

Information Dissemination Through Body Markings: A Survey of Selected Tribes in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria

Ngozi Blessing Ossai-Ugbah

John Harris Library,
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
Email: ngozychikaogu@yahoo.com

Samuel Adewale Ogunrombi

John Harris Library,
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
Email: sarombi@yahoo.com

Doi:10.5901/jesr.2012.v2n2.251

Abstract: *The study investigated dreams information dissemination through body markings among some South-South tribes in Nigeria: Etsako; Ika; Edo; Ukwuani; Esan and Ijaw. The aim of the research was to explore if body markings are still carried out today by people in South-South region of Nigeria; to find out the purpose(s) of body markings; and to discover the information which these body markings disseminate. To this, all of the respondents amongst all tribal nationalities do agree that body markings carry medical, spiritual, beauty, and identify purposes. This in turn has influenced the type of information they convey. This research is a descriptive survey. The population of this study consisted of 300 persons between ages 20 and above. The research findings showed that all ethnic groups investigated attach and derive certain information from body markings which has significant implication for relationships.*

Keywords: *Information, Body Markings, Body Art, Dissemination, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

Since cultures began to exist and people groups emerged, there have been patterns of beautification which necessitated some form of human body markings. These body markings conveyed information of status, power beauty and a distinct identity which was to make social relationships easier in the environment (Schildkrout, 2000 & 2004; Rainier, 2006; Reischer, and Koo, 2004; Peek, 2004). Body marking is the practice of embellishing the body with piercings, colourations, tribal mark or scarifications (Segen's Medical Dictionary, 2011). Body marking therefore is an art made on the human body which include but is not limited to the face such as teeth filing. This involves but is not limited to colourations, scarification in which raised scars, are made through various means like incision or burning to carve out a particular pattern on the skin. This practice is more common among darker-skinned peoples, where, presumably, tattoos were not sufficiently distinct. The word tattoo though of Polynesian origin was introduced into English from Tahiti as it was first recorded by James Cook's expedition in 1769 (Dolnick, 2011, Rovine and Adams, 2002). Cabrini says:

The origins of tattooing as an art form are to be found in societies all over the world where it was first used for magical purposes. The finality of being tattooed gave it a seriousness and a social importance no longer seen on the globe today. In ancient Egypt, among Native Americans as well as in Africa and in the Pacific Basin tattooing assured control over the supernatural, as well as the forces of nature. Both the form and placement of designs were used to achieve the maximum intended power. The tattooed person's age, marriage status,

prowess as a warrior or membership in a specific group were in this way identifiable in this life. Often, too, the tattoos were intended as a sort of passport in the afterlife. (<http://www.chelsea-art.com/tattoo.htm>)

Schildkrout (2000) says body marking is a way of indicating an individual's status in society, reveal a particular time of life, and celebrate a change in life or just following a fashion. The information these markings convey are used to identify an individual in a unique way or as member of a group. Thus, whether enduring or momentary, these body markings carry vital messages about the festooned person. Schildkrout (2000) says:

Colours, designs, and the use of particular techniques are part of a visual language with specific cultural meanings. To decipher this language, one needs to understand the shared symbols, myths, social values, and individual memories that are drawn on the body. Since body art can draw attention to cultural differences, it is also a means by which people eroticized and sometime ostracized others. But body art in all cultures changes, and it is an ideal canvas for individual creativity and self-reinvention. It can also be a way for people to challenge social values and cultural assumptions about beauty, identity, and the body itself.

Body markings may point toward religious dedication or alliance with a certain god; they may also serve as protection against some evil such as a disease, as identification with a certain group, such as the tribe, or as evidence of personal rank or status within the group (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2007).

Body marking among Africans was considered an identifier with regard to stages of life. It also is an accepted cultural identifier between a person and another, or "the civilised self and the natural self". Vogel (1986, p.25) cited by Coleman (2002) stated: "Scarification and other forms of body decoration were traditionally considered marks of civilisation. They distinguished the civilised, socialised human body from the body in its natural state and from animals." Body markings therefore identify different tribes and ethnic groups, giving them the privilege to be easily identified while provoking close unity among a group of people. These body marks which vary widely among areas and ethnic groups are still practiced throughout West Africa and even in several parts of Nigeria. The marks are made to differentiate between specific ethnic groups, clans and even families so that when they move around it helps to prevent those of the same clan or those of opposing tribes inter-marrying.

