

CONNOTATION OF SEX, VIOLENCE, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL THEMES IN MUSIC VIDEOS OF BILLBOARD'S TOP HIP-HOP SONGS

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Abstract: Sex, violence, drugs and alcohol are among the popular antisocial themes portrayed in hip-hop music and music videos. They are antisocial given that they are portrayed in manners that go against the Nigerian society's moral virtues. These themes are portrayed through subliminal signs and sign systems thereby prompting the need for their investigation. This study aims at investigating the connotative signs and sign systems used in portraying themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in globally popular hip-hop music videos. The hip-hop songs used in this study were collected from Billboard Year-End Charts of 2017 and 2018 and their respective music videos pulled from YouTube. Focus group discussion was adopted in carrying out this study. There were two sessions with 7 participants each. Participants included music broadcast journalists, heavy music video consumers, social media experts, hip-hop artistes and music video producers. Results revealed that certain foods, objects, colours, gestures and animals are some sign systems that portray sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in hip-hop music videos. It was therefore recommended that parents and guardians be educated to regulate the consumption of these music videos by their children/wards who are under 18 years of age.

Keywords: music videos, hip-hop, themes, antisocial, sign, sign system, connotation

Introduction

Imagine a world where communication is non-existent. This means that there will be no talking, staring, feeling or making any form of sound, no expressions whatsoever or perception of meaning. It is quite unimaginable. No man is an island therefore the world cannot and will not survive without communication. This is because communication deals with sending and receiving, transmitting and sharing information and common understanding from one person to another (Lunenburg, 2010). This common understanding within oneself and between people is what brings development to people and indeed the world. An idea originates from a thought within oneself, and then is sent to another and can end up being shared among millions of people around the world. This is due to the open-ended nature of communication. Its multifacetedness makes for countless ways in which communication could take place. Music and music video are one of such ways. Tagg (2015) categorizes music into three main genres: folk, art and popular music. Folk music is the traditional music that is sung in localities and passed on from generation to generation. Art music is the classic music known today which was performed in theatres to elitist audiences (Tagg, 2012). Meanwhile, popular music deals with the recorded music for the masses, the one relayed on different media platforms such as radio, television, CDs, DVDs and online. Hip-hop music being one of the most popular genres of music (Feeney, 2015) is a sub-genre of popular music (Timothy, 2014).

As stated earlier, music could be relayed on different mass media forms. One of such is audio-visual form known as the music video. According to McQuivey (n.d.) in Mowat (2017) if a picture is worth a thousand words then a video is worth 1.8 million words. This is because a video plugs into different senses. It can be seen, heard, felt, demonstrated, informing, evaluating and provides a call to action (Origins of Motion, n.d.). Regarding the music video, artistes and characters could be seen, heard, felt and demonstrating to their consumers. This means that they employ different nonverbal cues to further drive home their message. These cues could be portrayed both denotatively and connotatively. Denotation being the literal representation whereas connotation, taking a more subliminal nature (Chandler, 2008).

Since the emergence of MTV in the early 80s, music video production became more sophisticated. They are no longer limited to visually capturing the artistes and their emotions as they sang or tried to represent the message of the song in front of a video camera. Instead, they capture different stories within the story, different ideologies within the main ideology and different interests within the main interest. Music videos are seen on their own as independent art just as it is with movies, television and theatre plays. Moreover, the explosion of the new media in recent times has given even more prominence to music videos as artistes are now known for the number of views or streams of their songs and music videos on the internet. Music videos are the most-watched videos on popular video sharing platform, YouTube (Tankovska, 2021).

Hip-hop music and music videos are notorious for portraying themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in antisocial manners, some of which are glamorized nudity, drugs and alcohol abuse as well as graphic violence (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2008). These themes are also portrayed denotatively and connotatively. Dearn (2013) observed that a majority of hip-hop consumers and fan base are teenagers and young adults. In the age of the internet, many of these young ones have smart phones and no longer use the traditional mass media such as television to access their favourite music videos, they just go straight to YouTube. Music videos relayed on television are transient and censored for appropriate viewing however music videos on YouTube are uncensored and static. This means they are readily available to be watched and re-watched for as many times possible.

