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Persuasion Strategies of Modes of Signification: A Case of Television Advertisement of Royco Mchuzi Mix

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Abstract:

Studies in signification as a communication strategy have underscored the need to analyze texts on the multi-modal plane, where the representation of reality is a function of a combination of an array of modes of signification. This type of communication poses a challenge to television viewers who are targeted by such modes. Understanding the persuasion strategies employed in advertisements is crucial for both marketers and consumers. This paper focuses on the specific persuasion strategies utilized through modes of signification in television advertisements in Kenya. More specifically, the paper analyzes the persuasive communicative strategies in the television advertisement of Royco Mchuzi mix. The objective is to examine the interpretation of the appealing strategies of the modes of signification using the Multi-modal Discourse Analysis Theory propounded by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). The paper also examines how television viewers perceive these strategies. The findings reveal that persuasion strategies appeal to emotional and rational instincts to attract viewers to commercial products. The intention is to influence the decision of the viewers in the process of making choices. The findings also reveal that television viewers pay little attention to the intended interpretation of the modes of signification employed for communication since they are not familiar with their hidden import.

Keywords: Modes of signification, appealing strategies, communication, multi-modal text and interpretation

1. Introduction

The choice of a language for communication influences people's behavior by convincing them to believe in the idea represented. Zhiganova (2016) posits that a code choice in an advertisement must be emotive and use persuasive techniques. This persuasive technique in television advertisements influences viewers through an appeal to their emotions in order to manipulate their views on the products being advertised. Advertisement is a form of communication that persuades and encourages people to take a particular action. Dyer (1982) describes advertisement as a type of communication because it can merge itself in the field of communication to influence people's decisions, thoughts and feelings. Basically, communication in advertisement is an activity that expresses ideas and feelings by giving some information about the advertised product through interaction with language (Leiss et al., 2013). Language, therefore, as examined in Sapir (2006), plays a vital role in any form of communication. For this reason, language communicates ideas, emotions, and desires through a system of voluntarily produced symbols. This is supported by Dyer (1982), who claims that people communicate by conveying information to influence others through various modes. This paper explores how visual, linguistic, and auditory elements are orchestrated to influence consumer behavior and attitudes towards *Royco mchuzi mix* product.

Notably, advertisers communicate to consumers with the intention of persuading them to like their products using modes of signification. Hence, there is a relationship between advertisement and communication. Firms producing goods cannot advertise without communicating. This fact is supported by Kokemuller (2014), who argues that the relationships between advertisement and communication are in the consumers, message development, method of communication and the service offered. Communication in television advertisements shows that meaning is realized not only through language

but also through the integrated use of various modes of signification (Liu, 2013). These modes represent ideas through the notion of signs, where the elements of the signifier and the signified are brought together. The meaning and a material form are brought together. This paper seeks to identify and interpret, using a multi-modal discourse approach, the appealing strategies of modes of signification in the television advertisement of *Royco mchuzi mix* in Kenya.

Duncan and Sandra (1998) argue that one must know the audience to encode information appropriately. In the context of advertisement, the audience is the viewers of the advertised products who receive the message in the advertisement. Communication then plays a pivotal role in conveying brand messages, promoting products, and persuading consumers to like the advertised products. Communication in television advertisements uses signs, symbols, and pictures to represent ideologies about the advertised products (Richard, Scott & George, 1983), which are intended for the viewers to interpret. Different studies, for instance, Kotler and Keller (2006), assess different facets of communication, such as its effectiveness in advertising campaigns, the impact of speech styles in television advertisements, and the importance of cross-cultural considerations in advertising. The paper seeks to delve deeper into examining how television viewers interact with and make interpretation of these persuasion strategies in television advertisement of *Royco mchuzi mix* in Kenya. Television advertisement serves as a powerful tool for influencing consumer behavior and shaping perceptions of products and brands which this paper seeks to investigate. Within the culinary market, where competition is fierce, and consumer preferences are deeply intertwined with cultural and social values, understanding the persuasion strategies employed in advertisements is crucial for both marketers and consumers. Despite the significance of this area, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific persuasion strategies utilized through modes of signification in television advertisements of *Royco Mchuzi Mix*.

