

REPLICATION OF DC AND MARVEL TROPES BY SOME NIGERIAN COMIC ARTISTS: A COMPARATIVE VISUAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Marvel and DC Comics are longstanding companies based in the United States of America. They birthed most of the superheroes known to both the young and old today. Among Marvel's heroes are Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, and the Avengers, while popular DC heroes include Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Robin. These characters not only influence Nigerian children but also create nostalgic memories for them as adults. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, many comic companies have emerged in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the works of some of these artists show strong similarities to DC and Marvel heroes, with some copying them outright, especially the superheroes and villains. This research, therefore, assessed the level of influence Marvel and DC Comics have had on the artistic styles of some Nigerian comic artists, the challenges they face in maintaining originality, and possible ways forward. The data for this research were primarily sourced from the Internet. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. In addition, a comparative method was used to analyse the visual data (photos) collected for the study. The findings of this research aim to reposition the thinking of many emerging comic artists in Nigeria and encourage them to strive for originality in their work.

Keywords: Comic Style, Comic Artist, Influence, DC Comics, Marvel Comics, Nigerian Comic Artist

INTRODUCTION

The company DC Comics, founded in 1937, is a foundational institution in the comic book industry and a significant producer of related media (Pustz, 2012). The company is most notably associated with its celebrated roster of superheroes, including iconic figures like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, who are widely regarded as the "DC Trinity" (Arndt, 2017). These characters' pervasive cultural influence extends far beyond their print origins, as they have been adapted into a wide array of other media, such as movies, television series, and video games. While its superheroes are its most recognised contribution, DC's publications also encompass a variety of other genres, including horror, mystery, and science fiction comics, and the company has expanded its operations to include the publishing of graphic novels and the creation of merchandise and digital content (DiPaolo, 2011).

Marvel Comics, established in 1939 as Timely Comics before being rebranded as Atlas Comics, holds a significant position in the entertainment industry (Howe, 2012). The company solidified its identity in 1961 with the introduction of The Fantastic Four and a range of other superhero narratives that profoundly shaped its creative direction. Marvel's evolution continued with its acquisition by The Walt Disney Company in 2009, further expanding its global reach and media integration. The success of Western comic firms like Marvel has had a significant impact on some artists, especially African artists. Many African artists have been strongly influenced by Western comic styles, such as DC and Marvel, which can make it challenging for Nigerian comic artists to express their ideas without incorporating these styles. This can result in a focus on Western themes and culture, rather than African ones, which may lead to a loss of identity in the world of comic art.

In Nigeria, comic art serves as a significant medium for visual expression, employing a combination of imagery and text within sequential panels to narrate stories (Olowu, 2017). This narrative form frequently integrates elements such as speech balloons, captions, and sound effects to convey information effectively. The deliberate arrangement and scale of these panels are instrumental in guiding the reader's progression through the storyline. Comics are typically created using various drawing and cartooning techniques. The genre encompasses diverse formats, including comic strips, editorial cartoons, gag cartoons, and comic books. More recently, the prominence of graphic novels and serialised comics has grown, alongside a notable surge in the popularity of webcomics with the widespread adoption of personal computing (Adeniyi, 2021).

Whether it is a movie, a comic, or a graphic novel designed in a region, say, Japan, there are regular occurrences that readers anticipate seeing in those works. Those occurrences can be called Clichés. In Hollywood movies, there is always a hero and a villain. While the hero is projected to represent the good, the villain is billed to represent evil. In the end, the good will always triumph. As such, the good is always given uncanny abilities to be able to beat the villain. Among such is that despite firing hundreds of rounds, they (Heroes) rarely reload, withstanding unbelievable amounts of damage and keep fighting. Such feats are also seen in DC comics, Marvel comics, and graphic novels, where characters possess unbelievable powers such as levitation, teleportation, telepathy, and invincibility, among others.

On this note, the paper aims to ascertain the influence of D.C. and Marvel Comic styles on some modern Nigerian Comic Artists.

Purpose of the Study

Given the identified problems, this research aims to:

- a. Evaluate and understand the extent to which Nigerian comic artists replicate or are influenced by the tropes, styles, and characters of DC and Marvel Comics.
- b. Suggest strategies or approaches that can help emerging Nigerian comic artists foster greater originality in their creative output.