This study is both practically and theoretically significant. It examines the latest trends of connotation that express themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in popular hip-hop music videos released between 2017 and 2018. Parents, guardians, teachers, NGOs, the media, scholars and consumers of hip-hop music videos are all beneficiaries of this study. Theoretically, this study serves as a basis for many studies regarding connotation in music media which is still a widely untapped area of research in communication. Practically, this study's findings will guide parents, guardians, teachers and NGOs among others to better educate teenagers and young adults of the dangers of over-exposure to uncensored hip-hop music videos. This study also serves as content and literature to the media regarding topics of discourse.

Statement of the problem

Undoubtedly, hip-hop music videos are heavy laden with themes such as sex, violence, drugs and alcohol all portrayed in antisocial ways. These themes are also relayed through dynamic subliminal signs and sign systems bound by sub-cultural ties. Therefore, there was the need to investigate these connotative elements in popular hip-hop music videos. As with communication, hip-hop music videos employ different non-verbal cues that could seem harmless to people who are not part of the sub-culture whereas hold harmful meanings that are passed across to consumers within the sub-culture. Given that these music videos are mostly consumed by young people in many parts of the world, including Nigeria and are easily accessible in their uncensored forms it became necessary to examine the different elements of connotation that express themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in globally popular hip-hop music videos. The concern is that young consumers who regularly watch these music videos could be negatively influenced by the messages portrayed through these connotative sign systems.

Aim and objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the connotative signs and sign system used in expressing themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol portrayed in antisocial ways in globally popular hip-hop music videos. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. investigate the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of sex in globally popular hip-hop music videos.
2. find out the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of violence in globally popular hip-hop music videos.
3. examine the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of drugs in globally popular hip-hop music videos.
4. investigate the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of alcohol in globally popular hip-hop music videos.

Literature review

Multimodality theory

The theory found most relevant to this study is the multimodality theory. Considered a fairly new theory, multimodality also known as multimodal studies (Lyons, 2016), multimodal discourse (Yang, 2016) or Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) by O'Halloran and Smith (2011), deals with studying how different modes come together in meaning-making. According to Bernsen (2007) the history of multimodal studies could be traced to publications from Bolt (1980). Bolt used the term modality in one of his earliest papers in 1980 that examined the advantages of using combined speech and deictic gesture. Adami (2015) posits that there are two perspectives of multimodality - a phenomenon of human communication as well as a diversified and growing field of research. As a phenomenon of human communication, he described multimodality as a field of study that examines how different semiotic resources or modes in texts as well as communicative events combine to make meaning. It tries to explain how modes such as a still and moving image, speech, writing, layout, gesture, and/or proxemics among others all combine in passing a message to the receiver. Meanwhile as a field of research, Adami (2015) juxtaposes multimodality with the development theories, analytical tools and descriptions used in the study of representation and communication, in which modes are seen as the organizing principle. Moreover, O'Halloran (n.d.) conceived multimodality from the perspective of social semiotics which could be linked with Adami's (2015) human communication perspective. O'Halloran (n.d.) sees multimodality as the field that comprise the study of all semiotic resources, thereby describing multimodal as the multiple modes (e.g. spoken, written, printed and digital media, embodied action, and 3-D material objects and sites) by which communication takes place. Van Leeuwen (2005) in Liu (2013) therefore defined multimodality as the combination of different semiotic elements in a communicative experience. Snyder (2010) explains that researchers' goal in this area of study was to identify the influence modes have in the process of making meaning within a given context. They achieved this by focusing on the co-occurrences and interaction between different semiotic systems. In other word, they tried to identify all the different elements that possess the power to influence meaning within a given context. It means that there are different modes, elements or semiotic systems which must be considered as influencers of meaning within a given context.

