

Appraisal of Cultural Inclusion and Representation in MTN Nigeria Facebook Advertisement (January – December, 2025)

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Abstract:

This study appraised cultural inclusion and representation in MTN advertisements in Nigeria. The general aim was to evaluate the extent to which MTN Nigeria's multi-ad campaign strategies reflect genuine, equitable cultural inclusion across the nation's diverse socio-cultural landscape. The study was theoretically anchored on Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory. Utilising a convergent mixed-method design, the study conducted both quantitative and qualitative content analyses. The population comprised MTN's 2025 Facebook advertising output, from which a sample of 45 advertisements meeting the inclusion criteria was coded. The findings revealed that ethnic representation was infrequent and narrow, with 84.4% of advertisements carrying no identifiable ethnic marker. Where markers appeared, majoritarian groups dominated (Hausa: 11.1%; Yoruba: 8.9%; Fulani: 8.9%), leaving Igbos underrepresented (4.4%) and minority groups completely unrepresented (0.0%). Visual/pictorial elements (31.1%) skewed higher than symbolic (17.8%) and substantive linguistic representation, as standard English (84.4%) and Pidgin English (15.6%) entirely dominated copy execution. Although character placement was overwhelmingly prominent (84.4%), the dominant narrative framework was Majoritarian Hegemony (80.0%), compared to Progressive Inclusion (20.0%). The study concludes that MTN Nigeria's advertising output operates primarily as a mechanism of majoritarian hegemony that systematically flattens the nation's deep ethnic, linguistic, and regional plurality into a monolithic, consumerist consensus to optimise corporate economic efficiency. It is recommended that MTN and its creative agencies intentionally feature minority ethnic groups, actively incorporate indigenous languages directly into ad copywriting, balance single-person layouts with multi-ethnic community frames, and systematically replace the homogenist narrative with a progressive-inclusion framework.

Keywords: *Corporate Advertising, Media Representation, Cultural Inclusion, Majoritarian Hegemony, Media System Dependency Theory*

Introduction

Corporate advertisements serve as profound cultural mirrors that simultaneously reflect and shape societal value systems, group identities, and normative behaviours within a multicultural nation (Dalamu, 2020). Within the contemporary Nigerian socio-economic landscape, the telecommunications sector remains an economic and cultural forerunner in advertising (Dada, 2010). MTN Nigeria, one of the key players in Nigeria's telecommunication sector, controls a dominant market share of over 38% and an active subscriber base exceeding 78 million consumers (Nigerian Communications Commission [NCC], 2024). This massive corporate footprint places a profound ethical and sociological responsibility on the brand's marketing communications, transforming its televised, print, and digital

advertisements from mere commercial messages to potent cultural scripts that circulate widely across the public sphere (Nwokoro & Peter, 2022). These commercial advertisements function as an informal form of social enlightenment and preservation, where the selective projection of local languages, domestic archetypes, and ethnic symbols can either foster holistic national cohesion or perpetuate structural marginalisation of sub-cultures.

The linguistic choices and cultural artifacts embedded within GSM advertisements, according to Dada (2010), heavily influence public perceptions of social reality across diverse Nigerian demographics. In Nigeria, the issue of equitable representation within highly visible corporate media campaigns is critical. Advertising agencies frequently struggle to balance core

commercial motives with local ethical responsibilities, resulting in uneven or minoritising portrayals of diverse cultural values (Nwokoro & Peter, 2022; Akai et al., 2025; Akai & Uford, 2025). Furthermore, the strategic revitalisation of cultural characteristics within mainstream advertisements carries immense power to shift or maintain specific public worldviews (Dalamu, 2020). This cultural inclusion denotes the deliberate, strategic, and equitable integration of diverse cultural identities, linguistic variations, and traditions within mainstream media spaces. The purposeful inclusion of localised traditions significantly enhances the text's meaning potential and builds deep symbolic bonds with a multicultural consumer base (Dalamu, 2020). This intentional incorporation of localised cultural symbolism directly accumulates into the concept of media representation, which defines how social reality, ethnic identities, and regional archetypes are constructed through visual and linguistic signifiers to produce institutional meaning.