Conceptual Review

Comics are a visual medium that uses images and text to convey ideas. They are typically structured as a series of panels with speech balloons, captions, and sound effects. The size and arrangement of the panels influence the narrative pacing. Comics can be drawn or created using photographs. Common formats include comic strips, editorial cartoons, gag cartoons, and comic books. Graphic novels and other bound volumes have become increasingly popular, and online webcomics have proliferated in the 21st century.

The term "comics" originally referred to humorous comic strips in American newspapers. However, it is now used to describe all types of comic books, regardless of whether they are humorous or not. The term "comic book" is also misleading, as they are not always humorous and are not considered regular books. They are actually periodicals. English often uses the original-language terms for comics from different cultures, such as "manga" for Japanese comics and "bandes dessinées" for French-language Franco-Belgian comics.

Narratology, Forms and formats of comics

Comic strips are generally short, multi-panel comics that traditionally most commonly appeared in newspapers. In the US, daily strips have normally occupied a single tier, while Sunday strips have been given multiple tiers. In the early 20th century, daily strips were typically in black-and-white and Sundays were usually in colour and often occupied a full page (Booker, 2014).

Specialized comic periodical formats vary greatly in different cultures. Comic books, primarily in American format, are thin periodicals (Orr, 2008) usually published in colour. European and Japanese comics are frequently serialized in magazines—monthly or weekly in Europe, and usually black-and-white and weekly in Japan. Japanese comics magazines typically run to hundreds of pages (Schodt, 1996).

Book-length comics take different forms in different cultures. European comic albums are most commonly printed in A4-size colour volumes (Grove, 2010). In English-speaking countries, the trade paperback format originating from collected comic books has also been chosen for original material. Otherwise, bound volumes of comics are called graphic novels and are available in various formats. Despite incorporating the term "novel"—a term normally associated with fiction—"graphic novel" also refers to non-fiction and collections of short works (Goldsmith, 2005). Japanese comics are collected in volumes called *tankōbon* following magazine serialisation.

Gag and editorial cartoons usually consist of a single panel, often incorporating a caption or speech balloon. Definitions of comics which emphasise sequence usually exclude gag, editorial, and other single-panel cartoons; they can be included in definitions that emphasise the combination of word and image (Harvey, 2001). Gag cartoons first began to proliferate in broadsheets published in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the term "cartoon" was first used to describe them in 1843 in the British humour magazine *Punch* (Harvey, 2001).

Webcomics are comics that are available on the internet. They can reach large audiences, and new readers usually can access archived instalments. Webcomics can make use of an infinite canvas—meaning they are not constrained by the size or dimensions of a page.

Some consider storyboards and wordless novels to be comics. Film studios, especially in animation, often use sequences of images as guides for film sequences. These storyboards are not intended as an end product and are rarely seen by the public (Rhoades, 2008).

Nigerian Comic Art Experience

In Nigeria, the history of visual narratives and comics dates back to the late 1970s, marked by Wale Adenuga's launch of the widely popular Ikebe Super comic magazine and Super Stories. In December 1976, using savings from his youth service year, Wale Adenuga published the first issue of Ikebe Super. For the first four years, he single-handedly created the characters and crafted the stories and cartoons featured in the magazine. According to Uzoatu (2020), one of the prominent characters was the balding chronic womaniser Papa Ajasco, supported by the hilarious cast of his long-suffering wife Mama Ajasco, his impish son Ajasco, the playboy Boy Alinco, the rustic illiterate Pa Jimoh, the gold-digging lass of promiscuity Miss Pepeye, etc.

From 1975 until 1977, a comic about the superhero Powerman was also published in Nigeria and distributed in limited quantities in the UK. According to Dutton (2016), this comic was an initiative from Pikan Press (or Pican Publications), a Nigerian advertising agency, which, according to one of the artists who worked on the comic, was owned by white people. (Lokiofmidgaard, 2016) In the 1970s, most of the comics sold on the Nigerian market were reprints of British comics with almost only white characters. Pikan Press wanted to develop a comic with black superheroes and heroines, both to fill this gap in the market and because they thought it would be a good way to promote literacy in Nigeria. The executives of Pikan Press approached the British agency Bardon Press Features, who commissioned comic book artists Dave Gibbons and Brian Bollard for the job. Pikan Press did not approach any African artists because they assumed that African comic book artists did not yet exist and would only emerge once comics became popular in Africa (Michael Molcher, 2006).

