

An Assessment of Communicativeness of Tattoo among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

Akulughan Aselemi Godsgift

Postgraduate student of the Department of Mass Communication,
Faculty of Social Sciences
Rivers State University Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Dr. Richard N. Amadi

Associate Professor and Communication scholar at the Department of Mass Communication,
Faculty of Social Sciences
Rivers State University Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

Tattoo wearing has become fashionable among the youths in recent times. The communicativeness of tattoos, however, may be perceived in different ways by members of the society notwithstanding the disposition of the tattoo wearer. The objective of the study was to assess the communicativeness of tattoos among students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Survey questionnaire was used to elicit responses from 400 respondents which constituted the sample size of the study. The study adopted the Purposive sampling techniques to identify the institutions selected for the study as well as the departments where the questionnaire were distributed. Findings of the study showed that the message communicated by a tattoo student varies according to personality differences, and they fall within the categories of an expression to promote personality/social status, an expression to show disgruntled personality elements, an expression of love and affection for subject of tattoo; and a promotion of self-ego. Also, the impression that students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State have about a tattooed student varies according to personality differences. Some see a tattooed student as having low moral standards, some see them as bold and creative, some are not open to be friends with tattoo wearers, and some feel that a tattoo student has a good sense of style. The study thereby concludes that personality difference affects the perception of tattoo communication. The message that the tattoo wearer intends to communicate may be interpreted correctly, but there is also a potential for misinterpretation.

Keywords: *Tattoo, communication, trends, tertiary institution, student, perception*

Introduction

Communication plays a vital role in human interaction and appearance. It is said that “you are addressed due to how you dress”. This justifies the notion of tattoo communication. Tattoos are forms of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is usually understood as the process of sending and receiving wordless messages. Such messages can be communicated through gesture, body language or posture, facial expression, object communication such as clothing, hair style or even tattoo. Africans have their cultural forms of tattooing which may be specific to different locales and such tattoos may have been amongst the people for centuries. Many youths in the present day society, especially those found in the cities do not usually fancy the local style of tattooing. Rather, there is a trend of accepting the western lifestyle, which includes their kind tattoos. Maintaining trendiness in fashion is a common practice in higher institutions in Nigeria. Port Harcourt being a

cosmopolitan city in Nigeria is not left out in this trend. Among the trending fashions is tattoo wearing which students use to communicate various messages.

In the times past, it was quite rare to come across someone with a tattoo in Nigeria. Then tattoo was considered by some as defiant, repulsive, satanic or a cultic symbol or mark. This was in fact a typical dominant perception in a typical Nigerian Christian-dominated society like Port Harcourt. Then, most parents would discourage their children from associating with people having tattoos so as to guard their morality and protect them from becoming corrupt by such associations. Presently, having tattoos has gradually infiltrated into the Nigerian society and the tertiary institutions. Students in the tertiary institutions now seen walking around displaying tattoos on their arms, neck, back and leg and some ladies display theirs on the more sensual parts of their body such as the breasts, laps or a little above the pelvis or buttocks. These students communicate by wearing clothes accentuate and display the tattoos. Tattoos have become one of the new trends of non-voice or nonverbal communication for university students in the world of communication today, changing face of fashion (Nwafor, 2016). Some youths emulate entertainers, football players, artistes, sports men and women by taking on familiar tattoos that could be attributed to them. Having tattoos may also be an influence from them. According to Adegoke (2004) tattoo or body piercing could attract negative stereotypes which tend to be especially detrimental in the job market.

Tattoos are made with a meaning attached to it. The wearer of a tattoo whether consciously or unconsciously passes on a message. Mostly, individuals rely on previous experiences to make conclusions about information presentation. Even if an individual does not connote that personal tattoos are communicative, they may be perceived that way and a message is created where none is intended (Doss & Ebesu, 2009). However, whether a tattoo is an image or text, there may be a potential gap between what the tattooed wants to communicate and what potential viewers may feel is being communicated. Leavy (2009) notes this creator-viewer dilemma in the scope of art and specified that the context in which art is viewed can shape meaning. Therefore, it can be deduced that interpretation of a tattoo may be subject to individual perception. Atkinson (2003) opines that, the role of the audience with respect to body modification has been significant, obvious and appealing to the society and with several interpretations. Lei (2009) observes that there may be potential issues of having a tattoo text misinterpreted or prepared incorrectly due to language translation, leading to an error and misunderstanding.