Media representations are never neutral records of reality; they are selective fabrications that carry immense power to normalise specific social roles while pathologising or erasing others. Asemah et al. (2013) state that the choice of cultural symbols and language used in advertising must actively mirror the core values and moral expectations of the target society for its message to remain genuinely persuasive and effective. These representational choices integrate into the corporate advertising strategy of any given company. It represents an organised, heavily funded framework of persuasive communication designed by corporate entities to influence consumer attitudes and stimulate product demand. Corporate advertising strategy operates as a dominant pedagogical force where cultural elements are deliberately leveraged to humanise the multinational corporate image.

Corporate advertisements in Nigeria have successfully shifted away from colonial, Eurocentric marketing models toward deeply localised, indigenous narratives. Dada (2010) highlights that the extensive use of local artifacts, indigenous music, and popular speech patterns has successfully indigenised the linguistic landscape of mainstream advertising. Conversely, a

prominent point of divergence exists regarding the structural equity, ideological authenticity, and ethical responsibility of these representations. While these campaigns, on one hand, can be progressive celebrations of national diversity, on the other hand, these representative colourations remain deeply paternalistic. Akpan and Umukoro (2020) indicate that blending official English with indigenous languages and Pidgin can introduce linguistic inconsistencies and majoritarian biases that leave minority ethnic accents or identities marginalised. Furthermore, prominent disputes persist regarding how corporate campaigns navigate deep-seated societal prejudices; while Okiyi and Eteng-Martins (2015) argue that advertising practitioners should operate on universal moral codes of decency, truthfulness, and social balance. Bello et al. (2019) observe that mainstream telecommunications ads frequently exploit reductive domestic stereotypes or regional privileges to achieve rapid commercial resonance. This body of literature reveals a critical empirical gap: much of the existing research relies heavily on qualitative textual or semiotic analyses of historical campaigns, leaving a pronounced scarcity of contemporary, multi-method studies that balance statistical frequencies with deep textual analysis.

To address these deficiencies, this present study will attempt a content analysis to evaluate cultural inclusion and representations within MTN advertisements in Nigeria. The rationale for this investigation is rooted in the necessity of advancing past purely exploratory frameworks to establish an empirical baseline that simultaneously measures the literal frequency of diverse cultural depictions and evaluates the latent socio-political meanings behind them. Given MTN's unmatched socio-economic reach across the federation, this provides a robust, dual-perspective dataset showing whether corporate advertising strategies are systematically executing genuine cultural inclusion or subtly reinforcing majoritarian imbalances.

Statement of Problem

Despite the strategic shift toward indigenising promotional narratives within the Nigerian telecommunications landscape, corporate marketing campaigns continue to perpetuate

uneven, majoritarian, and highly stereotyped representations of the nation's diverse cultural fabric. When media representations favor major regional languages, exploit reductive domestic archetypes, or rely on patriarchal frameworks to secure commercial appeal, they alienate substantial consumer demographics and reinforce historical patterns of cultural hegemony. In a pluralistic society with over 250 ethnic nationalities, this structural imbalance fosters symbolic erasure and fractures national cohesion. With it, there is an urgent socio-political need to hold major corporate media producers accountable to the multi-ethnic public sphere they monetise, ensuring that massive communication frameworks actively support progressive representation rather than commercialised exclusion. As a multinational giant commanding the largest subscriber base in the country, the media outputs of MTN Nigeria carry immense pedagogical power, serving as informal sites of social education that shape public perceptions of ethnic identity, gender roles, and regional belonging. Consequently, leaving these expansive corporate narratives unexamined allows commercial forces to unchecked dictate the visual and linguistic boundaries of national identity, making an objective critique of their content an immediate societal necessity.

In attempting to address this problem, previous media communication scholars have made significant strides by examining localised advertising artifacts through various analytical frameworks. Researchers have extensively documented the indigenisation of the linguistic landscape, evaluating how code-switching, local idioms, and traditional musical elements are deployed to build brand loyalty and humanise multinational corporate identities. However, a critical empirical gap persists within the existing body of literature. Previous scholarly interventions have been predominantly qualitative, exploratory, and restricted to isolated, single-ad campaigns from historical eras, thereby treating advertisements like localised text rather than long-term, institutional strategies. As a result of this gap, this study seeks to answer a vital overarching question: To what extent does the corpus of multi-ad campaign strategies of MTN Nigeria reflect genuine, equitable cultural inclusion across the nation's diverse socio-cultural landscape between

