

Visual Art and Rebranding of Nigeria's Environmental Aesthetics ¹Ebodili, C. Chuka (PhD) & ²Efih, O. Godspower

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Abstract

Visual art constitutes a significant aspect of human civilization and has consistently served as an instrument for national development and identity construction. Across various societies, artistic practices have been deployed to cultivate vocational skills, enhance cultural capital, and project positive national images. This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based research approach to interrogate the potential of visual art as a tool for rebranding Nigeria's environmental and national image. The review reveals that although Nigeria functions as a unique brand for its citizens, the nation is frequently perceived externally through negative stereotypes associated with corruption and environmental degradation. To address these representational challenges and improve Nigeria's aesthetic and socio-cultural reputation, strategic engagement with visual arts becomes imperative. The study demonstrates that visual art—through its capacity for creativity, symbolic communication, and environmental transformation—offers viable prospects for rebranding national identity and enhancing environmental aesthetics. It also highlights the challenges inherent in such rebranding efforts. The paper recommends the deliberate utilisation of diverse artistic genres, including painting, sculpture, pottery, textiles, crafts, and clothing design, to foster sustainable environmental development and promote a more favourable and visually appealing image of Nigeria.

Keywords: Visual-Arts, Rebranding, Creativity and Environment.

1.1. Introduction

Art and aesthetics mean different things to different people and have been interpreted in various ways with diverse meanings. It becomes pertinent, therefore, to clarify that the term art could mean any of several arts: visuals, installations, or performance arts. For this study, art implies visual experience or an idea formed with the skilful use of a medium. It also connotes the wilful use of skills in the making of aesthetic objects (Esekpa et al., 2025). In the philosophy of art, aesthetics relates to the perception of beauty and covers both artificial and natural sources of beauty. It expresses the process of producing artworks and sensory appreciation of objects; how persons use, admire and evaluate artworks (Russo, 2022). Hence, aesthetics can occur from different creative vistas of art, particularly the visually expressed arts, which is the angle from which this study was leveraged (Okeke, 2025).

Art, from a historical perspective, has existed for almost as long as mankind and dates from prehistoric times. Art has functioned as a visual medium in different spheres of human affairs, expressing human thoughts and beliefs and promoting the world of nature (Rahman, 2023; Lazzari & Schlesier, 2008). Every work of art is created with its definite aesthetic criterion and belongs to an eclectic realm of cultural experience (Marchenko et al., 2023). Aesthetically, art is a product of human culture. The culture of a people influences their philosophy and kind of art forms, and the nature of aesthetic judgments; as a result, the art products of a people always differ from those of other people (Okodo, 2013).

Art demonstrates man's inventiveness and creative ideas. It also represents what people have produced to satisfy individual and societal needs and to provide an aesthetic experience. Since the prehistoric era, several art forms have been created with their prevailing aesthetics and used to express daily life (Dissanayake, 2015). It is in this sense that different art forms are used to define people's way of life. It also informs the many uses of the arts in our environment to promote the visual culture and creative potential of the people. In effect, art has been used by persons, groups and communities to celebrate unique moments. In every environment, there are a series of visual forms, with each generating its own level of aesthetics while providing the needed attractions (Walters et al., 2021).

Pryshchenko (2021) defines art as the product of creative human activity in which materials are shaped to convey an idea, emotion, or visually interesting form." He went further to say that Art can refer to the visual arts, including painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, decorative arts, crafts, and other visual works that combine materials or forms. The word Art can also be used in a more general sense to encompass other forms of creative activity, such as music, dance, and drama, or even to describe skill in almost any activity, such as "the art of bread making". In this paper, attempts will be made to examine how Nigeria can be re-branded through the visual arts and the challenges of the rebranding campaign.

The term art can also be understood in a broader sense to include creative activities such as music, dance, and drama. It may even refer to mastery or skill in virtually all human activity, as in the art of bread making. In this study, as an effort is made to examine how Nigeria can be rebranded through the visual arts. According to Pandey (2024), art is "the conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colours, forms, words, movements, or other elements in a manner that affects the sense of beauty; especially the production of the beautiful in a graphic or plastic medium, for example, painting and sculpture."