It is expected that a tattooed person will most of the time be confident in his or her looks but the message that is passed on to the different members of the society may not be certain. One thereby wonders about the current students' perception of tattoos in the tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt.

Statement of the Problem

Trendiness in fashion is a common practice in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The fashion of tattoo has however, become a common sight in the tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt. The tattooed may have a message intended to communicate but it may not always be interpreted that way. So, students go about their various school activities displaying tattoos on some body parts like the legs, arms and necks, while the way the tattoos are perceived and interpreted by those who see it may be sometimes negative. Some of these tattoos have been found to irritate the observers due to the prevailing values of the viewer and this could cut the communication link between the tattooed and the viewer (Nwabueze & Nkwamuwaruoma, 2017).

In lieu of this, one wonders the extent of communicativeness of tattoo display in the tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt. Although a number of studies have been carried out on different aspects of verbal communication, not much has been done about the communicativeness of tattoo which is an aspect of non verbal communication. The need to fill this gap in knowledge is what prompted this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the reasons that motivated students of tertiary institutions to wear tattoo
2. determine the messages students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State are communicating with their tattoo display
3. investigate the impressions students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State have about people wearing tattoos on their bodies

Research Questions

1. What are the reasons that motivate students of tertiary institutions to wear tattoo?
2. What messages do students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State communicate with their tattoo display?
3. What impressions do students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State have about people wearing tattoos on their bodies?

Literature Review

The Phenomenon of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication can be a very powerful tool in understanding ourselves and others. Nonverbal communication is everything that communicates a message but does not include words. This definition covers a very wide range of topics: facial expression, hand movements, dress, tattoos, jewelry, physical attractiveness, timing of what happens, position in the interaction, tone of voice, eye movements, the positioning of furniture to create atmosphere, touch, and smell, among others (Nwabueze, 2014). Agbanu (2013) noted that nonverbal communication transcends the activities of the human body and also can be done through the use of inanimate objects. Dickson and Hargie (2003) opine that people use nonverbal communication in order to:

- i. replace verbal communication in situations where it may be impossible or inappropriate to talk
- ii. complement verbal communication, thereby enhancing the overall message
- iii. modify the spoken word
- iv. contradict, either intentionally or unintentionally, what is said
- v. regulate conversation by helping to mark speech turns
- vi. express emotions and interpersonal attitudes
- vii. negotiate relationships in respect of, for instance, dominance, control and liking
- viii. convey personal and social identity through such features as dress and adornments
- ix. contextualize interaction by creating a particular social setting.

Nonverbal behaviour (e.g. a gesture or eye movements) tell us about a person's true state of mind (Navarro, 2008). Nonverbal communication can be ambiguous, we should not presume that we can read other people's minds because of what we think they are saying nonverbally. Such assumptions may be right, but equally they could be wrong. To be more right than wrong, we should not seize upon one gesture or posture in isolation, rather, we need to recognize entire groups or clusters of non verbal behaviour that suggest the same internal state of mind. People should also not presume, as some do, that nonverbal communication is more important than verbal communication. It has become commonplace, for example, to hear that nonverbal communication comprises 70 to 90 per cent of our communication and