2. Background of Study

Nigeria is a home of informative diversities and this is voiced by the differences in their beauty – aids, notwithstanding their strong informative fusion. Among the people of Borno State for example, Kanuris adopt a special way of beautifying their bodies by hair treatment, skin cleansing and body making-up. They adopt a type of body embellishment referred to as henna art. This elaborate body art serves the purposes of beauty; denote one's age, title, amicable status, and membership of any revered organisation in the society.

Body markings sometimes called "body art" are generally used by Africans of all gender for several reasons. Some of these are: for festivals, feast celebrations, daily attire, beauty and strength. However, each body marking vary from region to region. The Maasai people of East Africa's body markings are primarily to denote the celebration of festival of the Moran or depict who is a warrior. The Turkana people of Kenya use it to show the status of men and women. Body markings among some tribes are to show stages of development or rites of passage such like the Ga'anda and Kao people of Nigeria, body marking especially for girls show each important stage of their development into womanhood. (What can be used as African Body Art? www.all-about-african-art.com).

Body decoration is a culture that is universally practiced among the peoples of various ethnic groups of Nigeria to enhance beauty and for aesthetic, spiritual, religious or ceremonial purposes. It serves as a sort of expression of beauty and indication of one's age, title, social status, and membership of any revered group in

the society (Oziogu, 2011). Facial markings for instance were for identification and protection purpose especially during the time of slave trade. Facial marking is common among the Yorubas, Gobirs and the Kanuris as well as other tribes. It is more pronounced among the Yorubas. This is because they have different names for different types of facial marks according to the number and the length or breadth of lines and their arrangement (Oziogu, 2011 and Bodunde, 2011).

Evidence from prehistoric burials, rock carvings, and paintings indicates that body-marking existed in ancient times; ethnographic studies show that it is still practiced today. Meek, (1931) mentioned the Kagoro where a girl getting ready for marriage receives body marks to show eligibility for marriage. These body markings say Tremearne, (1912) too among the Kagoro cut across superstitions and magic. The art of body marking among the Nuba is also documented to depict rites of passage and decoration (Singh et al, 1997; Brian, 1979; Faris, 1972; Riefenstahl, 1979 & 1995; Rodger, 1999; van Gerven, et al, 1973). Among the Tiv, body markings indicate a ritual between two persons, a form of dress, male identity, religious significance, beautification and fertility for women (Abraham, 1933; Akiga, 2003; Bohannan, 1988 and 1969; Brain, 1979; Eicher, et al, 2000; Lincon, 1975, Burton, 2001). The Yoruba and Luba groups use body markings to test courage; for the aesthetic or to empower the body; to emphasize the women's beauty in their culture (MacGaffey, 2000; Drewal, 1988 and 1997; Drewal and Mason, 1997; Adepegba, 1986; Vlahos, 1979). Among the Fulani and Ekoi body marks are for ornamentation and symbol of status (Ebin, 1979; Fisher, 1984, Groning, 1998). Among the Efiks, body marks are primarily for ornamentation done with the aid of colours especially for women (Rosevear, 1990). In the Eastern part of Nigeria among the Igbo people body marks are to indicate rites of passage while "uli" is used mostly by women for ornamentation (Iwuagwu, 1998,; Ukwu, 2002). It is suggestive that body markings therefore disseminate information.

3. Objective

The objective of this research is set forth in the following:

1. To find out if body markings are still carried out today by tribes in Nigeria;
2. To find out the purpose(s) of body markings;
3. To discover the information which body markings disseminate.

4. Justification of study

This is a study that has continued to capture attention in Nigeria with regard to body markings information dissemination. Since a Librarian is an information broker and would delve into any area of information gathering, storing and management, it is of significance to explore areas of people's lives which has to do with information management of which body markings appear to be one. Attempt is being made in this study to draw information that body markings convey whether positively or negatively within a given setting. In the background to this study evidence revealed that body markings cut across several cultures, so, it will not be out of place for a librarian to delve into body markings research for information purposes.

Furthermore, with different meanings and symbols attached to body markings across tribes, cultures and people groups, it behooves a librarian to investigate all forms of information structure into which body marking fall. This area of research has been given extensive coverage in some other countries and people groups of Nigeria, but not much has been done among South-South tribes of Nigeria. This study is therefore an attempt to investigate the information body markings contain among some ethnic groups in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria.