Jewitt (2009) in Yang (2016) posits that approaches in multimodal studies attempts to understand communication and representation beyond language instead in an all-encompassing manner involving the full range of communicational forms people use such as image, gesture, gaze and posture among others, and the relationships between them. This means that multimodality involves studying all the different modes in which is used for meaning making as well as the relationships between them. Such modal resources include; aspects of speech such as intonation and other vocal characteristics, the semiotic action of other bodily resources such as gesture (face, hand and body movements), proxemics, as well as products of human technology such as carving, painting, writing, architecture, image and sound recording, and in more contemporary times, interactive computing resources like digital media hardware and software (O'Halloran and Smith, 2010). Studies from Jewitt (2009) and O'Halloran (2011) show that all communication is multimodal and goes beyond just language instead all modes of communication occur concurrently and is shaped by culture. Adami (2015) in explaining this stated that:

Modes such as gesture, sound, image, colour, or layout, for example, are conceived as sets of organized resources that societies have developed – each to a greater or lesser level of articulation in different social groups – to make meaning and to express and shape values, ideologies, and power relations. When in combination with speech and/or writing, they are not a mere accompaniment of, or support to verbal language, as labels such as para-/extra-linguistic or non-verbal might suggest; rather, each concur with a specific functional load to the meaning made by the overall text – and as such they deserve attention (p. 3).

This theory adequately encapsulates the processes involved in making meaning from music and music videos. It also explains how ideologies and trends are communicated to the audience. For example, in a music video, elements such as clothing, dance moves, props, location, gestures and aesthetics could all be modes which combine to project a particular message to the viewers. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) in McKerrell and Way (2017) noted that messages, trends, ideologies, etc., could be explicitly and implicitly

stated. In agreement, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) opined that visual communication is always coded. This means that there are always elements that hold embedded and contextual meanings. This is also applicable to music videos that also involve different modalities, which are explicitly and implicitly stated, and which all re-enforce meaning.

Connotation

The concept of connotation is grounded in semiotics – the study of signs. Danesi (2004) sees a sign as anything—a colour, a gesture, a wink, an object, a mathematical equation, etc.—that stands for something other than itself. Chandler (2017) sees the field of semiotics having two founding fathers: Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914). Although their conceptualization of a sign was from different perspectives, their studies served as a basis for different semiotic studies in the 20th century. Noth (1990) outlined two main branches, linguistic belonging to Saussure’s study and philosophical grounded in Peirce’s school of thought. Budrevičius (2012) observed that the scope of Saussure’s semiology was limited to language and its social environment whereas Peirce’s view of semiotics was more of a bird’s eye point of view where a sign goes beyond just language. Curtin (2006) and Danesi (2010) both acknowledge Roland Barthes (1915-1980) as the first to apply ideas of semiotics directly into media and culture in his now-classic book *Mythologies*. He was the pioneer to study semiotics, as it developed from linguistics to visual images. Barthes (1983) observed a linguistic element in written words and pictures that was entirely ignored. He believed that this ignored element played a significant part of the signification system called connotation. Curtin (2006) notes that Barthes called the immediate impact of the sign, denoted meaning (or first-order or basic meaning) and the cultural meaning we attach to it the connoted meaning (or second-order meaning).

Condon, Perry and O’Keefe (2004) define connotation as the contextual meaning of a sign which varies from person to person and across culture. Chandler (2008) sees connotation or connotative meaning as the socio-cultural and personal associations (ideological, emotional etc.) of the sign. In other words, with connotation the culture and demography of the receiver plays a vital part of the meaning. This is quite evident in youth slang usage. An example is the use of the word ‘savage’. Denotatively it is seen in a somewhat negative light (animalistic, violent, etc.) however, it is used positively to connote something or someone being ‘cool’ which in itself is a connotation denoted to refer to temperature.

It cannot be denied that music and music videos employ a host of different signs of both denotative and connotative natures. These different signs, whether collectively or individually provoke the listener or viewer’s emotions. Tagg (2010) posits that embedded in culture, music is the most ubiquitous of symbolic systems. In agreement, Mazzola (1997) states that music is one of the most developed non-linguistic systems of signs. It is no wonder why different modes such as clothing and dance moves, among others are heavily employed in hip-hop music videos. This study exposes the signs that may seem harmless and social based on their denotative meaning but could be harmful and antisocial due to their connotative meaning.

