady (Kachi) trying to ward off an offensive description of her body size accused of being fat. The term is used in such a way to suggest that she is out of place due to her physical body size. In defence, she describes herself as 'adding flesh', 'being tall and plump'. In the heat of the argument, Kachi calls on Emmanuella (the main character in the performance) for her opinion, and she tells her, 'You are not getting fat, you are already fat. . . yes you are adding flesh, fat flesh!' She goes ahead to say: 'I know five fat people in this compound, and you are three of them! You better start drinking slim tea'. The overriding aim of the performance is to place a call on women to oppress their bodies through self-abnegation in order to fit into societal construct. This abnegation of the self is enforced from without. One of the resultant effects of selling such ideal to the populace is that it could push women into punishing themselves; trying really hard to escape their shame of being fat; as well as to end up hating themselves more than before. Expatiating on such assertion, Susierbach (2019) explains that 'in such process they could ruin their health, weaken their bodies and render themselves socially ineffectual as obese nonpersons or as invisible anorexics' (p. 146). It is also on this note that Bruch (2012) warns that women need to learn that, contrary to what society tells them, 'Their identity consists of more than how they look' (38). Women need to 'ignore the tyranny of slenderness, define themselves as subjects and value their personhood rather than their objectified bodies' (p. 90).

In the Nigerian context, the word 'fat' denotes a negative affiliation of unattractiveness, accumulation of excess fat that obstructs the functionality of persons and reduces the person to a class of the undesired. The woman with much flesh is presented as a problem that needs fixing. The label is that the woman's body is some sort of social currency and as such fitting into the socially-constructed body size for the woman is an achievement to show off and this heightens the commodification of the woman image.

Title Two: Episode 79: 'Again'
This episode features Kachi (the character from episode 69) still in an attempt to get some positive description of herself from Emmanuella. She seeks Emmanuella's opinion again on being 'fat'. Emmanuella replies: 'I don't know if you are fat but slim tea is nine thousand naira'. This pushes Kachi to express admiration for her body size, noting the beauty that comes with her physical attributes. Her action elicits laughter from Emmanuella. Just then someone raises alarm that kidnappers are on rampage which causes people to run for safety. Kachi joins in the race but could not make it through the small gate opening that every other person passed through. She calls on Emmauella to help her through the gate.

Emmauella replies: 'I think I told you to drink slim tea…you said you are not fat! *oya pass na…* Don't worry you are safe, the kidnappers did not come with trailer so if they kidnap you, what will they use and carry you?'

A general perception that emerges from the *Mark Angel Comedy Series* is that the slim status is the socially acceptable definition of beauty for the female. Their idea of fat shaming a body size is a way of making people laugh and for promoting a product – slim tea! Body size should not be an apology; whatever one's size of body is should cause no legitimate offense. This is particularly of interest because it is mainly the females that get this sort of criticism while the men walk tall with their whatever body size. Relating to this is the assertion that 'the effort to reduce the body stands for women's effort to reduce the self; it is a form of self-oppression' (Counihan, 2018, p. 195). Never just the oppressive circumstances we want to leave behind, but "that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us," is the real goal of revolutionary change (Lorde, 2023, p. 123).

The portrayals made by *Mark Angel Comedy Series* tend to define 'fat' people as less humans who should dedicate all their energies and time to achieving a body size worth the social trophy. Fatness, in many cases, has been used synonymously with some slew terms; women are socialised to believe that their problems come from being fat. Being thin then becomes a panacea, a totally absorbing quest, a 'pathetically reductionist channel for attaining control in a world where women suffer institutionalized powerlessness' (Counihan, 2018, p. 84). In this case, the media contribute by promoting a thin ideal that is almost impossible to attain and, where such is attained, could result in the literal physical weakness of undernourishment for most women. This ideal, can increase the distance between a woman and herself, exacerbating her conflicts and making it harder for her to be at one with herself. And as noted by Ekpe & Thompson (2020), 'arts do not develop in a vacuum, it is given impetus, shape, and direction by social, political and economic forces in a particular society' (p. 98). It, therefore, implies that digital performances such as *Mark Angel Comedy* which sells this sort of idea, seems to suggest that the world is not built for persons who take up more space than what is socially allocated to the female body. Body size should not be a barrier to happiness. Life should not be lived only in a thin body, neither should body size negate the worth of an individual.

Conclusion

A significant part of artist marketing and promotion involves digital performances. They generate a lot of attention and penetrate different angles of the online media space. The objectification of females in Nigeria is borne out of the desire of a patriarchal society to subjugate and dominate. The most prevalent form of female objectification in the Nigerian context has been in advertisements and recent studies seem to show that focus is heightened in digital performances where the female body is defined as an object in thousands of different ways and her personhood determined by her bodily ornaments and societal construct of subjugation. In a bid to sell an idea, product, generate virtual followers and earn money from social platform operators, the woman's body is

dismembered, fragmented and objectified. The diversified forms of female objectification in the performances range from women's sexual roles, women's 'supposed' materialistic nature, 'acceptable' body size for a woman, the woman as a 'commodity', the dependent nature of women and so on. These portrayals, consciously and unconsciously create a definition assumed for the woman and this imposed definition is more of a reflection of what the objectified woman is expected to be. The performances analysed in this paper expose the struggles women often face in a society that institutionalizes competition in every aspect of women's life which at the same time denies women the ability to compete and still be feminine. Analytically, *Battabox* and *Mark Angel* performances illustrate the different forms of objectification identified by Nussbaum and Langton. The elements of instrumentality, denial of autonomy and subjectivity plus violability, ownership and fungibility appear more overt in *Battabox* than in *Mark Angel.* The rhetoric in *Mark Angel* appears more subdued in the inertness and ownership form but explicit in reduction to body and denial of subjectivity. Comparatively, the performances of *Battabox* are replete with the supposed man-woman superior-inferior ideologies, which are anchored on pedagogies of the oppressed, much more so, than what is contained in the performances of *Mark Angel.* Overall, all the performances give express definition to the different forms of objectification categorized by Nussbaum and Langton. The female can, through their bodies live out their own oppression and objectification, which are institutionalised by a patriarchal, capitalist culture that profits from women's subordination. Women can demonstrate their strength, uniqueness, and inventiveness through their bodies. They can use the transitional and creative nature of reproduction to transform the bodies and their selves. But to achieve the aforementioned, women must continue to critique and challenge practices and ideologies that demean them and rob them of agency. The diversity of the female form and beauty of all women must be appreciated. Women should continually be celebrated and the attention focused only on how women look should be challenged. Women should celebrate the power to give birth and link it to respect for the female sexuality.

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