5. Methodology

The research method is a descriptive survey designed to find out information disseminated through body

markings. The survey was also designed to find out the personal and the cultural patterns employed in body markings. The research instruments used for data gathering was both the questionnaire and interview method. A total of 360 questionnaires were sent out (i.e. 60 to each tribal group). Some respondents 70 years and above were interviewed as most were not literate in English language.

Table 1 –Ethnic and Age Distribution of Respondents

Tribe or Dialect Spoken	Population	Age			
		20-39	40-59	60 – 69	70 & Above
Etsako	50	14	20	10	6
Ijaw	50	10	25	10	5
Edo	50	15	13	17	15
Ukwuani	50	2	4	18	26
Ika	50	12	16	12	10
Esan	50	10	12	11	17
Total	300				

The population of this study consisted of persons between ages 20 and above. The sample population shows the ethnic distribution to consist of the same number of respondents (50 each). However, the number of respondents in the age distribution varied with Ukwuani having more of respondents in 70 years and above followed by Edo-Benin (15) and Esan (17) respectively. The population was made up of 300 persons.

A. Investigating personal body markings

Table 2. Personal body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer		
		Yes	No	Total
Do you carry any mark on your body?	Etsako	15	35	50
	Ijaw	12	38	50
	Edo	19	21	50
	Itskeri	28	22	50
	Ukwuani	14	34	50
	Ika	18	32	50

In table 2 more of the respondents do not carry any form of body marks. The reason for this may be due to their current locations in urban centers like Benin, Port Harcourt, Warri, Auchi, Agbor, and Obiaruku. So, being in urban centers they became more exposed to modern social and medical amenities.

Table 3-Tribal body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer		
		Yes	No	Total
Do you carry any tribal mark on your body?	Etsako		50	50

	Ijaw		50	50
	Edo			
	Itsekiri	35	15	50
	Ukwuani		50	50
	Ika		50	50

Tribal marks act as identifiers for any people group or culture. This is shown with the Itsekiri as 35 respondents carry tribal marks. Tribal markings are uncommon among the Ijaws, Ukwuani, Etsako and Ika people. These tribes do not carry any peculiar and distinct tribal markings to single out their tribes people like the Hausa, Yoruba and Ibirra tribes amongst others.

B. Investigating the purpose(s) of body markings.

Table 4-Tribal body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer		
		Yes	No	Total
Does your tribe carry out any form of body markings?	Etsako	44	6	50
	Ijaw	36	14	50
	Edo	46	4	50
	Itsekiri	35	15	50
	Ukwuani	40	10	50
	Ika	31	19	50

In all the tribes and cultures investigated, certain forms of body markings are made for certain reasons. So while these marks cannot be said to have tribal identities or classification they do exist depending on the reasons for which the marks were made.

Table 5 - Peculiar body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer		
		Yes	No	I don't know
Does your tribe have peculiar body/tribal marks?	Etsako	13	23	14
	Ijaw	12	38	10
	Edo	42	8	50
	Itsekiri	35	10	5
	Ukwuani	6	39	5
	Ika	1	43	6

In the above table Itsekiri (35) respondents noted that they have peculiar body/tribal marks. It is usually made as a single stroke straight down on either cheek of the face. This is also true with the Edo. Many Edos, the Ora extraction inclusive, carry similar mark. Some of the marks could also be double and short horizontal blade strokes on both cheeks, especially for the ladies. Tribal marks in Ora, Owan LGA, Edo state, date back into the very distant and remote past. They stood the natives out for easy identification in times of peace and prosperity, war and adversity. For the latter, it facilitated possible assistance/rescue as the urgency arose.

Nevertheless, tribal marks/incisions in Ora are out-fashioned these days. Among the Ukwuani, Ika, Ijaw and Esan there does not exist distinct tribal marks. However, among the Etsako the act of teeth filing is prominent. This is because the terminology "Etsako" according to Onimawho (2011) refers to "those who file their teeth." While this does not in any way point to a tribal marking, it is to signify personality and status in society. Among the Ijaws, there is a variation in clan culture. While the Kalabari and Nembe of Rivers do not carry tribal marks, the Ijaws of Edo State (Ukusan called Ekewan) have tribal marks to identify their clan members. These are three straight strokes made on the cheek of the bearer. In the Kalabari clan however, some form of peculiar body marks were given by the people to help identify a slave both to the owners and the people in the environment.