Art is seen as a way to develop skills in the use of art materials through experimentation, manipulation, and practice. It is also a way to enrich critical appreciation of artists, artworks, and aesthetic forms. However, Kind (2022) sees art as a means of using the imagination to express ideas or feelings, particularly in painting, drawing, or sculpture. The foregoing definitions suggest that art emphasises the development of skills, the use of art materials through manipulation, enrichment of critical appreciation of artworks, arrangement of aesthetic elements in the production of artworks, and expression of ideas through imagination. Perhaps the major difficulty in defining art lies in the fact that art implies value-monetary, social, and intellectual. As Appleton (2002) argued, attempts to define art can never fully capture everything that art represents. While artists focus on using materials effectively to communicate their ideas, museum curators and art historians tend to concentrate on identifying and classifying objects such as Greek vases, within specific artistic traditions.

Importantly too, art maybe fluid with yet evolving boundaries. These boundaries shift not only in its overall definition but also within its various sub-categories. Art is not only created by people; it is also defined by the choices individuals and societies make about which objects are regarded as art.

2.1. Research Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative literature review research design, relying exclusively of secondary sources to interrogate the relationship between art, aesthetics, and national rebranding. This design was considered appropriate given the conceptual and interpretative orientation of the inquiry, which may not necessitate primary field work but instead requires critical analysis, comparison, and synthesis of existing scholarly discourse.

3.1. The Concept of Art and Aesthetics

The study of art and aesthetic practice is not entirely a new task and has been in constant contention among art scholars. It has focused more on art forms and aesthetic judgments, and centres on symbolic or dynamic structures within which human experiences are evaluated. Scholars of arts and aesthetics see both concepts as a reflection of nature and culture. The ambiguous nature of both concepts has created several meanings; hence, art critics, writers, and philosophers have all used art and aesthetic concepts in their respective disciplines, with their definitions differing greatly. Art connotes a mastery of a medium or a sense of trained ability. It can be referred to as the developed and effective use of a language to convey meaning with nearness and or depth. Art could also be seen as a process of expressing feelings and thoughts. The thoughts are expressed through the understanding reached with the material, due to its handling, which also assists the people's thinking processes. Quite relevant to the above are the opinions of Sewornu (2022); Pizzolante et al. (2024).

In an analysis of arts and ideas, Hanama and Siswanto (2025), argued that art is a language of images that human beings use to communicate ideas with their fellow humans and the universe. While Alamineh et al. (2023) asserted that art is a record of what people of a particular culture and location have created to satisfy societal needs, Levin and Mamlok (2021) described the nature of art as among the most delicate problems of traditional human culture. Art is a vehicle used for the expression or communication of ideas and emotions, a means of exploring formal elements for their specific sake, and as a representation or mimesis (Osaigbovo & Osaigbovo, 2022). Harris's (2006) opinion of art states that art is used to express emotions and art essentially exists in the intellect of the creator. Similarly, Papavasileiou et al. (2021) assert that art is a visual medium or object used by human beings to express ideas and emotions, and to promote their environment and the natural world.

The idealist views on art as explained by Papavasileiou et al. (2021) attempts to promote imagination or presentation of a mental picture of forms as aesthetic awareness would have them, rather than as they are. This view highlights the subject matter in a work of art in which the conception of beauty or form is stressed, often by a selection of inherent traits or features of that form or beauty.

Art has been a significant component of human activity involving creativity as well as the power of innovation. Ng et al. (2022) described art as an acquired skill in doing or proficiency in performing. It is in this regard that Bormann et al. (2021) described art as the conscious use of skill and creative mind, especially in the making of aesthetic objects. The foregoing descriptions of art are in alignment with the argument of Gong (2021), which states that art is a visual experience or expression of an idea formed with the skilful use of a medium.