In essence, visual grammar is described in the multi-modal discourse analysis theory as a social resource of a particular group, its explicit and implicit knowledge about this resource, and its uses in the practices of that group (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Consequently, different values and meanings are attached to the dimensions of visual space, which this paper seeks to establish in the television advertisement of *Royco mchuzi mix*. Kress and Van Leeuwen (ibid) argue that meanings and values differ depending on the culture's history of the use of visual space and writing. The universal aspect of meaning lies in semiotic principles and processes. Culture-specific aspects lie in their application over history and specific instances of use. This paper adopts this concept to interpret the appealing strategies of the modes of signification, as applied in the television advertisement of *Royco mchuzi mix* in Kenya. By examining the interplay of signs, symbols, and narratives, this paper seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which the advertisement of *Royco Mchuzi Mix* communicates messages of taste enhancement, culinary authenticity, and domestic bliss. Furthermore, it aims to shed light on the effectiveness of these persuasion strategies in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase intentions within the competitive landscape of food production.

2. Multi-modal Discourse Analysis Theory

This paper adopts the Multi-modal Discourse Analysis Theory propounded by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). This theory emerged in discourse studies in which scholars have expanded the study of language in a wider scope by involving other resources such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, soundtracks, and music. This theory is relevant in engaging the appealing strategies of the modes to make interpretations of the represented ideas. Multi-modal discourse analysis is a development of Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1978), which is known as guidance to analyze one of the multi-modal discourses, which is the verbal mode. Halliday (1978) recognizes three main kinds of semiotic works, which are always performed simultaneously. He terms them as meta-functions, for example, the ideational meta-function, which is the function of creating representations; the interpersonal meta-function, which is the part language plays in creating interactions between writers and readers or speakers and listeners; and the textual meta-function, which brings together the individual bits of representations and interaction into communicative events. These are readdressed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) as representational and communication, creating and maintaining interaction and overall meaning of the complex text tenets. This paper adopts representation and communication tenets for its analysis.

This tenet is adopted to analyze the data with the aim of examining and interpreting the appealing strategies of modes applied in the television advertisement of *Royco Mchuzi mix* in Kenya. According to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), representation is multiple, and understanding the visual as a representation and communication is done in a semiotic fashion, where images are understood in our social semiotic approach. This tenet considers the way the composition of a text can be used to attract the viewer's attention to what is being advertised. Kress and Van Leeuwen (ibid) explain that any mode has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans, which this paper seeks to establish in the responses of the perceptions of the interviewed informants.

3. Literature Review

Television advertisement largely influences the way and manner in which consumers decide to consume the products, as explained by Ibrahim (2008). This study examines the influence of television advertisements on consumers of alcoholic products in Traraba-State, which forms the parameters used to support discussions in this paper. The findings suggest that advertisers should always create awareness concerning their products for more patronage. However, the analysis does not portray the techniques television advertisements use to influence viewers, which is addressed in this paper. Furthermore, the influential aspects of modes of signification are not discussed, which is the focus of this paper.

Additionally, innovative language use in multi-modal discourses, as examined by Kodak (2017), supports this paper in discussing the persuasion of mods of signification. Kodak (ibid) specifies television advertisements and investigates how multi-modes are manipulated in television advertisements to appeal to viewers and motivate them to buy the advertised products. The findings show that television viewers do not receive advertisements passively but are actively involved in

the reading and interpretations of advertisements. The findings further suggest that television advertisements are created to appeal to viewers' sense of appreciation for the products. Additionally, the blending of multi-modes in advertisements works effectively to appeal to viewers. However, the analysis only indicates how language is innovatively used in multiple modes to appeal to viewers. It does not examine the perception of views on the innovatively used language. Moreover, no investigation is done on the types of appeal multi-modes employ to persuade viewers, which this paper seeks to establish.

Consequently, Adeyinka (2015) establishes that recall plays a vital role in advertisement effectiveness by discussing factors that influence recall of television advertisements among viewers in Ibadan, Nigeria. The findings reveal that advertisements that consumers recall most are those which contain memorable lyrics and rhythm (music), clear messages, powerful action, distinct and catchy slogans, beautiful scenes, few shots and good product demonstration. These findings form the basis for discussions in the paper on persuasion of modes of signification. This study recommends that more attention should be given to the advertisement elements that have high memorable value when developing television advertisements. However, the data analyzed does not factor in the perception of television viewers on modes used to craft memorable messages. Further, there is no investigation on the types of appeals derived from the advertisement message which the paper seeks to examine.