that spoken words comprise only a small proportion of the totality of communication. This percentage approach is generally attributed to Mehrabian (1971), who based it on word-ambiguity experiments he conducted using US college students in the late 1960s. From this research he developed the idea that only about 7 percent of meaning in communication could be extracted from the actual words spoken, while tone of voice accounted for about 38 percent and body language about 55 percent of conveyed, meaning. This conjecture, based on experimental data that has often been challenged has wrongly been established in some minds as irrefutable fact relevant to all situations in all cultures. In some situations, of course, nonverbal communication comprises 100 percent of the message being sent for example, touching the hand of a grieving relative, or two lovers gazing into each other's eyes but in others it might comprise only 10 percent or less. The idea of applying percentages is misguided anyway. Some specialists in nonverbal communication use the illustration of a television set with the sound turned down: we can tell what is going on they suggest, merely by observing the nonverbal behaviour. This is a dubious proposition: we might be able to work out, in general terms, what is happening, but we would certainly miss the specifics, and, more often than not, would get things totally wrong. An overemphasis on the previous percentages has been a useful corrective to our historical absorption in the verbal aspects of communication, but it is time the pendulum in the debate was wrenched back again (Baxter, 2009).

In some respects, it is a false dichotomy to separate verbal and nonverbal communication. Truly effective communication occurs when the two aspects are in harmony. When they are not congruent with each other when, for example, a friend says 'I'm OK, really', but her mournful expression, slumped posture and teary eyes indicate otherwise, then we need to pay attention to the imbalance between the two channels of communication. A Federal Bureau of Information (FBI) agent skilled in reading nonverbal communication, was interviewing a suspect in a rape case. The suspect denied involvement, saying that he had turned left and gone home, but his hand gestured to his right (he subsequently confessed). In many circumstances, therefore, it sometimes makes sense to give more credence to the nonverbal message than to the verbal message (Navarro & Karlins, 2008).

Tattoo communication is here categorized under the following approaches:

An expression of personality/social status: Tattoo can be used to show one's personality, social status and choice of life style. Many popular personalities like musicians, footballers, actors have tattoos. In fact once most of them attain the status .of a celebrity they get tattoos that become a feature of their personality. In the society, people also get tattoos to identify with social groups of which they share a sense of belonging. Dress sense is an accompanying feature of the tattoo that helps to define personalities. For instance, tattoos can be common among miscreants, prostitutes, or even people who care less about what others think about them.

An expression of disgruntled personality elements: People may have different reasons for wearing tattoos sometimes it may be a result of one's past experiences which may not be pleasant. People who have a displeased sense of self may wear tattoos to show caution to people that relate with them. Miscreants and criminals may find it as a common practice to wear tattoos. Also, people with a negative past experience may wear tattoos as a reminder.

Expression of love and affection for subject of tattoo: Many people wear tattoos because they fancy the subject of the tattoos being inscribed on their bodies. This becomes a way .of expressing their affection and love for the tattoo subject inscribed on their bodies.

Promotion of self-ego: Some tattoo wearers may do so to communicate an image of which they wish to promote of themselves. It may be good or bad. Societal difference and context may determine what meaning people will make out of the tattoos.

Tattoos in the Tertiary Institutions

Tattoo use in the tertiary institutions the world over has been one of the non-verbal communication techniques employed by students (Mayers & Chiffrieller, 2008). Undergraduates display their tattoos on their arms, neck, back and leg and some ladies display theirs on the more sensual parts of their body such as the breasts, laps or a little above the pelvis or buttocks. These undergraduates communicate by wearing clothes that expose their cleavage, low waist trousers or skirts for the one on their button and tops revealing their back to show the tattoos. Tattoos have been one of the new trends of non-voice or nonverbal communication for university undergraduates in the world of communication today; tattoos have changed the face of fashion by undergraduates (Nwafor, 2016).

Both tattooed and non-tattooed college students agree that, tattooing is main stream and that a variety of people get tattoos (Manuel & Sheehan, 2007). In general, college students have positive images of tattooed individuals, and they are minimally concerned about being labeled a risk taker if they become tattooed. Many non-tattooed adolescents say they would like to have body art (Armstrong & Murphy, 1998), in another study, a majority of college students were positively disposed toward getting a tattoo in the future (Swami & Furnham, 2007). However, even as more people and increasingly diverse groups of people get tattoos, research still indicates that tattooing is often seen as a negative behavior (Hawkes, Sean, & Thorn, 2004).