A more extensive description of art covers those activities which artists engage in with outcomes that are significant aesthetically. In the opinion of Gombrich (2023), art entails creative activities in the areas of ceramics, textiles, construction, photomontage, paintings, sculpture, installations, performing arts, as well as land art. The classification of art and craft-based arts was explained by Gombrich (2023).

Beyond the aesthetics of artworks bolsters lots of anthropological viewpoints regarding culture. It is pertinent to note, therefore, that culture embodies art. Perhaps, for this reason, Schneider & Wright (2021) infer that every artwork is a product of human culture. They emphasised that art belongs to the broader realm of cultural experience and is made with their aesthetic criterion to correspond with what society considers art. Hence, Phillips (2022) described Art as one of the most regular forms of human expression, achieved by mankind. In affirmation of the above assertion, Szmelter (2013), in an analysis of the values of cultural heritage and the need for a new paradigm regarding its care, reports that since prehistoric times, humans have used diverse art forms with their prevailing aesthetics to express their everyday life.

In this contemporary era, the meaning of art goes beyond the realities of symbols and objectives (objects). The purpose of art today is to create and promote a sense of beauty, communicate ideas, and explore the perception of nature. In affirmation of this assertion, Ikwuemesi et al. (2011), however, stated that despite the enormous progress claimed by contemporary artists regarding the phenomenon of art, people still look for symbols or objects alone in our environment when art is mentioned.

Ikwuemesi et al. (2011) emphasised that Art in this contemporary era is no longer defined along one plausible line because art itself is bursting with diverse interpretations as well as meanings. Such interpretations and meanings could no longer be contained in stationary objects or two-dimensional shapes. For Ikwuemesi et al. (2011), movements, oratories and performances are now being accidentally or creatively rendered to achieve various effects, thereby seeking refuge under the umbrella of art. He stated further that the so-called conceptual art takes everything in its stride, thus declaring that the world of contemporary art today is everything and nothing.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the issue of art was dominated by aesthetic ideas and was seen as an imitation of nature. It was often held that every artwork aims at beauty; hence, any object or thing that wasn't trying to be beautiful couldn't count as art. The idea of art as imitation could be traced to Plato's idea of an ideal republic. This idea was framed by the classical world and its values. Bell, on the other hand, asserted that human responses to certain types of art arose from the impression made by the properties of its form, such as lines, colours, shapes and tones. Bell claimed that such aesthetic responses were involuntary and intuitive, and may or may not relate to the intent of the artist in any way whatsoever, as the properties are linked to content rather than form (Pooke & Newall, 2008).

Art historians and art critics have consistently criticised the issue of art and aesthetics. They often argued that there is no exceptional aesthetic or art object. In their opinion, there is a variety and gamut of cultural forms and shapes which may appear as art. For an object to be perceived as art, there should be an inspirational form for beauty. The form must be appealing and reveal the effect which causes it to partake or be seen as beautiful. Aesthetics in art deals with the enquiry into whether such elements are objectively present in things they appear to qualify or exist only in the intellect of the person (Gombrich, 2023).

The concept of aesthetics, derived from the Greek *aesthetico* meaning "sense of awareness" serves as a framework for evaluating the intrinsic beauty of artworks but also extends to how various forms are perceived and appreciated beyond art. Adopting new aesthetic values or critiquing established standards does not require abandoning the pursuit of visual attractiveness. Aesthetics plays a vital role not only in art appreciation but also in critical reflection on the broader human experiences. This understanding aligns with the philosophical contributions of Kant and Hegel, who continue to influence contemporary aesthetic theory, alongside other thinkers such as Schlegel and Nietzsche. However, modern aesthetic discourse remains largely shaped by classical Western philosophy (Runte & Julia, 2011).

Many modern art movements reject the idea that beauty defines art, arguing that art's identity depends on the perspective or creative process rather than inherent features. Artists like Monet criticized authentic perception. Art's purpose often extends beyond aesthetics to convey social or moral messages, as shown in Goya's dramatic painting of the 1808 Spanish firing squad, which combines artistic skill with powerful commentary (Pooke & Newall, 2008).