4. Material and Methods

This was qualitative research, which adopted a descriptive research design. The data collected was on the appealing strategies of modes of signification in the television advertisement of *Royco Mchuzi mix*. This advertisement is one of the six advertisements purposively sampled for a larger project that yielded data for this paper (Midigo, forthcoming). The data were interpreted using the Multi-modal Discourse Analysis Theory (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The data were collected from 50 informants who were television viewers and shoppers of *Royco Mchuzi mix*, of whom the perception of the appealing strategies of modes of signification was sought. The 50 informants were purposively sampled from the modern market in Migori County, Kenya. It is a cosmopolitan County with a representation of the Kenyan population from different cultures and religions. These 50 informants were a sizeable and controllable number that made the work manageable in terms of time and resources. *Royco Mchuzi mix* television advertisement clip was downloaded from YouTube for content analysis. The clip was presented to the informants for an interview to elicit the needed responses on the perceptions of the appealing strategies of modes used and to elicit primary data for interpretation. Responses from interviews on the *Royco Mchuzi mix* and the multi-modal features from the semiotic modes formed secondary data for content analysis.

Ten interviewees at the modern market in Migori County were further engaged in four focus group discussion sessions within a month. Modes of signification were grouped into eight topics. Each discussion lasted for five minutes and discussed two topics. The discussions were intended to seek the opinion of informants on the use of modes of signification in television advertisement of *Royco mchuzi mix* to complement data collected from the interview sessions. This paper approached the analysis of the collected data from a multi-modal discourse analysis perspective. The analysis was strictly descriptive, and it involved identifying instances of meaning-making derived from representational and compositional meaning in modes of signification in the television advertisement of *Royco mchuzi mix*.

5. Results and Discussion

The study makes references from Belch and Belch (1998) and Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) in categorizing the persuasive strategies of modes of signification. These are rational and emotional appeals. The study seeks to investigate how rational and emotional appeals draw the attention of television viewers and enhance their desire to purchase the advertised product.

5.1. Rational Appeal

Rational appeal involves using logical arguments and reasoning for persuasion. This form of persuasion relies on conveying information and facts to support a particular product (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). As figure 1 below shows, rational appeal manifests through the composition of textual elements and visual images.



Figure 1: Conveying Information through Rational Appeal

Figure 1 presents images of *Royco mchuzi mix* container, a meal in a plate, *Royco mchuzi mix* powder in two bowls, and some poured down on the surface; the graphics are in white colour.

The advertisement was presented to informants, and the benefits of the product were discussed, relayed by the visual elements. The informants were able to notice the benefits highlighted, i.e., the graphic phrase in white color 'naturally sun-dried for richer flavor.' This graphic convinced them that the product is harmless (it is natural). However, the informants were not able to explain the significance of the composition of the visual images.

From the responses of the informants, it is evident that the benefits of the advertised product are narrated by the composition of the modes of signification. This narration is creatively composed to appeal to television viewers. This is evident from the responses of the informants, who indicated that they could buy the product since it is naturally sun-dried, besides the flavor it adds to the food. The benefits are presented in colored graphics and complemented with images of the product and the meal it is used to prepare. The meal beside the *Royco mchuzi mix* container is integrated with sensory elements and positioned at the left, as given information according to Multi-modal Discourse Analysis Theory by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). This is intended to provoke memories of tasty food. The meal is visually presented by arranging the food on the plate creatively, using techniques like garnishing and layering to make it visually appealing. The meal is intended to appeal to the sense of taste. *Royco mchuzi mix* container is positioned on the right side as the new information as envisaged in Multi-modal Discourse Analysis Theory. This container is intended to give an explanation to the consumers that *Royco mchuzi mix* can make their meal have a richer flavor.

Correspondingly, modes of signification employ rational appeal to explain the advantages of the advertised product. The idea is to convince viewers. This finding is in support of the argument in Kotler (1991), which claims that rational appeal is a rationally oriented purchase. Rational appeal is stimulated by directly giving explanations of a product's advantages. Additionally, modes of signification complement each other to create a rational appeal in the advertisement for persuasion. To specify, modes of signification emphasize the functions and benefits consumers' desire in a product, as illustrated in figure 1. For this reason, rational appeal is employed as a technique to provide information that is explicitly and directly related to a product. This is intended to seek viewers' attention more easily. Television viewers, therefore, get attracted to the benefits modes of signification narrate and, hence, show interest in the advertised product. Modes of signification influence viewers towards the product by presenting facts to convince them of the importance of the advertised product.