While both male and female college students report being tattooed at fairly equivalent rates, college females have fewer tattoos, and hide them more often (Home et al, 2007). Women tend to get tattoos on 'private' and sexualized skin, such as the lower back, while men are more likely to get tattoos on 'public skin', such as their arms and shoulders (Manuel & Sheehan, 2007). Furthermore, young women may use tattoos to enforce rather than challenge traditional femininity, and they do so by selecting small feminine images such as flowers, celestial motifs, hearts, and butterflies (Bell, 1999). Men often use their tattoos to represent masculinity and thereby tend to select images such as dragons, reptiles, skulls, crossbones, tribal/Celtic insignia, etc.

Samuel (2008) is of the view that, tattoo wearing among students need urgent attention before it gets out of hand. Adding that if the trend and practice is not checked and controlled by school management, atrocities such as armed robbery, cultism, sexual abuses and other criminalities will emerge and be on the increase. He opined that programmes, seminars, meetings with students in all faculties, department and classrooms should address the problems associated with tattoo communication among students on campus and the need to eschew them completely.

Some perception of tattoo wearers are that they are:

Bold and creative: No matter the society or the part of the world that one comes from, it takes boldness to add tattoo marks on the body. Some tattoos are done to be aesthetically appealing. Tattoo wearers know that they would have to face public perception of their tattoos but they did it anyways. This means that they already have a prior intention to deal with societal perception which either be positive or negative and are prepared to face it w whichever way it comes.

Sense of style: Tattoo wearers may feel that they are going with the trends in a way that may people will not feel free to express their selves. Some tattoos are done to complement dressing which may turn up to be beautiful.

Moral standards: The issue of the moral standards associated with tattoo wearing may be unending. People have varying perception and opinion of tattoo wearing, some see it as okay, others see it as bad some care less. This may in turn have an influence on their communication and relationship with tattoo wearers. Different religious dispositions to tattoo wearing may affect one's perception to it. The perception of moral standards as it relates to tattoo wearing is therefore varied, some see tattoo wearers as having low moral standards while some do not perceive it that way.

To be friends with a tattoo wearer: The different disposition and perception of tattoos and tattoo wearing will determine whether one will want to be friends with at tattoo wearer or not.

Why do People Wear Tattoos?

The reason for having tattoo varies for different people. Most people with tattoos do not think of them as accounts of cultural alienation (Rooks, Roberts, & Schelterna, 2000), nor are tattoos a statement of rebellion, at least among most adults. In fact, many tattooed persons view tattoos, and other forms of body art, as a way of expressing themselves and as an attractive method of body adornment (Forbes, 2001). Additionally, the acquisition of tattoos, particularly among adults, is a planned activity that is undertaken by so many people. Also, most people report having their tattoo done in a tattoo studio (Forbes, 2001), and most do not regret getting it (Bravennan, 2012). Studies have shown that women more often seek tattoos for personal decoration (Home et al, 2007) and to feel independent (Forbes. 2001), and men more often get tattoos as a symbol of group identity (Home et al, 2007). Furthermore, having tattooed friends significantly influences the attitudes of college students toward body art and the likelihood of being tattooed (Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, & Koch, 2002). Other studies find that, tattooed participants are more likely to have family, significant others, or close friends who are tattooed (Forbes, 2001).

Some people say there is no primary reason for wearing a tattoo. Classic motivations such as boredom, deviant affiliation or rebellion remain common. However, more people are becoming tattooed as a meaningful way to represent personal growth and individualism, and as a normal way of chronicling life events (Atkinson, 2003). Tattoos serve as a form of self-expression that can honor special times, persons and achievements (Armstrong et al, 2002). Furthermore, most individuals get tattooed for their own pleasure and not to impress others and many people have reported that they 'just wanted one' or just 'like the looks of it' (Armstrong & Murphy, 1997).

Tattoos become identity markers that allow individuals to present themselves to others according to their socially developed aesthetic tastes (Bell, 1999), amidst the process of symbolic creativity encourages individuals to select markers from a palate of cultural signs and symbols which they use to establish and present their existence, identity, and meaning (Bell, 1999). This mechanism applies especially to young adults, such as college students, for whom tattoos can represent significant interpersonal role transitions, changes in life that have important impacts on identity (Atkinson, 2003). These symbols are not limited to college students, as tattoos among older persons can also chronicle key turning points such as getting married, starting a new career, going back to school, or having their children leave home. Nevertheless, young adulthood is an especially fertile time of role transition, so it is not surprising that many college students have tattoos.