Still on the definition of aesthetics, Rader (1976) argued that aesthetics experience is the appreciation of qualities in objects, sounds, and emotions, in producing satisfaction through harmony between individual interest, ability, and perception. This experience is deeper than everyday life and encourages value-based judgments. Keating and Storm (2023) view aesthetics as a natural human

response to objects and events, while Aydin (1986) highlights that it involves satisfaction and lasting appreciation of forms and scenes. Aydin (1986) adds that aesthetics is key to evaluating beauty in artistic expressions like sculpture, music, and dance.

In affirmation, Keating and Storm (2023) stated that aesthetics is a product of human nature, which emanates from human responses to objects, events, and incidents. For Aydin (1986), the responses are always characterised by satisfaction experienced through interest and delight. The scholar hints further that aesthetic value refers to qualities of forms, objects, scenes, as well as events, which sometimes generate sustained interest and are worthy of appreciation. Zhang (2024) also stated that the aesthetic concept is central to the evaluation of beauty, as it is generally linked to artistic compositions and expressions like sculpture, music and dance.

From the foregoing, art and aesthetics can arise in any context and are closely linked to social and cultural activities. Understanding their definitions, which emphasize connections to culture, history and language, is essential to the crux of this paper. It is in this regard that Pooke & Newall, (2008) argued that clarifying the meaning of art is necessary to build a coherent foundation for exploring its relationship with the environment.

3.2. Visual Branding of the Nigerian Environment

Generally, branding is a strategic process of creating a unique identity for a company, product or service. In other words, branding means the use of a name, term, symbol, or design or a combination of these to identify a product (Jain, 2017). The foregoing implies that a brand name is a unique name for the product of a particular manufacturer. Successful products go through what is termed a product life cycle. Nigeria is a brand name that is unique to Nigerians and has, overtime, gone through a political and economic life cycle. Brand acceptance should be earned by Nigerians, and this can be done through regular promotion of the country's image, culture, or identity.

Nigeria is perceived as a corrupt and filthy nation, a notion that is not factual and also needs to be corrected. This can be achieved through rebranding. It is in the light of this those visual arts can be employed in redeeming the corrupt image of Nigeria. It is also against this background that the crux in this paper is the application visual arts as platform for rebranding the Nigerian nation. Art helps to build brand image and long-term value. The brand image and beauty of any nation goes beyond the functional characteristics of individuals. An important function of art in rebranding the environment is to create a welcoming atmosphere. Achieving brand awareness in Nigerians is yet a challenge. This, therefore, means that the people of a society should not only collectively create and maintain arts but also learn to preserve arts that speak volumes about society. The outcome of this is a subtle national rebranding.

3.3. Nigeria's Image and the Need to Rebrand

Rosser 1997 traced branding back to the middle ages when craft and merchant guilds regulated production by requiring producers to mark their goods, ensuring quality control and accountability. Tewari 2025 argued that originally, branding entailed searing flesh with a hot iron to create identifiable scars, a practice initially applied to humans and now primarily to livestock. Overtime, branding evolved into a method of maintaining quality standards.

These historical insights show branding as a longstanding and culturally significant concept, familiar to Nigerians and relevant to national modernization. This raises critical questions about Nigeria's identity: who or what is to be rebranded? The country, its people, or her products. Who should lead the rebranding efforts? The leaders or the citizens?

Nigeria already has a brand identity that requires redefinition. A successful rebranding will depend on Nigerians' recognition and acceptance of this identity and their commitment to change the negative perceptions about Nigeria. Thus, the responsibility for rebranding Nigeria fundamentally lies with its citizens, who should participate actively in reshaping the nation's image.

Nigerians urgently need to participate in changing the country's negative image. Some states have taken a proactive approach, redefining rebranding as improving governance and delivering democratic benefits, but this remains disconnected from the average citizen's experience. The major challenge is getting all government arms to embrace rebranding by reforming public finance to reduce waste and tackle widespread corruption. Ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo's Heart of Africa campaign aimed to boost Nigeria's global image and attract foreign investment but failed due to poor implementation and neglect of local investors, leaving Nigeria's reputation largely unchanged.