January and December 2025, rather than a commercialised reinforcement of majoritarian hegemony?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. determine the frequency of representation allocated to different Nigerian ethnic groups within the corpus of MTN Nigeria's advertisements between January and December 2025;
2. identify the types of cultural representation (pictorial, symbolic, or linguistic) deployed to manifest diverse cultural identities within the campaigns;
3. assess the structural placement (prominent, minor, background, or peripheral) of distinct sub-cultures and minoritised groups within the advertisements to evaluate their relative visibility; and,
4. ascertain the dominant frames progressive inclusion, commercialised tokenism, or majoritarian hegemony) used to package cultural narratives within the corporate advertising strategy.

Literature Review

Media Representation

Media representation refers to the selective process through which visual images, spoken phrases, and sound designs are assembled by media organisations to construct specific versions of social reality, identity, and regional heritage. Far from being neutral, unmediated channels that objectively capture real life, representations function as symbolic constructions that possess the institutional power to normalize specific social archetypes while marginalising others. Within media scholarship, it is established that corporate advertisements act as highly visible pedagogical sites. Adinlewa and Ojih (2018) observed that the promotional culture of contemporary advertising works its way deeply into public perceptions of right and wrong, heavily anchoring the significance of "image" in both public and private life. This systematic selection of who appears in the foreground or background allows media production teams to dictate the visual and cultural vocabulary of public belonging.

The structural distribution of media representations plays a foundational role in either validating or erasing diverse sub-cultures. When a dominant media producer constantly utilises majoritarian accents, localised urban settings, or singular cultural practices, it implicitly signals to the audience which demographics are central to national identity and which remain peripheral. This commercial dependency creates an ongoing tension between producing content that achieves instant mass appeal and upholding the ethical responsibility to provide authentic, diverse portrayals. According to Ihechu, Dike, and Oduh (2019), this tension is magnified across modern media environments where advertisements on television, social media, and digital networks are deliberately engineered to maximise consumer attention. Consequently, advertising images are widely viewed as reflections of prevailing societal norms, heavily shaping beliefs about appropriate social, regional, and gender roles (Nassif & Gunter, 2008).

Directions of representations are shifting rapidly due to digital proliferation, yet underlying structural disparities in narrative weight persist. The gendered dimension of media text architecture is highly visible here; critical content examinations reveal how mainstream news organs perpetuate institutional biases through exclusionary framing filters. Ukpong, Umoren, and Okpongkpong (2020) demonstrated that localised newspapers often apply restrictive framing structures when capturing women's socio-political contributions, frequently pushing minority perspectives to the narrative margins. This structural imbalance is further exacerbated when content delivery designs carry hidden ideological setups that position peripheral or gender sub-cultures unequally relative to dominant ones (Alsystech, 2024). Thus, media representation operates as an active, continuous site of cultural politics where the frequency, frame, and manner of portrayal dictate the boundaries of social inclusion.

Cultural Inclusion

Cultural inclusion denotes the deliberate, strategic, and equitable integration of diverse ethnic identities, sub-cultures, linguistic variations, and ancestral traditions within mainstream media and corporate communication spaces. Distinct from

superficial diversity, which often manifests as a cosmetic checklist, genuine cultural inclusion ensures that minoritised identities are afforded meaningful narrative depth, structural prominence, and ideological authenticity. In communication studies, this concept is measured by evaluating how local traditions, artifacts, and language variations are woven into media texts to expand their meaning potential and establish authentic symbolic bonds with a multi-ethnic consumer market. Communication Cultures in Africa (2018) highlights that when properly utilised, advertising functions directly as a socialising institution meant to cultivate, promote, and project the material, philosophical, and sociological aspects of a nation's culture.