Tattoos also can be an important feature of emotional management through which individuals attempt to overcome emotions of pain, stress, sorrow and loss such as the death of a loved one in an active, normative and controlled way (Atkinson, 2003). Not only can the tattoo serve as a tangible memorial, but also the physical pain of having the tattoo can help symbolically to exercise the emotional pain of the loss (Atkinson, 2003). The reasons why people wear tattoos may be categorized under the approaches: to remember loved ones, to identify with friends/groups members, an emulation/influence from celebrities and role models, to express a chosen lifestyle, a quest for uniqueness.

Theoretical Review

Social identity theory grew out of Henri Tajfel's early work in the early 1970s. The theory originated from the conviction that group membership can help people to instill meaning in social situations. In the experiment, people were put randomly into groups invented by experimenters. The "groups" have no real-life basis and participants did not know each other beyond their assigned group labels. Sometimes, they did not even meet or interact with each other at all. However, when asked to allocate rewards, most participants tended to favour those of the same artificially created group and discriminated against those of different groups. This finding of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination led to the development of the social identity theory. Social identity theory explains that derive esteem from a group that they positively identify with, therefore they favour it. They allocate more resources to the in-group to maximize the difference between their in-group and out-groups in order to achieve such identifications (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity can be defined as an individual's knowledge of belonging to certain social groups, together with some emotional and valuational significance of that group membership. Thus, while one's personal identity refers to self-knowledge associated with unique individual attributes, people's social identity indicates who they are in terms of the groups to which they belong (Ellemers, 2020).

Social identity theory aims to specify and predict the circumstances under which individuals think of themselves as individuals or as group members. The theory also considers the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and group behavior. It helps explain why people identify with a group, how that affects their affiliation and communication, and how in-group and out-group distinctions affect relations (Chi, 2015). Social identity theory explains how individuals create and define their place in society. According to the theory, three psychological processes are central in that regard: social categorization, social comparison, and social identification

Cognitive grouping involves "judgmental accentuation" where cognitive categories lead to the increased salience of distinguishing features between categories, exaggerating category differences. Applied to social groups, this principle could be used to explain biased and exaggerated perceptions of difference between groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel used a minimal group paradigm to test this effect. They divided people into two groups based on arbitrary criteria and showed that even this "minimal" group basis led people to form psychological groups, exaggerating the positive qualities of one's own group while exaggerating the negative qualities of the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Subsequent studies have attempted to demonstrate the wide range of socially important phenomena that result from such categorization, such as negative evaluations of the out-group (Dovidjo, Gaertner & Validzic, 1998), stereotyping (Smith, 1999), and failure to allocate resources to out-group members (Sidanius, Pratto, & Mitchell, 1994). However, more recent research has called into question whether social identification leads to out-group degradation and tends to

emphasize positive in-group regard more than out-group degradation (Reynolds, Turner & Haslam, 2000).

Methodology

The survey method was employed for the study. The population of the study is 81,899 which comprised of the population of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the three universities situated in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. As provided by the ICT Director in the three universities, University of Port Harcourt has a total of 39,999 students, Rivers State University has a total of 22,400 students and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education has a total of 19,500 students. The researcher purposively selected these universities because they are the most populated and popular institutions in Rivers State. Sample size was determined using Taro Yamene's formula to be 400. The researcher purposively selected six departments, in the universities to distribute the questionnaires. They are: University of Port Harcourt (Linguistics and Communication Studies, Sociology and Education Psychology, Guidance. & Counseling), Rivers State University (Mass Communication, Education Foundation) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling). The departments were selected to distribute the questionnaires because the students of the department are well exposed and knowledgeable on the communicativeness of tattoo in the society.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Presentation of Questionnaire Data

Table 1: Responses for reasons that motivate students of tertiary institutions to wear tattoo