Key areas needing rebranding include poor leadership, corruption, power outages, declining education, election fraud, violence, religious intolerance, unjustified salary hikes for legislators, and extortion by security forces. Effective rebranding could showcase Nigeria's positive cultural values and honesty, but this is hindered by corruption by those who are supposed to fight it. Inconsistencies in salary exemplify the problem. While federal workers in Nigeria earn a very low minimum wage, lawmakers grant themselves large, secretive salaries and allowances, unlike transparent wage systems in advanced democracies. This lack of accountability and transparency worsens public distrust and undermines efforts to genuinely reform Nigeria's image.

3.4. The Role of Visual Arts in Rebranding

The role of rebranding cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, Rivkin and Sutherland (2005) contend that a strong brand name fosters familiarity and communicates key information, suggesting that Nigeria's rebranding does not require a name change but rather a transformation of attitudes, cultural values, and behaviors. Through brand extension, leveraging an existing brand to improve social, political, economic, and cultural values is possible, with visual arts playing a central role in the process. Art, especially visual forms like painting, facilitates communication through symbols, enabling positive narratives and moral education that advance cultural identity.

Addressing Nigeria's negative image, including challenges such as kidnapping which contribute to brand rejection, demands significant effort and resources. Engaging youths in visual arts training offers a practical solution for fostering positive self-expression and reshaping and reshaping the nation's image. Art helps build a nation's brand image and long-term value, going beyond functionality to inspire pride nationally and admiration internationally. The foregoing should be a part of strategies for rapid political and economic development due to its deep cultural social significance. As artistic forms evolve with society, collective societal efforts to create and preserve art become important for rebranding Nigeria. Through cultural exchange, art transcends borders, symbolizing pure human creativity. Art is embedded in society, expressing status, ethics, and identity through imagery and inscriptions on various crafts that communicate messages such as "Great People", "Nigeria: A Land of Opportunity", and "Unity in Diversity". Performing arts like drama and music further promote Nigeria's heritage globally and serve as constructive critiques for societal reform, reinforcing art's role in national transformation. According to Ajulu (2001), art and culture in Africa are fundamental to economic empowerment, asserting also that art empowers communities and supports economic emancipation. This affirms the importance of art as a tool for Nigeria's rebranding and broader continental development.

3.5. The Challenges of the Rebranding Campaign

Rebranding inherently involves change, which is by nature dynamic and complex. However, the rebranding campaign in Nigeria faces significant challenges that hinder its success. One major obstacle is the lack of qualified and committed individuals in key positions who can effectively support and

communicate the rebranding message. Many of those currently in power are associated with issues such as corruption, fraud, poor leadership, power outages, and manipulation of election results. These same individuals are often not credible advocates for the rebranding effort. Moreover, the rebranding campaign is not widely taken seriously by Nigerians, thus, posing a risk to its sustainability. Another critical challenge revolves around the clarity and commitment to the rebranding project's implementation. There is a general lack of understanding amongst Nigerians regarding the technical processes and strategic approaches required to execute an effective rebranding campaign. Transparency and accountability in the campaign have also been compromised, as public access to vital records and documents necessary for social and environmental oversight is limited. Without this access, effective public engagement and trust-building become difficult.

4.1. Conclusion

The initial challenge in Nigeria's rebranding effort is to foster widespread awareness among Nigerians. Achieving this requires effective and consistent communication strategies, utilizing various forms of visual and performing arts to enhance societal values and national image. Artistic expressions – both material, such as painting, pottery, sculpture, textiles, clothing and cookery and non-material, including, music, dance, drama, storytelling, and written narratives – offer powerful tools to positively represent Nigeria. Leveraging these cultural assets can help counter negative perceptions and reinforce Nigeria's identity as a valuable and proud nation. It is imperative that Nigerians collectively work to prevent their country's name from becoming synonymous with negative connotations. If the brand "Nigeria" deteriorates into a generic symbol of problem, the nation risks losing ownership of its identity and dignity, thereby eroding a shared sense of national pride and unity.

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