Achieving authentic cultural inclusion within a multi-ethnic territory requires a careful balance between celebrating shared national bonds and respecting distinct regional differences. True inclusion requires that minority sub-cultures are not merely featured as exotic backdrops or comedic relief, but are instead presented with the same dignity and prominence given to majoritarian groups. Alimi (2022) discovered that locally derived icons capable of culturally persuading target audiences are often surprisingly scarce or unevenly distributed in mainstream advertising layouts. According to Adelabu, Alade, Sanusi, and Oloyede (2023), the modern Nigerian advertising industry is undergoing massive shifts due to enhanced consumer patronage, digital evolution, and the rapid emergence of social networking sites. This digital acceleration means that contemporary consumers are much more likely to actively support brands that demonstrate really cultural, and ethical integrity rather than cosmetic diversity (Hansen & Bo Nielsen, 2023). Ukpong (2019) establishes that the intentional integration of vernacular elements and localised programming carries immense structural weight in successfully preserving indigenous African culture and protecting minoritised heritages from institutional erasure within rapidly modernising media spaces.

Corporate Advertising Strategy

Corporate advertising strategy represents an organised, heavily funded, and systematically executed framework of persuasive communication designed by corporate entities to influence

consumer attitudes, humanise the corporate image, and stimulate market demand. Belch and Belch (2004) explains that the strategic shift toward integrated marketing communication reflects an active adaptation by marketers to a changing atmosphere with respect to consumer technology, media fragmentation, and shifting audience demographics. From an institutional standpoint, a company's advertising strategy is inherently tied to its market share and economic footprint. Dominant market players possess the financial resources to launch extensive multi-ad campaigns across televised, print, and digital channels, turning their commercial messages into powerful cultural scripts that circulate widely across the public sphere. When designing these campaigns, corporations regularly rely on external trust metrics to anchor their message authority.

Umoren (2019) clarifies this operational dynamic by stating that the strategic integration of celebrity endorsements serves as a primary psychological vehicle for shaping customer perception, reinforcing brand performance, and stabilising corporate image inside highly competitive urban marketplaces. Because these strategies are ultimately accountable to corporate profit motives, they frequently experience internal conflicts between maximizing commercial reach and maintaining social responsibility. Nwokah and Nwulu (2015) observes that massive capital investments are regularly channelled into strategic campaigns to capture consumer attention, yet these strategies often struggle to convert raw visibility into sustainable brand loyalty if they fail to align with the authentic identity of the consumer.

These corporate advertising strategies are undergoing a massive transformation driven by platform resets and localised marketing adaptations. Large-scale corporate entities are increasingly moving away from traditional, generalised media models in favour of fragmented, data-driven digital campaigns that rely heavily on regional networks to navigate multi-ethnic consumer markets. This structural evolution is particularly prominent within online cosmetic and lifestyle sectors, where electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and direct interactive marketing heavily dictate localised consumer preferences among younger demographics (Umoren, 2021). This modern evolution underscores why corporate

entities are facing intense regulatory and social pressure to conform to strict ethical guidelines regarding transparency and social equity (Naveed, 2023), especially with cultural inclusion. Therefore, effective corporate advertising strategy in the modern era transcends superficial marketing slogans, requiring corporations to systematically align their mediated outputs with objective metrics of social representation and institutional credibility.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically anchored on Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory, which was originally formulated by communication scholars Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976. Developed as an integrated sociological and psychological framework, MSD emerged historically to challenge the direct-effects ("hypodermic needle") and limited-effects paradigms that previously dominated mass communication research, shifting the academic focus toward an ecological approach that analyses the tripartite, reciprocal relationships between the audience, the media system, and the broader social structure (Almakaty, 2026; Davis, 2021). The foundational assumptions of the theory posit that mass media are not isolated actors; rather, their institutional power and the magnitude of their cognitive, affective, and behavioural effects are contingent upon the degree to which individuals, groups, or institutions rely on media resources to achieve specific goals (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Furthermore, the theory explicitly assumes that this dependency intensity increases drastically during periods of structural instability, rapid social change, pervasive conflict, or systemic crisis, when established interpersonal information channels collapse and audiences turn heavily to structured media to navigate ambiguity (Charanza & Naile, 2012; Kasirye, 2021). Within this systemic web, the key constructs of MSD Theory are operationalised through dependency relations (the intensity of reliance, measured along a low-to-high continuum), functional alternatives (the presence or absence of non-media resource options that can substitute for media systems), and the tripartite categorization of individual audience motivations: understanding (social and self-

comprehension), orientation (action and interaction planning), and play (entertainment and tension release) (Almakaty, 2026; Jakob, 2010). The theoretical architecture of Media System Dependency Theory is directly relevant to the current study as it explains the precise behavioural and cognitive mechanics under review. In this study, the constructs of understanding and action orientation are deployed to measure how the selective framing, media representations, and strategic outputs of communication organs shape public understanding or direct consumer behaviours. Within the contemporary digital and corporate communication ecosystem, these dependencies determine how audiences process brand narratives, construct social realities, and evaluate cultural inclusion when alternative institutional information channels are absent, fragmented, or highly competitive.

Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that advertising serves as an important medium for communicating cultural identity and promoting audience engagement through culturally meaningful representations. Alozie (2011) found that Nigerian advertisements extensively employ culturally recognisable symbols, human images and social values to enhance message effectiveness, while Oyedele and Minor (2012) similarly observed that television advertisements in Nigeria and South Africa construct idealised cultural and social identities rather than merely reflecting everyday realities. Supporting this perspective, Dalamu and Ogunlusi (2020) established that advertisers deliberately incorporate indigenous languages, traditions, religious celebrations and family values to strengthen persuasion and audience identification. These findings align with Obasi (2023), who demonstrated that verbal and visual elements jointly create cultural meanings in digital advertisements. However, Rößner and Eisend (2023) argued that increased ethnic representation in advertising does not necessarily translate into genuine cultural inclusion, noting that minority groups are often portrayed in stereotypical ways despite greater visibility. With particular reference to the telecommunications sector, Aka, Okorie and

Kehinde (2015) found that MTN advertising significantly influences consumer awareness and patronage, highlighting the effectiveness of the company’s promotional campaigns. Although their study did not examine cultural inclusion directly, it complements the findings of Dalamu and Ogunlusi (2020) by suggesting that persuasive advertising contributes to positive consumer responses. Nevertheless, Aka *et al.* differ from Rößner and Eisend (2023), whose emphasis was on the quality of cultural representation rather than advertising outcomes. These studies indicate that authentic cultural representation can enhance advertising effectiveness, yet they also reveal an important gap in the literature. Specifically, there remains limited empirical evidence assessing whether MTN advertisements genuinely reflect Nigeria’s diverse cultural identities or merely employ cultural symbols as marketing devices. This gap provides the justification for the present study on the appraisal of cultural inclusion and representation in MTN advertisements in Nigeria.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Results

A total of 45 MTN advertisements met the inclusion criteria and were coded. The advertisements covered a wide range of campaign types, including regulatory/compliance notices (e.g. NIN-linking and line-barring reminders), data and airtime promotions, value-added service promotions (CallerTunez, CallerFeel), corporate social responsibility and empowerment campaigns (Y’ellopreneur, MTN Foundation, MTN Scholarships), cultural and seasonal campaigns (New Year, Mother’s Day, AMVCA Cultural Day, “See Naija”), youth-focused campus campaigns (Campus Invasion), sports sponsorship (Super Eagles), and public service announcements (drug abuse, environmental waste). This mix of campaign types provided a representative cross-section of MTN’s 2025 Facebook advertising output for cultural-inclusion analysis.

Table 1: Frequency of Identifiable Ethnic Group Representation

Ethnic Group	Frequency (No. of Ads)	Percentage (%)
Hausa	5	11.1
Yoruba	4	8.9

Igbo	2	4.4
Fulani	4	8.9
Ijaw	0	0.0
Kanuri	0	0.0
Tiv	0	0.0
Efik/Ibibio	0	0.0
Edo	0	0.0
Nupe	0	0.0
Other Nigerian ethnic groups	1	2.2
Not identifiable	38	84.4

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of advertisements, 38 of 45 (84.4%), did not present any visually or contextually identifiable ethnic marker; characters were styled in generic, ethnically unmarked modern/urban fashion and the advertisement relied on product or promotional messaging rather than cultural cues. Among advertisements that did carry an identifiable ethnic marker, Hausa identity was the most frequently depicted (5 ads, 11.1%), closely followed by Yoruba and Fulani identity (4 ads each, 8.9%), while Igbo identity appeared in 2 advertisements (4.4%). This reenforced the majoritarian hegemony.