Empirical Review

In their study, *A Semiotic Analysis on LAY’s and EXO’s Selected Music Videos*, Sagimi and Sari (2019) sought to find out denotation, connotation and myth in the selected music videos. They conducted a qualitative analysis of the “Goodbye Christmas” by Lay and “Universe” by EXO music videos using Roland Barthes’ theory. Results revealed that there was connotation employed in both music videos and that the viewers will understand the messages of the songs if they pay attention to the signs presented on both music videos. Connotative signs realized in both music videos include properties, gestures, expressions and activities which all held connotative meanings.

In another study by Oktavyanthi and Kholiq (2018), they sought to investigate connotation and denotation in Taylor Swift’s *Blank Space* music video. Using the descriptive technique of qualitative method of analysis, they looked for connotation in elements such as visual signs and song lyrics. Among results realized, it was revealed that colour, animals, trees and infrastructure were all used connotatively in the music video. Colour was used to signify the emotion and attitude of the artiste. Yellow connoted a fun and carefree attitude, black was used to connote sadness and depression whereas blue was used to connote strength and confidence. Also, the horse was used to connote freedom.

These studies show that connotation is indeed employed in music videos to pass a message across to the viewers. However, due to their limited scope, results realized from both studies cannot be generalized. They are also not of the hip-hop music genre which is more graphic and would undoubtedly employ more

connotative signs. This study analyses connotation on a larger and more structured scale. This is because this study analyses different connotative signs employed in expressing themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in hip-hop music videos.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey in carry out its objectives. The survey was qualitative.



Specifically, the Focus Group Discussion was used in analyzing connotation of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in popular hip-hop music videos. The survey research design was chosen because according to Wimmer and Dominck (2011), it is a widely accepted approach to describing and recording current situations. There were two sessions of 7 participants each. One was conducted via face-to-face meeting whereas the other was conducted online via group chat on

WhatsApp. As recommended by Wimmer and Dominick (2011), online focus groups are advantageous especially regarding the recruitment of the most knowledgeable participants with a wealth of experience across different geographical regions. This eliminated regional bias and influence of group dynamics. Participants consisted of 6 music broadcast journalists, 2 hip-hop artistes, 2 music video directors, 2 social media experts and 2 heavy hip-hop music video consumers/enthusiasts. The focus group discussion guide served as the instrument for data collection. Discussion in FGD Session 1 and 2 was achieved by categorizing the signs into the four themes. This means that the discussion guide consisted of four main themes - sex, violence, drugs and alcohol categorized into four sections – 1, 2, 3, 4. Questions were based on naming and analyzing all possible signs and sign systems that are popularly known in the music video sphere to connote the themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol. The guide equally stipulated the stating and analyzing of the meanings the signs held. The discussion guide also contained operationalized definitions of all variables in order for participants to have adequate understanding of the concepts being discussed. Mock interviews were conducted in situations where the researcher found herself in the midst of music experts. Consequently, the guide was adjusted and readjusted to adequately capture the data.

Results

The findings of this study were discussed based on each objective.

Objective 1: Investigate the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of sex in globally popular hip-hop music videos.

As earlier stated, two focus group discussion sessions were used in tackling the objectives of this study. The responses from the discussions in the two sessions made clear that there were 6 main sign systems used in connoting sex in hip-hop music videos – Foods, Animals, Colours, Clothing, Objects and visual effects. This study's focus is on food and animals, the other connotative sign systems expressing sex will be discussed in subsequent publications.