S/N		Frequency	Percentage
i.	To remember loved ones	15	3.9
ii.	To identify with friends/groups members	135	35.5
iii.	An emulation/influence from celebrities and role models	56	14.7
iv.	To express a chosen lifestyle	112	29.4
v.	Quest for uniqueness	62	16.3
	Total	380	100

Among the responses for the reasons that motivate the student to wear tattoos there was a higher response in the category to identify with friends/groups members (35.5%), followed by the reason to express a chosen lifestyle (29.4%), quest for uniqueness (16.3%), emulation/influence from celebrities and role models (14.7%) and to remember loved ones (3.9%).

Table 2: Responses to determine the messages students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State are communicating with their tattoo display

S/N		Percentage
i.	Expression of love and affection for subject of tattoo	52%
ii.	Promotion of personality/social status	85%
iii.	Promotion of self-ego	35%

-
- iv. Showing disgruntled personality elements 72%
-

Responses indicate that 85% of the respondents are of the respondents view the messages communicated by tattoo display are an expression to promote personality/social status. This was followed by an expression to show disgruntled personality elements (72%), expression of love and affection for subject of tattoo (52%), and promotion of self-ego (35%).

Table 3: Responses to investigate the impression students of tertiary institutions in Rivers State have about people wearing tattoos on their bodies

S/N		Percentage
i.	Tattoo wearers are bold and creative	57%
ii.	Tattoo wearers have a good sense of style	21%
iii.	Tattoo wearers have low moral standards	75%
v.	I am open to be friends with a tattoo wearer	32%

Responses indicate that majority of the respondents are of the view that the tattoo wearers have low moral standards (75%), 57% see tattoo wearers as bold and creative, 32% of the respondents are not open to be friends with tattoo wearers, while 21% believe that tattoo wearers have a good sense of style.

Discussion of Findings

The reasons that motivate the student to have tattoos as seen on table 1, is mostly to identify with friends/groups members (35.5%), followed by the reason to express a chosen lifestyle (29.4%). Students in higher institutions have a tendency belonging to groups of which they are identified with. It may be a group of friends or even a fraternity. There is a tendency that group affiliations can influence fashion sense and even tattoo wearing. According to Armstrong et al (2002), having tattooed friends influences the attitudes of college students toward body art and the likelihood of being tattooed. This lends credence to the social identity theory that posits that quest for group identity could influence behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Belonging to a group may have some effect on fashion sense, affiliation and communication (Chi, 2015). The social identity theory considers the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and group behaviour. From the responses on table 1, 16.3% were of the view of the reason to have tattoo was a quest for uniqueness (16.3%). This is in line with Forbes (2001) who asserts that many tattooed persons view tattoos, and other forms of body art, as a way of expressing themselves and as an attractive method of body adornment. Many young people will tend to emulate their preferred celebrities role models by adopting fashion sense. This includes tattooing. Using tattoos to remember someone shows a sense of affection and attachment and it also serves as a way to recall the loss of a beloved siblings or friend that died and whose impact still remains fresh. The interest of getting tattoo is a way to gain or re-establish control over one's body. This supports the study by Synder and Fromkin (1977) which revealed that people use tattoo as a personality trait related with one's need to feel special, unique and different from the majority in order to love a sense of self-worth and wellbeing. From the foregoing, the students in the higher institutions have divergent opinions on the prevailing reasons that motivate their fellow students to wear tattoos on their bodies.