Additionally, modes of signification are used to create rational appeal through an emphasis on the benefits of the advertised products. The benefits are highlighted by graphics blended with other modes of signification, such as images and color. Color is used to complement other modes of signification to create an effective advertisement that impresses and stimulates the audience. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Marzieh (2013), claiming that colour creates a positive feeling and a good impression in the advertisement to persuade viewers. In addition to the claim made by Marzieh (ibid), rational appeal is used to deliver consumers' interests and desires. Further, rational appeal focuses on the benefits consumers may enjoy, using images besides the graphics for persuasion. In essence, self-benefits are the key propositions given priority in television advertisements, as evident in the *Royco mchuzi mix* advertisement. Modes of signification are, therefore, used to represent the ideologies of benefits, as illustrated in figure 1. Ideally, the benefits are presented in white-colored graphics to appear natural in the eyes of the viewers and signify the rays of the sun. Syntactically, the graphics are structured briefly with adjectives to sound musical in the ear by applying the adjectival phrase "naturally sun-dried." This is derived from the root word nature, signifying the rays from the sun. Suffixes are also applied at a morphological level by using the morpheme "-ly" to show adverbs of manner indicating how the processing was done (naturally).

5.2. Emotional Appeal

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), in the context of multi-modal discourse analysis, refer to emotional appeal as visual elements that can evoke emotional responses in viewers. In this paper, we explain how modes of signification are strategically crafted to elicit desired emotional responses from viewers. The focus is on how modes of signification arouse positive emotions to stimulate the purchasing intention of television viewers.



Figure 2: Conveying Information through Emotional Appeal

Figure 2 shows a male participant advertising *Royco mchuzi mix* by demonstrating how to prepare a meal using the product in a kitchen setup. Ingredients and the container of the *Royco mchuzi mix* are displayed on the cooking surface. When the advertisement was presented to interviewees and informants in the focus group discussion, they could identify the cook, indicating that he was famous. The cook, who is a renowned actor from South Africa, identifies himself with the company of *Royco mchuzi mix* by using its product to prepare his meals. This is intended to make the advertised product

appeal to his fans. He is, therefore, used as a symbol of prestige since he is popular and admired by many due to his societal status. His dress has the *Royco mchuzi mix* logo, which indicates his loyalty to the company and *Royco mchuzi mix* product. The camera zooms and makes a close-up headshot (from the chest to the head) of the cook for psychological manipulation and power relations. This brings him closer to directly addressing television viewers, as explained by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). His social position gives him the authority to be heard by television viewers.

Subsequently, emotional appeal is applied through the persuasive aspects of modes of signification. This is meant to target consumers' psychological, social or symbolic requirements for purchasing decisions through cognition and affection. Cognition and affection controls thinking and feeling (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). According to Allport (1935), cognition is an individual's evaluation towards external stimulation, while affection reflects an individual's internal feelings. The emotional appeal is used in this advertisement as a technique to make the advertised product attractive to television viewers. This makes modes of signification influence consumers' attitudes and emotions towards the product being advertised. The consumers are likely to echo and recognize the advertising messages and, afterwards, change their attitude towards the advertised product. As a result, modes of signification stimulate the purchasing intention of television viewers. This is done by arousing their pleasant emotions.

Similarly, this renowned actor from South Africa is used as a participant to appeal to the emotions of the viewers. He acts as a chef to narrate the usage of *Royco mchuzi mix* by practically cooking in the kitchen to influence the perception of television viewers of the need to purchase the product. Since many television viewers tend to identify with celebrities, copywriters use these celebrities to help present their products more effectively by combining their rich professional knowledge with persuasive appeals in modes of signification. This finding supports the claim in McCracken (1989), which explains in the meaning transfer model that celebrities bring their symbolic meanings to the endorsement process. Advertisers use celebrities to psychologically motivate targeted consumers by creating power to arouse consumers' desire and action to buy their products. Kamins et al. (1989), on the other hand, state that celebrities make advertisements to be more persuasive since customers trust their message. They facilitate the consumers' positive attitude towards advertisements. The narration they make through vectors and actions triggers consumers' inner momentum psychologically. Through celebrities, consumers are likely to echo and recognize the advertising messages, changing their attitude towards the advertised product.

6. Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be concluded that modes of signification link television viewers to their social conditions in life. This is intended to evoke their feelings towards the satisfaction derived from the advertised products. Modes of signification create a rational and emotional appeal to kindle pleasurable feelings in television viewers. As a result, viewers are motivated to buy the advertised product. Therefore, modes of signification persuade television viewers and shape their thoughts towards the advertised product without the input of their interpretation. These modes draw the attention of television viewers and catalyze their desire to purchase the advertised product. Advertisers employ persuasion strategies in modes of signification to deliver their explanation. The intention is to explain why consumers they target should consider buying their products. Consumers are attracted to the advertised product due to persuasion rather than an individual motivation for the product advertised. The persuasion forms the advertising message intended for the television viewers. In essence, we establish in this paper that advertisers use both emotional and rational appeal through modes of signification to influence the purchasing decisions of television viewers. These appealing aspects motivate targeted consumers to try out a new brand in the market to experience the ideal ideas being represented.

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