Pikan Press's initiative to create comics for a Nigerian audience with limited literacy presented several creative challenges for its British artists, including Dave Gibbons and Brian Bollard. The project's pedagogical focus necessitated a simplified format, with a strict editorial mandate limiting each page to a maximum of six numbered panels (Pijnaker, 2018). Gibbons, reflecting on the experience, characterised this approach as "a little bit patronising," suggesting a tension between the educational goals of the publisher and the artists' creative autonomy. This editorial directive highlights the complexities of adapting sequential art for a specific cultural and educational context.

Furthermore, they were instructed in culturally specific imagery and ideas, such as the notion that a fat stomach indicated success and power rather than gluttony or greed and that developing Powerman as a character who would always get the girls, in the end, was not considered sexist in Nigeria.

The creators of Powerman introduced all kinds of new threats to Nigeria, from dinosaurs to robots. Powerman wore a pink bodysuit with leopard knickers. He had superhuman strength and intelligence because he was struck by lightning as a child, and was durable and able to fly. His only weakness was snakebites – the writers assumed these happened a lot in Nigeria and would make the character more relatable. Powerman promoted characteristics such as individualism, devotion to duty and modernisation. (Molcher, 2006).

In recent times, Nigerian comic artists have risen incrementally and are waxing strong in the field of narrative art. One of them is Peter Chizoba Daniel. He is the founder of Pedacomics and the talented artist behind their flagship title New Born: Rise of the Mzeli. **Given this, Artist** Adeniyi Adeniji has this to say, "What I've always loved about this comic is the art. The story isn't bad either, the first issue does a good job of filling the reader in on the fantasy world universe Daniel and the Pedacomics crew create with the title, but the art is quite simply unique, which is saying a lot for an industry where many of the practicing artists often take their inspiration from more westernized art styles or Japanese Manga. And it is this art style that makes reading Newborn a rather pleasant experience. Peter has quite a few of these issues under his belt, and even if most of his work is in a single series, that's more of a plus in my opinion than anything else."

Another one is Sunkanmi Akinboye. He is yet another prolific and highly talented Nigerian artist who has been plying his trade in the Nigerian comic book circuit for several years. Having worked for Litramed Publications, Panoramic Entertainment, Pandora Comics and YouNeek Studios, Adeniji (2018) buttresses that **what he has always liked about Sunkanmi's art is his attention to detail and the fact that he is always willing to do research to ensure that whatever he is working on comes out even better than what it initially looked like.**

Dayo Animashaun is another contemporary Nigerian comic book artist who has been drawing comics for over 10 years. His credits include work he's done for **Litrated**, **Panoramic Comics** and **Comic Bandit Press**.

Ozo Ezeogu is another prolific contemporary Nigerian comic artist. According to **Adeniji (2018)**, *Ozo Ezeogu* is one of those artists no one talks about, but when it comes to the amount of work he's done on titles for *Comic Republic* and on titles like *Eru* and *Hero Generation*, there's no question that he more than deserves to be in the rankings. He is also a talented comic book artist with a distinctive style. His gritty and artistic approach to drawing characters and panels in titles like 'Eru' (which he co-created and writes) sets his work apart from most Nigerian comics. This unique style is a refreshing change and a major reason for his high ranking. Additionally, his contributions to two separate titles demonstrate his consistent productivity.

Again, Chidi Oswald Onwuekwe, a contemporary Nigerian comic artist, exemplifies the integration of academic rigour with creative practice within the burgeoning Nigerian comic industry. Holding a Ph.D. in Communication Art and Design from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Onwuekwe's scholarly background profoundly informs his artistic output (Onwuekwe & Uka, 2023). His recent graphic novel, "Achuzia: Surviving Federal Onslaught" (also referred to as "Achuzia's Exploits in Nigeria-Biafra War"), a comprehensive 140-page visual narrative on the Nigeria-Biafra conflict, serves as a significant demonstration of his capacity to engage with intricate historical themes through the medium of sequential art. This work not only contributes to the historical discourse surrounding the conflict but also showcases the evolving sophistication of graphic storytelling in Nigeria.