On table 2, responses indicate that 85% of the respondents are of the view that messages communicated by tattoo display are an expression to promote personality/social status. This was followed by an expression to show disgruntled personality elements (72%), expression of love and affection for subject of tattoo (52%), and promotion of self-ego (35%). Man is a communicative being and we communicate even when we are not aware of it. So it is for a tattoo wearer. The truth is that a tattoo wearer especially in an academic institution does a lot of telling about him/herself in this African society. According to Bell (1999) tattoos become identity markers that allow individuals to present themselves to others according to their socially developed aesthetic tastes. More often than is realized, one is bound to assess a tattoo wearer to tell what message the person is passing on about him/herself. There may be a wide range of possible negative outcomes for a tattooed student that has to communicate or relate with a lecturer. Since tattoo is a form of nonverbal communication, there is a tendency of a breach in communication. The message that the tattoo wearer wishes to pass on may not be always understood that way. The different messages to be communicated from tattoo wearing out listed here may vary according to personality for the tattoo wearer. Tattoos signs encourage symbolic creativity encourages individuals to select markers from a palate of cultural signs and symbols which they use to establish and present their existence, identity, and meaning (Bell, 1999). According to Atkinson (2003), young adults use tattoo to express role transition and changes in life that have important impacts on identity.

On table 3, responses indicate that majority of the respondents (75%), are of the view that the tattoo wearers have low moral standards, 57% see tattoo wearers as bold and creative, 32% of the respondents are not open to be friends with tattoo wearers, while 21% believe that tattoo wearers have a good sense of style. Different people have varying impression about tattoos, some see it as positive, some see it as negative while others care less about attributing dispositions based on tattoo. Armstrong (2004) asserts that many college students have positive images of tattooed individuals, and they are minimally concerned about being labelled a risk taker if they become tattooed. According to Swami and Furnham (2007), a majority of college students were positively disposed toward getting a tattoo in the future. However, even as more people and increasingly diverse groups of people get tattoos, research still indicates that tattooing is often seen as a negative behavior (Hawkes, Sean, & Thorn, 2004).

With respect to the social identity theory that explains in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, attachment to a group that sees tattoos as negative will influence a negative perception of tattoo wearers on group members. The social identity theory purports that there can be judgmental accentuation where cognitive categories lead to the increased salience of distinguishing features between categories, exaggerating category differences (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

With the religious disposition of Port Harcourt city, as a highly Christian one, a high level of moral fortitude is expected in the society and wearing tattoo paints one in a negative light in this respect. To this end, a major perception in higher institutions in Port Harcourt is that many students perceive tattoo communication symbol as one that provoked stigma, discrimination and evil disposition, which may make the other students and the public see them in a negative perspective to the society at large. Emeka (2010) opined that, tattoo wearing among students is really appalling and indicates negative impression about the students to others and they may be ostracized from others in all areas of ramification. However, message that the users of tattoo communicate to the society differs. Tattoo communicates but there is always multiple meaning and the meaning differs from one person

to the other. This agrees with the observation of Atkinson (2010) that, tattoo and body piercing carry a lot of meanings and individual perception differs in many respects.

Conclusion

It is now a common practice that students in higher institutions in Port Harcourt are found wearing tattoo on their bodies. What motivates the students into wearing tattoo on their bodies depend on individual choice and interest. The wearer of a tattoo whether consciously or unconsciously passes on a message to be decoded. Personality difference affects the perception of tattoo communication. The message that the tattoo wearer intends to communicate may be interpreted correctly, but there is also a potential for misinterpretation. So, whether a tattoo is an image or text, there may be a potential gap between what the tattooed wants to communicate and what potential viewers may feel is being communicated. Therefore, having a tattoo can be perceived in different ways by those who see it. Some see tattoo wearers as deviant while others care less about attributing dispositions based on tattoo.

For the students in the tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, the perception concerning tattoo is that it can tell more a person, produce stigma or even create affinity. Public perception varies as to the message communicated and meaning differs from one person to the other. But for the tattoo wearers, it is a way of self expression.