Table 2: Number of Persons Represented per Advertisement

Number of Persons	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No persons shown	4	8.9
One person	19	42.2
Two persons	6	13.3
Three persons	7	15.6
Four persons	2	4.4
Five or more persons	7	15.6

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 4.2 shows that single-person advertisements dominated the sample (19 of 45, 42.2%), typical of

product/promo adverts built around one model demonstrating a service. Group advertisements of five or more persons (15.6%) were associated mainly with cultural/collective-themed campaigns (e.g. Super Eagles fan support, AMVCA Cultural Day, family New Year gatherings, MTN Scholarships) and campus-invasion youth adverts, while 8.9% of advertisements (mainly informational/PSA graphics) featured no human figures at all.

Table 3: Pictorial and Symbolic Cultural Representation

Variable	Present		Absent	
	Freq	%	Freq	Absent – %
Pictorial representation (traditional attire, food, hairstyles, artefacts, festivals)	14	31.1	31	68.9
Symbolic representation (national/ethnic symbols, religious symbols, ceremonies)	8	17.8	37	82.2

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 3 shows that pictorial cultural elements (such as traditional attire, indigenous food, traditional hairstyles, cultural artefacts and festival imagery) were present in 14 of the 45 advertisements (31.1%), most visibly in the New Year family advert (AD02), the Y’ellopreneur empowerment series (AD14, AD36), the indigenous-food advert (AD26), the “See Naija” groundnut advert (AD34), the Hausa-Fulani family adverts (AD21, AD24), the gele/headwrap advert (AD15) and the multicultural “This is Home, This is Naija” (AD25) and AMVCA Cultural Day (AD38) adverts. Symbolic cultural elements (national symbols, ethnic colours, religious symbols and cultural ceremonies) were comparatively rarer, appearing in only 8 advertisements (17.8%), and were concentrated in the same set of culturally themed adverts plus the

Super Eagles sports-sponsorship advert (AD09) and the scholarship advert (AD20), both of which used national colours/religious symbols (e.g. the hijab) as markers of inclusion.

Table 4: Linguistic Representation of Culture

Linguistic Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	0	0.0
English only	38	84.4
Indigenous language only	0	0.0
English + Indigenous language	0	0.0
Pidgin English	7	15.6
Multiple Nigerian languages	0	0.0

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 4 shows that English was the dominant linguistic mode, appearing as the sole language of communication in 38 advertisements (84.4%). Nigerian Pidgin English featured in 7 advertisements (15.6%), typically in informal, youth-oriented promotional copy (e.g. “No gree for boredom,” “Let di gbedu enter bodi,” “Awuf enter,” “Better talk no suppose end”). No advertisement in the sample employed an indigenous Nigerian language (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo or any other) on its own or in combination with English, and no advertisement used multiple indigenous languages simultaneously. However, two advertisements (AD11 and AD34) referenced indigenous languages thematically, inviting audiences to comment with native-language translations of words such as “outdo yourself” and “groundnut”. Nonetheless, the advertisement copy itself remained in English, meaning indigenous-language usage was symbolic/participatory rather than substantive.

Table 5: Structural Placement of Represented Persons

Placement Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Prominent (main character/central focus)	38	84.4

Minor (secondary speaking role)	1	2.2
Background (visible but passive)	0	0.0
Peripheral (brief appearance only)	6	13.3

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 5 indicate that represented persons were overwhelmingly placed in prominent, central positions (38 of 45 advertisements, 84.4%), consistent with MTN’s product-advert format in which a single model or small group is the clear visual and narrative focus. Peripheral placement, where persons appeared only briefly or were depicted abstractly (e.g. silhouettes, reflected figures, or as a named but unseen character), accounted for 13.3% of advertisements, while only one advertisement (2.2%) placed a represented group in a minor/secondary role.

Table 6: Dominant Inclusion Frame

Inclusion Frame	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Progressive Inclusion	9	20.0
Commercialised Tokenism	0	0.0
Majoritarian Hegemony	36	80.0
Total	45	100.0

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 6 shows that the Majoritarian Hegemony frame dominated the sample, accounting for 36 of 45 advertisements (80.0%). This category captured the large number of generic, ethnically unmarked product adverts (which implicitly normalise a single, homogenised “mainstream” urban Nigerian identity communicated almost exclusively in English) as well as the smaller set of advertisements that depicted one cultural/ethnic group exclusively (e.g. the Hausa-Fulani family adverts AD21 and AD24, the Yoruba New Year and gele adverts AD02 and AD15) without contrasting or balancing that representation with other groups within the same advertisement.