Onwuekwe's artistic process involves utilising Manga Studios applications and employing vector and bitmap techniques with layered colouring. This versatile approach allows him to achieve a unique and visually striking style. His previous work, a comic book titled "ENFORCERS," a fiction on Nigerian police, demonstrates his ability to create engaging characters and captivating storylines. As a Nigerian comic artist, Onwuekwe is contributing to a growing and dynamic scene. His innovative works are helping to redefine the possibilities of graphic novels in Nigeria and beyond.

Tropes in Super Hero Comics

DC and Marvel Comics, while often celebrated for their innovation, have also incorporated certain recurring tropes and clichés over the years. These pervasive elements, while occasionally leading to predictability, establish a recognisable framework that facilitates audience engagement with character development and unfolding storylines (Pustz, 2012)

Among the most frequently observed tropes are various character archetypes, such as the inherently destined "Chosen One," the perpetually burdened "Tragic Hero," and the morally ambiguous "Anti-Hero." Plot construction commonly features devices like the "Secret Identity," the obligatory "Origin Story" that explains a character's genesis, and the existential "Doomsday Scenario" threatening ultimate destruction. Visually, these narratives are often defined by distinctive costuming, formidable superpower arsenals, and climactic confrontations (Reynolds, 1992).

Themes such as Good vs. Evil, the Power of Friendship, and Redemption are often explored. While these clichés can become predictable, they also serve as a foundation for storytelling. According to Putz (2012), both DC and Marvel have consistently engaged in the dynamic process of refining and reinterpreting these established tropes, thereby generating innovative and compelling storylines across generations.

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for this study is Mimicry Theory. It is primarily associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, an influential figure in postcolonial studies. In his seminal book, "The Location of Culture" (1994), Bhabha discusses the concept of mimicry as a strategy employed by colonised subjects. Mimicry refers to the act of imitating the coloniser's cultural practices, language, and behaviours, but with a twist that reveals the complexity of power dynamics. This imitation can serve to challenge colonial authority while simultaneously reinforcing it.

In the context of comics and narrative art, from the findings of this work, Nigerian contemporary comic artists seem to have replicated elements of Western comics in their works, with the names of characters and costume colours being the difference.

Methodology

The research method for this work is a descriptive survey research design. The primary source of data was the Internet. Image formats such as Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) and Portable Network Graphics (PNG) photos of some comic strips, characters and comic covers have been selected carefully from DC Comics, Marvel and random samples from Nigerian comics archives on the internet for the study. A comparative analysis was applied for data analysis. It involves the detailed examination of visual contents across two parallel visual data to highlight their unique qualities and interrelationships. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how visual elements are employed to convey meaning, engage audiences, or fulfil specific functions.

Data Presentation

Collected pictures will be analysed based on Hermeneutics, form, content and style, to compare and contrast the styles. Hermeneutics means the interpretation and understanding of the material through analysis of possible meanings and social uses.



Plate 1: “Guardian Prime” (left) compared to DC’s Captain Marvel (right).

Sources: Comic Republic and Pinterest.

Plate 1, the left-hand side is the Guardian Prime, by Nigeria’s Comic Republic. Describing the character, Theblerdgurl (2018) agrees that Guardian Prime is Comic Republic’s flagship character and currently has a six-issue arc based on his storyline. Touted as the “Nigerian Superman”, his powers include flight, super strength, speed, and an exalted sense of justice with a side of unmitigated logic. On the right-hand side is Captain Marvel, otherwise known as “Shazam”. He is the alter-ego of William Joseph "Billy" Batson, a young boy who is granted magical powers by the Wizard by speaking the magic word "SHAZAM!", an acronym of six "immortal elders": Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles, and Mercury, and transforms into a costumed adult superhero with various superpowers derived from specific attributes of the aforementioned elders (Wikipedia, 2024) Shazam has a rival who is almost more powerful than him. He is called the Black Adam. See plate 2. Comparing Plate 2 to Plate 1, it is obvious that the artist who made the guardian prime

Copied Black Adam, and made almost no changes n his character



Plate 2: DC’s Captain Marvel (right).