Starting with foods; it was unanimously chorused in both sessions that creameries such as ice cream and whipped cream represent semen and vaginal fluids. In other words, the licking or eating of ice cream or whipped cream connotes oral sex. Examples can be seen in music videos such as 6ix9ine's Fefe featuring Nicki Minaj (Figure 1) and Cardi B's I like it. Both music videos showed the artiste(s) eating ice cream from a cone. In the Fefe music video, both artists can be seen eating the same ice cream from one cone. When asked the specific meaning of this, a participant from the first group further analyzed the scene stating thus: "this scene means you do me and I do you". 'Do' in this sense refers to giving oral sex. When asked about the scene in the second session, a participant stated that the cream represented male orgasm and ejaculation in which the product expelled is licked off by the female. Another example of creameries in hip-hop music video is display of whipped cream seen in Tyga's Taste featuring Offset (Figure 2). All participants agreed that it also represents semen however this time around ejaculated into the mouth of the

female. In other words, the general connotation of creameries (ice cream, whipped cream, cake icing) in hip-hop music videos is oral sex and sexual bodily fluids.

Figure 1: Artistes sharing an ice cream in Fefe MV by 6ix9ine ft. Nicki Minaj (Tekashi 6ix9ine, 2018)
Connotation: Mutual oral sex.

Figure 2: whipped cream poured into the mouth of a female in Taste MV by Tyga ft. Offset (Tyga, 2017)
Connotation: Swallowing ejaculate

Other foods noted to connote sex in hip-hop music videos include cake, sausages, cucumber, banana, berries/cherries, peach, watermelon and apple among others.

Regarding animals that connote sex in hip-hop music videos, it was revealed during the discussion in both sessions that dogs, horses and cats were some of the animals popularly used in connoting sex. It was revealed that smaller sized dogs were used to reference females in general, specifically meaning 'bitch' which is a word used to refer to females in hip-hop culture. Meanwhile, the bigger dogs represented the state of being horny and longing for sex with the females or longing for the body of the female. Two music videos which were cited with examples of these two different perspectives are the Fefe and Taste music videos by 6ix9ine and Tyga respectively. In the Fefe music video (Fig. 3), there was a small-sized dog being pet by 6ix9ine himself whereas, in the Taste music video (fig. 4), a bigger sized dog can be seen panting towards the half-nude female characters.

Regarding the horse or animals that are ridden, it was a unanimous revelation that they represent the act of sex where the 'female rides the male like a horse' as one participant mentioned. Therefore, the horse represents the male during sex. Another participant was quick to also point out that it also means that the female riding the horse is good at sex. The music videos of DJ Khaled, I'm the One music video (Fig. 4) and Cardi B's Bodak Yellow were cited to reinforce this notion. In the former, a half-clad female was riding a horse while Cardi B herself rode a camel in the latter music video.



Figure 3: Artiste about to kiss a dog in Fefe MV by 6ix9ine ft. Nicki Minaj (Tekashi 6ix9ine, 2018)
Connotation: female conquest.

Figure 4: character riding a horse in I'm the One MV by DJ Khaled (DJ Khaled, 2017)
Connotation: sexual prowess

Objective 2: Find out the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of violence in globally popular hip-hop music videos.

It was revealed that violence has five main sign systems of connotation – clothing, colours, objects and certain actions as well as hand gestures. This study's focus is on clothing and colours, others will be tackled in subsequent publications. Regarding clothing, bandanas and ski masks were the main clothing that was chorused across both FGD sessions. The bandanas connote that the wearer is a member of a violent gang and colour comes to play here as it was stated that the main hip-hop gang colours are blue and red. Therefore, where a character in the music video is seen with a red bandana, it means he is a member of the 'bloods' whereas wearing a blue one stands for 'crips' gangs respectively. There were music videos in this study that heavily featured the red bandanas including, 6ix9ine's Gummo (Fig. 5) and Black Beatle by Rae Stremmur. Participants argued about the colour black, some stated it connoted gangsterism while others said it was more of resistance to the norm, the government, oppression, etc. However, it was agreed that this resistance usually culminated into violence such as riots. Meanwhile, the ski mask was said to specifically connote criminality as it is mostly worn to commit crimes such as robbery and murder. An example of this can be seen in the Tunnel Vision music video by Kodak Black (Fig. 6).



Figure 5: colour red and hand signs on display in Gummo MV by 6ix9ine (Fck Them, 2017)
Connotation: member of 'blood' gang



Figure 6: artiste wearing a ski mask in Tunnel Vision MV by Kodak Black (Kodak Black, 2017)
Connotation: a criminal

Objective 3: Examine the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of drugs in globally popular hip-hop music videos.