Table 7: Presence of Identifiable Ethnic Marker by Dominant Inclusion Frame

Options	Majoritarian Hegemony	Progressive Inclusion	Total
No identifiable ethnic marker	31	6	37
At least one identifiable ethnic marker	5	3	8
Total	36	9	45

Source: Content analysis, 2026

Table 7 disaggregates the inclusion-frame finding by whether an advertisement carried any identifiable ethnic marker at all. Of the 37 advertisements with no specific ethnic marker, the great majority (31, 83.8%) were coded Majoritarian Hegemony by default, since their reliance on a single, unmarked, English-language, urban-modern visual register implicitly represents one dominant cultural mode rather than Nigeria’s ethnic plurality. Among the 8 advertisements that did carry an identifiable ethnic marker, the split was more even: 5 (62.5%) were coded Majoritarian Hegemony because they centred a single ethnic group exclusively, while 3 (37.5%) achieved Progressive Inclusion by combining multiple groups within a single frame. This pattern suggests that explicit ethnic representation in MTN’s 2025 advertising was significantly limited.

Summary of Findings

The following are key findings from the study:

- i. Ethnic representation was infrequent and narrow: 84.4% of advertisements carried no identifiable ethnic marker, and where ethnic identity was depicted, it was concentrated among Hausa, Yoruba and Fulani imagery (Igbo and other groups appeared far less often), while Ijaw, Kanuri, Tiv, Efik/Ibibio, Edo and Nupe identities did not appear at all in the sampled period.
- ii. Cultural representation skewed pictorial over symbolic and linguistic: visible cultural elements such as attire, food and hairstyles appeared in under a third of

advertisements (31.1%), explicit symbolic elements in under a fifth (17.8%), and indigenous-language use in none of the advertisements’ actual copy, with English dominating (84.4%) and Pidgin English serving as the only departure from standard English (15.6%).

- iii. Structural placement of represented persons was overwhelmingly prominent (84.4%), indicating that when people — ethnically marked or not — were shown, they were not relegated to the visual background.
- iv. The dominant narrative frame across the sample was Majoritarian Hegemony (80.0%), with Progressive Inclusion present in a meaningful but minority share of advertisements (20.0%) and no advertisements meeting the threshold for Commercialised Tokenism.

Discussion of Findings

Ethnic representation was overwhelmingly infrequent and narrow in MTN’s 2025 Facebook advertisements. More than eighty percent of the advertisement (84.4%, 38 of 45 ads) had no identifiable ethnic markers at all, while the remaining 15.6% heavily favoured majoritarian identities like the Hausa (11.1%), Yoruba (8.9%), and Fulani (8.9%), leaving major groups like the Igbo underrepresented (4.4%) and minority groups like the Ijaw, Kanuri, Tiv, Efik, Edo, and Nupe completely unrepresented (0%). This stark absence of minority ethnic markers suggests that MTN adopts a strategy of visual neutralisation, preferring generic, modern urban imagery to avoid the complexities of navigating Nigeria’s highly fragmented ethnic landscape. The corporate advertiser inadvertently marginalises the country’s pluralistic identity in favour of a commercialised, singular mainstream. This pattern directly aligns with the findings of Omenugha and Nuemeka (2020), who observed that corporate advertising in Nigeria consistently suffers from an “ethnic blind spot,” disproportionately favouring the three major ethnic groups while systematically ignoring the country’s multi-ethnic realities. However, it contrasts sharply with Akpan (2022), who argued that digital media platforms have democratised advertising, prompting brands to employ highly

inclusive, hyper-localised representations. This pervasive exclusion of minority voices is highly descriptive of Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory. According to MSD theory, when social instability or complexity is high, individuals and institutions depend heavily on media systems for information to understand their environment and form cognitive schemas.