Sources: wikipedia.org



Plate 3: EXO: the legend of Wale Williams by Sunkanmi Akinboye, Roye Okupe. Source: google.com



Plate 4: Iron man by Sunkanmi Akinboye. Source: google.com

In a disappointing turn of events, Akinboye, though possessing a firm creative prowess, obviously copied the Marvel Iron Man (see plate 4). Tony Stark is a fictional character, widely recognised by his alias Iron Man, who appears in Marvel Comics and is prominently featured in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) (Wikipedia, "Tony Stark (Marvel Cinematic Universe)"). Initially portrayed as a wealthy industrialist, genius inventor, and former playboy, Stark transforms, utilising his technical expertise to create advanced armoured suits to defend Earth (Wikipedia, 2025). Plates 2 and 3 have similar features of a man putting on metal suits that can fly, shoot projectiles and detect rockets from afar. Above all, the two superheroes focus on bringing sanity to their cities by fighting terrorists and gunmen. In plate 3, the oldest son of a world-renowned scientist, Wale Williams--aka tech-savvy superhero EXO--tries to save Lagoon City from a deadly group of emerging extremists (Darkhorse, 2021)

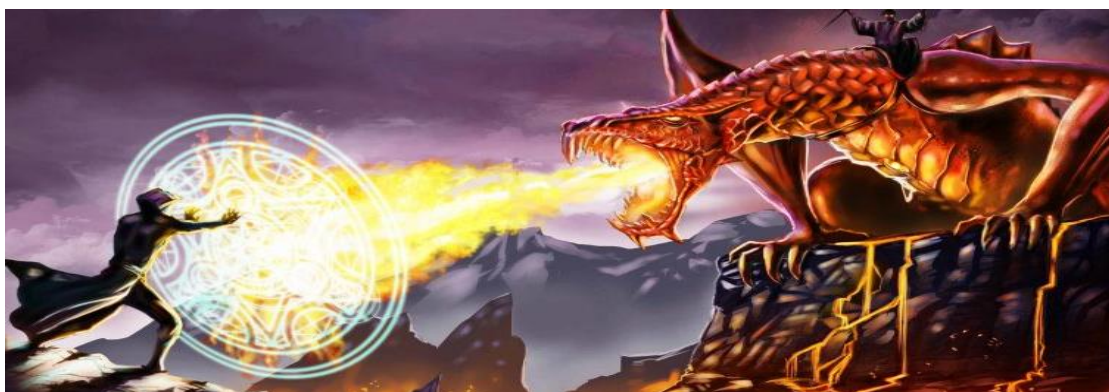


Plate 5: Doctor Strange by Sunkanmi Akinboye. Source: goggle.com

The image here took a texture transformation and retained the object's peculiar Doctor Strange, a fictional superhero in the Marvel Comics universe (Marvel Comics, n.d.). Created by writer-artist Steve Ditko, he first appeared in Strange Tales #110 (Ditko, 1963). Doctor Strange, whose real name is Dr. Stephen Vincent Strange, is a brilliant neurosurgeon

who gains magical abilities after a car accident damages his hands (Ditko, 1963). He becomes the Sorcerer Supreme, defending Earth from magical and mystical threats (Marvel Comics, n.d.).

Some of his notable powers include mastery of magic, teleportation, time manipulation, and casting spells (Ditko, 1963; Marvel Comics, n.d.). He's also known for his iconic cloak and the Eye of Agamotto (Marvel Comics, n.d.). Doctor Strange has been featured in various Marvel movies, including Doctor Strange (2016), Thor: Ragnarok (2017), Avengers: Infinity War (2018), Avengers: Endgame (2019), and Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness (2022), played by Benedict Cumberbatch (Avengers: Endgame, 2019; Doctor Strange, 2016).

The dragon here is peculiar to Eastern culture. If the dragon were replaced with a giant Python, it would have taken an African shape. The dressing and the rings of fire are exactly the features of Marvel's Dr. Strange. See plate 6.



Plate 6: Original Doctor Strange. Source: <https://thathashtagshow.com/marvel/doctor-strange-nexus-of-nightmares-coming-soon-from-marvel-comics/>



Plate 7:Araali by Buganda Tales . Source: <https://pedaentertainment.com/portfolio-item/araali/>



Plate 8: Japanese Samurai Toy. Source: goggle.com/portfolio-item/araali/

Plates 7 and 8 are very similar. They resemble Samurai characters from Japanese culture. The Samurai were members of the warrior class in Japan from the 12th to the 19th centuries (Turnbull, 2006). Known for their martial skills, honour, and discipline, they adhered to a code of conduct known as Bushido (Nitobe, 1905). Samurai warriors were skilled in sword fighting, archery, and hand-to-hand combat, using weapons like the katana and yumi (Friday, 2004). Their legacy continues to influence Japanese culture and is celebrated in literature, film, and art (Yamada, 2015). The work by Buganda was vividly influenced by Eastern culture (Japanese), such that the costumes resemble. Samurai do not wield a stick, but a Katana, a double-edged curved, but extremely sharp battle sword. However, the skin texture of the image in Plate 7 was coloured to depict an African instead.