It was revealed that signs that connote drug presence in hip-hop music videos are just as much as that of sex or could even be more as discussed in the FGD sessions. Their sign systems include objects, gestures, foods, nature, colours and visual effects. For the sake of this study, the focus is on objects and visual effects. The objects discussed included chemistry lab apparatuses, cooking pots and white cups. One participant likened the relay of chemistry lab apparatuses in hip-hop music videos to the popular TV series Breaking Bad where the lead character prepares hard drugs such as crystal meth in his make-shift lab. In other words, lab apparatuses in hip-hop music videos connote the presence of hard drugs such as crystal methamphetamine, heroin and crack cocaine. The music video in which this was quite prominent is the Rich The Kid Plug Walk. All participants agreed to this as one stated that it was “sort of a no brainer”, referring to the make-shift lab in which the main character can be seen cooking up something greenish with lab apparatuses in the Plug Walk music video (Fig. 7). The ‘greenish’ substance was revealed to represent crystal meth. Another music video within the scope of this study that had a lab apparatus in it was the T-Shirt music video by rap group Migos (Fig.8). In it, a character was seen cooking something in a lab apparatus.

Also, a connotative sign in hip-hop music videos and perhaps the most overlooked as stated by a participant in the first group is visual effect. Music videos such as Post Malone’s Rockstar (Fig. 9) and Travis Scott’s Goosebumps (Fig. 10) were cited to contain visual effects that could be said to connote the state of intoxication. The specific visual effect called to question was the blurry/slurry/psychedelic visual effect. One participant stated that the appearance of the effect in relation to the song lyrics further reinforces its connotation. Another participant in the second group argued that the lyrics were not even needed to know that the blurry/slurry/psychedelic visual effect in the Rockstar music video had something to do with intoxication – “it just shows”. It was also pointed out in the first session that the music videos of rap artist Travis Scott mostly seem to have these visual effects that are psychedelic in form and that could connote psychedelic drugs or a mere state of drug intoxication.



Figure 7: Chemical apparatus in Plug Walk MV by Rich The Kid (Rich The Kid, 2018)
Connotation: crystal meth



Figure 8: Chemical jar in cooking pot in T-Shirt MV by Migos (Migos ATL, 2017)
Connotation: crack cocaine



Figure 9: Blurry visual effect in Rockstar MV by Post Malone ft. 21 Savage (Malone, 2017)
Connotation: intoxication



Figure 10: Blurry & psychedelic visual effect in Goosebumps MV by Travis Scott (Scott, 2017)
Connotation: intoxication

Objective 4: Investigate the connotative signs and sign systems that express the theme of alcohol in globally popular hip-hop music videos.

Regarding signs that connote alcohol, only one was echoed across both FGD sessions – red disposable cups. These cups were said to be very popular in music videos. This means that when characters in hip-hop music videos are seen holding or drinking from red disposable cups, as can be seen in the Everyday we lit music video by YFN Lucci (Fig. 11), it means that the content inside is alcoholic. Some participants also argued that the disposable cups do not have to be specifically red in colour as it could be of any colour. One participant stated, “when you see any kind of disposable cup in hip-hop music videos, it’s one of two things – alcohol or codeine”. Another interjected, “not just that, sometimes both: they mix codeine in alcohol”. This was agreed upon by all participants as well as the notion that disposable cups seen in music videos could connote alcohol irrespective of the colour. Another sign was suggested to connote alcohol in hip-hop music videos – water. This was raised by a participant who is a hip-hop artist in the second group. He said that water in the form of a pool or beach or river could be used to connote alcohol. He gave an example of a Kendrick Lamar music video Swimming Pool in which he said water in a pool was used in connoting alcohol. This brought about another reference of water as alcohol in the iSpy music video by Kyle featuring Lil Yatchy (Fig. 12). At the start of the video, Lil Yatchy can be seen saying the following to Kyle, “you see this fine bitches over here, you see this trees mehn..you see this water”. As he said the words ‘bitches’, ‘trees’ and ‘water’, the pictures shown were bikini-clad females, palm tree props and water from the beach respectively. The analysis was that the trees stood for marijuana whereas the bubbling beach water stood for alcohol. In fact, one participant said it looked more like champagne because of its bubbly nature.