References

- Adegoke, A. A, (2004). Adolescence and adolescent problems in schools. In B. Adeyemi. (Ed.), *Guidance and counseling in education*. Ilorin: Indernac Publishers Nigeria Ltd.
- Agbanu, V. N. (2013). *Mass communication: Introduction, techniques, issues*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Ltd.
- Armstrong, M., Owen, D., Roberts, A. & Koch, B.(2002). College tattoos: More than skin deep. *Journal on Nursing*, 14, 317-323.
- Armstrong, M., & Murphy, K. (1998). Adolescent tattooing. *The Prevention Researcher*, 5, 1-4.
- Atkinson, M. (2003). *Tattooed: The sociogenesis of a body art*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Baxter, M. (2009). The activity of meaning making: A holistic perspective on college student development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50,621-639.
- Bell, S. (1999). Tattooed: A participant observer's exploration of meaning. *Journal of American Culture*, 22, 52 -58.
- Bravennan, S. (2012). *One in five U. S. adults now has a tattoo*. Harris Interactive. Retrieved from [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vauWHarris%2GPoli%2022%20-Tattoos 2.23 .12.pdf](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vauWHarris%2GPoli%2022%20-Tattoos%2023.pdf).
- Chi, R. B. (2015). Social identity theory. The SISU Intercultural Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.courses/InterculturalCommunication>
- Doss, A. & Ebesu, H. (2009). Body piercing: Medical consequence and psychological motivations. *The Hancet*, 5, 12- 25.
- Dovidjo, J. F., Gaejtner, S. L, & Validzic, A. (1998). Intergroup bias: Status, differentiation, and a common in-group identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 109-120.
- Ellemers, N. (2020). *Social identity theory*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-identity-theory>
- Forbes, O. (2001). College students with tattoos and piercings: Motives, family experiences, personality factors, perceptions by others. *Psychological Reports*, 89, 774-786.

- Hawkes, D., Sean, C. Y. & Thorn, C. (2004). Factors that influence attitudes toward women with tattoos. *Sex Roles: Journal of Research*, 50, 593-604.
- Home, B., Knox, D., Zusman, B. & Zusman, M. (2007). Tattoos and piercings: Attitudes, behaviors, and interpretations of college students. *College Student Journal*, 41, 11-20.
- Leavy, L. (2009). *Everything you need to know about the dangers of tattooing and body piercing*. New York: The Rosen publishing group Inc.
- Lei, E. M. (2009). *Bodies of subversion*. New York: Juno Books.
- Manuel, L. & Sheehan, N. (2007). Getting inked: Tattoos and college students. *College Student Journal*, 41, 89-98.
- Mayers, L. B. & Chiffriker, S. H. (2008). Body art (body piercing and tattooing) among undergraduate university students: Then and now. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 42, 201-213.
- Navarro, J. & Karlins, M. (2008). *What everybody is saying: An ex-FBI agent's guide to speed-reading people*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Nwabueze, C. (2014). *Introduction to mass communication: Media ecology in the global Willage*. Owerri: Top shelf Publishers.
- Nwabueze, C. & Nkwamuwaraoma, A. (2017). Mark of deviance or self-expression? A study of communication motives of the tattooed among students of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. An unpublished B. Sc. project, Department of Mass Communication, ChukwuemekaOdumegwuOjukwu University, Igbariam campus, Anambra State, Nigeria.
- Nwafor, P. (2016). Mark of deviance or self-expression? A study of communication motives of tattoo wearers in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. An unpublished B. Sc. project, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam campus, Anambra State, Nigeria.
- Reynolds, K. J., Turner, E. C., & Haslam, S. A. (2000). When are we better than them and they worse than us: A closer look at social discrimination in positive and negative domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(1), 64-80.
- Rooks, B. I., Roberts, D. B. & Scheltenia, K. (2000). Tattoos: Their relationship to trauma, psychopathology and other myths. *Minnesota Medicine*, 83, 24-27.
- Sidanius, B., Pratto, F. & Mitchell, M. (1994). Intergroup identification, social dominance orientation and differential intergroup social allocation. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 3(4), 15-25.
- Smith, E. R. (1999). Affective and cognitive implications of a group becoming part of the self: New models of prejudice and of the self-concept. In D. Abrams & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), *Social identity and social cognition* (pp. 183-196). Oxford: Blackwell, Publishers.
- Swami, V. & Furnham, A. (2007). Unattractive, promiscuous, and heavy drinkers: Perceptions of women with tatoos. *Body Image*, 4, 43-52.
- Snyder, C. R. & Fromkin, H. L. (1977). Abnormality as a positive characteristic: The development and validation of a scale measuring need for uniqueness. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 86, 18-27.
- Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel & L. W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