Plate 9: Heroes by Ezeogu Balox (Left) and X-Men (right), 1997, Source: google.com

This comic by Ezeogu Balox depicts the flying heroes done by Marvel and DC. However, the heroes were mainly of African appearance but retained the costumes and features of X-Men, inset on the right. The setting was highly influenced by the same source. The superhuman strength, intelligence and ability to fly are the clichés found in Marvel comics as heroes. A closer look at the image, one will see the famous Marvel hero Cyclops wearing a kind of Google, and on the other side, there is another hero, wearing a Google, and a similar blue and a touch of yellow. This reveals a lack of originality.



Plate 10: trike Guard Art by Sunkanmi Akinboye / Vortex, Inc. Source: [www.https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/african-storytelling-meets-comic-books-these-new-superheroes-n573391](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/african-storytelling-meets-comic-books-these-new-superheroes-n573391)

Plate 10 is an action scene in Vortex comics where the hero is wielding a thunderbolt. Many Superheroes in DC or Marvel fire Thunderbolt. Chief among them is X-Men's Storm. Her real name is Ororo Munroe, a fictional

superheroine in the X-Men comics (Lee & Kirby, 1963). She's a mutant with the ability to control the weather, using her powers to fight for peace and equality (Claremont & Cockrum, 1975). As one of the X-Men's most prominent members, Storm has played a key role in the team's battles against villains and social injustices (Wein & Kubert, 2005).

The Way Forward

To foster a truly distinctive and impactful Nigerian comic art scene, a conscious and multifaceted approach is required. Firstly, a strong emphasis must be placed on cultivating a unique visual language rooted in Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. This involves actively encouraging artists to draw inspiration from the nation's diverse mythology, folklore, traditional art forms, and everyday life. By integrating these elements into character designs, settings, and storytelling techniques, Nigerian comics can develop an aesthetic that echoes deeply with local audiences and offers a fresh, authentic perspective to the global stage. Furthermore, exploring and experimenting with indigenous artistic sensibilities in areas like linework, colour palettes, and panel layouts can further distinguish Nigerian comics from their Western counterparts.

Secondly, a crucial step forward lies in the creation of original character concepts and narratives that are intrinsically linked to Nigerian experiences. This means moving beyond generic superhero tropes and developing heroes and stories whose powers, motivations, and challenges reflect the unique social, political, and cultural realities of Nigeria. Exploring themes relevant to the Nigerian context, such as social justice, cultural identity, technological advancements within the nation, and reimaged historical narratives, can lead to more engaging and meaningful content for local readers.

Finally, building a robust local comic industry and nurturing a culture of originality through education and collaboration are paramount. This includes supporting Nigerian-owned publishing houses, creating platforms for showcasing local talent, and cultivating a readership that values and demands original Nigerian content. Educational initiatives, such as art school curricula and mentorship programs focused on developing unique concepts and exploring Nigerian visual culture, will equip emerging artists with the necessary tools and perspectives. Fostering a supportive environment for constructive critique and encouraging collaborations between writers, artists, and creators from other artistic disciplines can further cross-pollinate ideas and drive innovation within the Nigerian comic art landscape. By embracing these interconnected strategies, Nigerian comic artists can forge a path towards creating a vibrant, original, and culturally significant artistic movement.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the Marvel and DC Comic styles completely influenced the output of some 21st-century Nigerian comic Artists. From the data presented, artworks made by Nigerian characters bear the direct semblance of Marvel and DC comic counterparts. The research shows that the major inputs of these Nigerian comic artists were mainly on skin texture and colour, retaining the costumes and other features of Marvel and DC styles of work.

The researchers try to encourage Nigerian artists to be original and embrace uniqueness in the comic field. The outcome of this research shows that Nigerian comic Artists can still apply elements of African cultural milieu to depict and communicate the same message, instead of duplicating the character features of Marvel and DC comic characters. Finally, young comic artists should summon the courage to explore and exploit expressively new areas in the comic field and manifest originality in African themes.

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