Figure 11: red disposable cups on display in Everyday we lit MV by YFN Lucci Featuring PnB Rock (YFN Lucci, 2017)
Connotation: alcohol



Figure 12: bubbly beach water in iSpy MV by Kyle featuring Lil Yatchy (SuperDuperKyle, 2017)
Connotation: alcohol

Discussion

Findings from this study revealed several connotative sign systems regularly employed in expressing themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in hip-hop music videos. Sign systems such as foods, animals, colour, clothing, objects, gestures and visual effects were the main sign systems used connotatively in expressing sex, violence, drugs and/or alcohol in hip-hop music videos. Some of the signs that were revealed that connote sex include ice cream/creameries, cake, sausages, berries/cherries, peach, watermelon, apple, dogs, cats, snakes, horses, among others. Some of the signs revealed that connote violence include bandanas & ski masks, the colours blue & red, among others. Some of the signs revealed

to connote drugs include chemistry lab apparatuses, cooking pots, white disposable cups and blurry picture visual effects. In addition, red disposable cup and water were the signs that were revealed to connote alcohol.

These findings show clear evidence of the theory of multimodality. In agreement with Jewitt (2009) in Yang (2016) all these different modes combined to give the receiver who in this case was the music video consumer, a full communicative experience. Findings from this study show that communication goes beyond just language. O'Halloran's (2011) assumption that all communication is multimodal and restriction to only verbal communication through language is a great mistake, was validated in this study. Unlike studies from Sagimi and Sari (2019) and Oktavyanthi and Kholiq (2018) which had little to no connotative signs expressing antisocial themes in the music videos, this study's findings show the many elements of connotation expressed through antisocial themes of sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in hip-hop music videos. Given that their studies were conducted on music videos of the pop music genre, this study shows how graphic and explicit connotative signs are relayed in hip-hop music videos. Imagine the consequence of parents not taking the signs and sign systems analysed in this study into cognizance therefore letting their minors incessantly consume these music videos without regulation or supervision. This is where a lot of parents and guardians get it wrong. If these minors understand these connotative meanings and continue to consume them regularly, they could be slowly but surely influenced by these themes. Clearly, people outside the youth/hip-pop culture, would be oblivious of the communication taking place through connotation in hip-hop music videos which validates Chandler's (2008) claim that connotation is bound by culture and demography. A closer examination of the signs also validates Barthes (1983) concept of connotation and second-order meanings of signs. Denotatively, these signs mean one thing whereas connotatively they mean totally different things.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sought to analyse the different signs and sign systems used in connoting sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in hip-hop music videos. This was realized as results revealed that certain foods, objects, colours, gestures and animals among others are sign systems that are used connote sex, violence, drugs and alcohol in hip-hop music videos. These findings show how communication goes beyond language and verbal cues. It shows how different non-verbal elements that may seem harmless to the ordinary viewer are employed in their connotative capacity in passing messages and ideologies that could be harmful to their young audience members. It is therefore recommended that parents or guardians should regulate their wards' hip-hop music video watching habits and ensure they are not spending too much time watching hip-hop music videos on YouTube. Some regulation techniques include limiting number of minutes their young ones spend on YouTube and only allowing them watch censored versions of the music videos on television. Educational and awareness programmes should be carried out in PTA meetings of primary and secondary schools so as to educate parents and teachers on the connotative meanings embedded in hip-hop music videos. This will arm them with the information they need to make decisions regarding regulation of the media consumption of their wards. Given that connotative signs are dynamic, it is recommended that this study be carried out from time to time so as to be up to date with new connotative signs and their meanings. It is also recommended that there be some form of censoring from video sharing platforms like YouTube on hip-hop music videos with graphic and explicit content.

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