Table 6 - Reasons for body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer				
		Medical	Identity	Beauty	Spiritual	All
What are the reasons people in your tribe carry any form of body markings?	Etsako	5	15	10	10	15
	Ijaw	10	5	11	5	19
	Edo-Benin	10	3	2	9	27
	Itsekiri	8	14	6	10	12
	Ukwuani	8	2	10	10	20
	Ika	10	2	10	10	18

In the above table, greater number of respondents noted that body marks were given for: medical, identity, beautification and spiritual purposes. Thus, the respondents who saw all options (111 or 37%) as reason are more compared to the individual options. However more respondents in Edo-Benin (27) indicated use of body markings more in all categories. While only the Itsekiri (14) indicated body markings are used more for identity and in this case to mark them out as a tribe and unit from others.

C. Investigating the information which body markings disseminate.

Table 7 - Periods for body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer				
		Sickness	Birth/Death	Festivals	Rite of passage	All
When are these body markings made by people in your culture?	Etsako	5	5	10	10	15
	Ijaw	10	5	11	5	19
	Edo-Benin	10	3	2	9	27
	Itsekiri	12	8	8	8	14
	Ukwuani	8	2	10	10	20
	Ika	10	2	10	10	18

Table 6 and table 7 share similarity in data distribution. This is because the periods that dictate when body marks are made also determine the reason for the body marks. As noted earlier in Tables 5 and 6 body marks were given depending on the reason for the marks. These reasons were also dictated by the circumstance of the individual in particular and culture in general. Among the Kalabari (Ijaw) for instance, women make more body marks but these were temporal. This was because the body marks were more of

colorations for beauty during the owu-arusun festival. The marks were given also to Iria dancers and other participants during the festival.

Table 8-Information conveyed by body marks

Question	Tribe	Answer				
		Born to die	Status	Protection	Fashion	All
Which information do these body markings convey in your tribe/culture?	Etsako	3	23	4	6	10
	Ijaw	5	5	10	3	27
	Edo –Benin	10	13	15	2	10
	Itsekiri	8	21	11	5	5
	Ukwuani	12	1	17	15	5
	Ika	16	2	14	15	3

As noted earlier, while among the Etsako teeth filing cannot be said to portend tribal mark, it helps to identify the married from the unmarried to check adultery and promiscuity (Onimawho, 2011). It is no surprise therefore that Etsakos (23 respondents) use marks more for identity of status. Among the Unemhe of Udochi in Etsako, body markings are principally for three reasons: spiritual (protection), medical treatment and identify jenu (born to die child). This pattern of identifying the born to die called ogbanje among the Ika and Ukwuani (Delta State) and menji ogbo tubo among Kalabari and uguwenitobor among the Ukusan (all of Ijaw stock) in Rivers and Edo States respectively. The marks made by the Ijaw (Ukusan) for the born-to-die child are three straight marks by the side of the eyes to identify the child as such.

6. Findings

- 1.Body marks convey identity, fashion, status and spiritual information
- 2.Tribal body marks don't exist among certain tribes in the south-south of Nigeria
- 3.Body marks exist more because of beautification, medical reasons and to identify the born-to-die child across all the tribes.
- 4.Body marks are still made by all the tribes but these are not peculiar tribal marks.

7. Conclusion

In all ethnic groups that fell into the research, the individual receives information about body marks based on the periods and reasons they were made. Therefore, body mark information is dependant sometimes on what the individual and culture projects. These marks help extremely in social relationships. While some of the body marks are temporal like colourations made during festivals, others like stratification and scarification of the born-to-die child are permanent. In all, body marks are varied and are veritable parts of each society.

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APPENDIX

Sample of questions used for questionnaire and interview of respondents

A. Personal Information

1. Tribe: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Sex: _____

B. Information on Body Markings

1. Do you carry any mark on your body?

Yes _____ No _____

2. Do you carry any tribal marks on your body?

Yes _____ No _____

3. Does your tribe carry out any form of body markings?

Yes _____ No _____

4. Does your tribe have peculiar body/tribal marks?

Yes _____ No _____ I don't know _____

5. What are the reasons people in your tribe carry any form of body markings?

A. Medical _____ B. Identity _____ C. Beauty _____ D. Spiritual _____ E. All _____

6. When are these body markings made by people in your culture?

A. When a person is sick _____ B. At birth/death _____ C. During festivals _____ D. Rite of passage _____ E. All _____

7. Which information do these body markings convey in your tribe/culture?

A. Child who always die to return _____ B. Status in society _____ C. Protection _____

D. Fashion _____ E. All _____