There was a clear skew in the dimensions of cultural representation toward superficial visual cues, with pictorial representations (traditional attire, food, hairstyles) appearing in 31.1% of the ads and symbolic markers (national colours, religious symbols such as the hijab) present in just 17.8%. Substantive linguistic representation was completely absent. English was the absolute dominant mode of communication at 84.4%, with Nigerian Pidgin English accounting for the remaining 15.6% (7 ads) and indigenous languages serving zero role in actual copy execution. While Pidgin English is utilised as a conversational bridge to capture informal youth audiences, the absolute reliance on English highlights a systemic corporate hesitation to invest in multi-lingual copywriting. This aligns with the findings of Adebayo (2021) that corporate media routinely reduces complex cultural systems to “visual shorthand” or shallow aesthetics without engaging with indigenous languages. This contradicts Olutola (2023), who highlighted a rising trend of “linguistic indigenisation” where major brands increasingly use code-switching and native vocabularies to drive consumer engagement. However, this is not the case with MTN Facebook advertisement.

The structural placement and visibility of represented persons within the advertisement frames were granted exceptionally high visibility, with an overwhelming 84.4% (38 of 45 ads) placing represented persons in prominent, central roles as the main character or core focus of the narrative. Minor or secondary roles accounted for just 2.2%, while peripheral or brief appearances made up 13.3%, meaning that models were rarely relegated to passive background imagery. This structural prominence is deeply intertwined with MTN’s tactical reliance on single-person advertisements, which dominated the sample at 42.2% (19 ads). These single-model formats are specifically engineered to build clear, uncluttered

narrative focus around a product or value-added service. This structural visibility strongly supports the conclusions of Ibrahim and Bello (2024), who noted that contemporary digital advertisements focuses intently on high-visibility, single-influencer models to capture fleeting attention spans on social feeds.

The dominant narrative frames used to construct cultural inclusion and pluralism in the advertisement sample was the Majoritarian Hegemony frame. It was present in an astonishing 80.0% (36 of 45 ads) of the total sample, while the Progressive Inclusion frame appeared in a minor 20.0% (9 ads) share, and the Commercialised Tokenism frame was entirely absent (0%). When this data was disaggregated, it became clear that the dominance of majoritarian hegemony was driven by the 31 ethnically unmarked, urban-modern ads that implicitly normalised a singular, homogenised English-speaking identity as the default Nigerian experience, alongside a smaller subset of ads that centred a single ethnic group exclusively without any pluralistic contrast. These findings demonstrate that MTN’s conceptualisation of inclusion is deeply limited; rather than paying attention to Nigeria’s diverse subcultures within their campaigns, the brand chose a homogenised “one-size-fits-all” urban identity that erases difference under the guise of modernisation. From the perspective of Media System Dependency Theory, the pervasive dominance of the Majoritarian Hegemony frame highlights a massive systemic asymmetric dependency.

Conclusion

Corporate advertising by multinational entities in pluralistic societies functions less as an authentic mirror of cultural diversity. It serves more as an instrument of social homogenisation, retreating into a sanitised, consumerist baseline that normalises a single, dominant way of mirroring modernisation rather than cultural glocalisation. Specifically, MTN Nigeria’s 2025 Facebook advertising output operates primarily as a mechanism of majoritarian hegemony. There was a complete omission of minority ethnic groups (such as the Ijaw, Kanuri, and Tiv), and an absolute reliance on standard English over indigenous languages. By confining cultural expressions to

superficial pictorial aesthetics and high-prominence, individualised visual framing during isolated seasonal campaigns, MTN exploits the audience's structural media system dependency to cultivate a standardised, market-friendly urban identity. Consequently, MTN's inclusive branding remains largely cosmetic, systematically flattening Nigeria's deep ethnic, linguistic, and regional plurality into a monolithic, consumerist consensus to minimise cultural friction and optimise corporate economic efficiency.

Recommendations

This study recommends that:

- i. MTN Nigeria and its creative agencies should intentionally diversify their casting choices by explicitly featuring minority ethnic groups like the Ijaw, Kanuri, and Tiv in mainstream campaigns to dismantle the visual erasure of these populations;
- ii. Corporate media strategists must move beyond superficial visual aesthetics and actively incorporate indigenous Nigerian languages directly into advertisement copywriting, normalising native tongues as functional tools for the digital economy;
- iii. Creative directors should balance single-person advertisements with diverse, multi-ethnic group layouts to structurally frame modern technological progress as a collective, community-driven experience rather than an isolated individual pursuit; and,
- iv. MTN should systematically replace its homogenised, "one-size-fits-all" urban narrative framework with an intentional progressive-inclusion framework that weaves multiple subcultures into single campaign narratives to foster a truly pluralistic national identity.

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