

Persuasive Communication: Semiotic Analysis of “Share-a-coke” Advertising Campaign

Edafejirhaye I Vincent, Prof. Ajilore Kolade

Abstract— The focus of this paper is the semiotic analysis of coca cola’s “share a coke” advertising campaign. The study used descriptive analysis. This paper is anchored on Individual differences theory and De Saussure’s semiotic model. The campaign recorded a huge success in Nigeria for the following reasons: the personalized nature of the product’s advert (consumers’ names printed on the bottles of drink), social media were used to drive the campaign vigorously and point of sale were lavishly decorated with coca cola logo and various pictures of “share a coke” adverts. The paper therefore; recommends this advertising strategy for all and sundry.

Index Terms— Persuasive communication, semiosis, semiotic analysis, “share a coke”, advertising, Campaign, Social media, Individual differences theory and Advertising campaign.

I. INTRODUCTION

Persuasive communication according to Miller (1980) is any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another or others. Such responses are modified by symbolic transactions (messages) which are sometimes, but not always, linked with coercive force (indirectly coercive) and which appeal to the reason and emotions of the target persuadees. Generally, persuasion refers to such communicative activities that are mediated. Those that are face-to-face are called compliance-gaining Wilson (2002) argues. Persuasive communication can be targeted at:

- Cognition- Persuasion can be used to change individuals’ beliefs about an object or an issue, which includes attributes, interpretation, definition, outcome, and so on.
- Attitude- Persuasion can be used to change individuals’ attitude toward an object or an issue, which refers to the categorization of an object or an issue along an evaluative dimension (from negative to positive).
- Behaviour- Persuasion can be used to change individuals’ behavior, which is the overt actions regarding an object or an issue.

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, suggested that any spoken or written communication intended to persuade contains three key rhetorical elements: logos, the logic and reasoning in the message; ethos, the character, credibility and trustworthiness of the communicator; and pathos, the emotional dimension. The extent to which we draw on each appeal will depend upon the situation. A process description

in a technical manual, a highly informational message, will focus on logos – the message needs to be clear, logical, precise and unambiguous. This kind of message needs little, or no, pathos or ethos.

On the other hand, an advert message meant to persuade consumers to purchase a product may well require a combination of logos, ethos and pathos. To achieve the desired communication outcome, Pratkanis & Aronson (1991) opine that we need to get the right mix of ethos, logos and pathos. Coca cola company has been able to combine the above elements in their various adverts messages over the years especially in their “ share a coke” advertising campaign since 2015 to 2018.

Chandler (2002 P.1) postulates that semiotics is simply the study of signs If semiotics is the study of signs, then it is given that signs are studied to derive a meaning from their understanding. On the other hand, Danesi (2007 p.11) argued that “semiotics can be defined simply as the science of meaning”. In respect of this paper semiotic analysis is simply concerns about analysing the “Share a Coke” campaign advert in order to deduce an understanding that explains its phenomenon success across the globe. There is every need to know a brief history of the coca cola company.

A Brief History Of Coca-Cola Company

The history of Coca-Cola Company as documented by Retroplanet (2008) that, it was first invented by John Stith Pemberton in 1886 as a drink meant to impart good health and stamina. Pemberton was a pharmacist from Columbus, Georgia who originally made a Coca wine called Pemberton’s French wine coca in 1885. When prohibition laws were passed within his country, Pemberton position out to make a new non-alcoholic drink. What he creates was pleasant tasting syrup that could be mixed with carbonated water and served at the soda fountain as a refreshing drink. He first sold this drink for five cents a glass at his establishment Jacob’s pharmacist in Atlanta, Georgia. The average sales for the first eight months average nine glasses a day. Another Atlanta pharmacist and businessman, Asa Griggs Candler bought into Pemberton Company, and in the following year, pemberton sold Candler his remaining interest in the company. Asa Candler purchase exclusive rights to the coca-cola formula in 1891 and by the subsequent year had increased sales ten times over. Sales were going so well that Candler sold his pharmaceutical business and committed himself fully to the success of coca-cola. His brother, John and pemberton former partner frank Robinson joined Candler and together they formed the coca-cola company. The trade mark “coca-cola” was registered in the US patent office on January 31, 1893. Candler constantly grow the business with

persuasive advertising and distributing thousands of free drinks coupons. In 1894 the popular drink was sold in bottles for the first time. Beginning in 1899, independent bottling companies were licensed to bottle the drink, a practice that is still in use today by US soft drink industry. In 1920 to 1926 Robert Woodruff was president and established the foreign department, which in 1930 became a subsidiary of coca-cola known as the coca-cola export corporation. Woodruff was dogged to the expansion of the coca-cola company internationally. Plants had already been built in France, Cuba, Panama, Canada, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam. Woodruff brings out the world-shattering new 6 bottles cartons that made it easier to take bottles of coca-cola home. In 1928, sales of coca cola in bottles go beyond sales at the soda origin for the first time. In 1929 metal top opening coolers were created to dispense bottles of ice-cold coca cola in stores and filling stations. Mechanical soda dispensers made their entrance in 1933 at the Chicago world’s fair when coca cola introduced the dole master dispenser. This was the first soda dispenser that was able to mix the carbonated water and soda syrup together automatically which was then dispensed merely with a pull of the handle. When the world war II broke out Robert woodruff was quoted as saying that he wanted to “see that every man in uniform get a bottle of coca cola for 5cents. Wherever he is and whatever it cost the company”. During the war, 64 bottling plants were constructed as closed as was possible near areas of combat in North Africa, the pacific and Europe. Military personnel consumed more than 5 billion bottles of coca cola during World War II. The coca cola company introduced diet coke in 1982. This was the first extension of the coca cola and coke trademark. In two years time, diet coke was the top selling diet soft drink in the world. In 1985 the formula for coca cola was transformed and the coca cola company gave free a new coke. There was such a negative reaction to this change that the old formula was re-released within 8 months with the name coca cola classic. On July 12, 1985, the new coke was the first soft drink to be consumed in space, having been place in specially designed cans just for the trip on the space competitor. These containers were called the “coca cola space can”. Diet coke became the first diet soft drink consumed in space aboard the space transport discovery in February 1995. This trip marked the first time soda fountain equipment was used in space. Today coca cola produces nearly 450 brands in more than 200 countries and rates as one of the most acknowledgeable brand in the world.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Logos (logical appeal): Persuading through reasoning based on evidence. Logos is about logic. Most communications require that we are logical and ‘rational’. Logos refers to the overall logicity and coherence of the message. Appeals to logos are necessary where facts or processes are of utmost importance especially in advertising. Process descriptions, technical manuals, and business reports in general are heavy on logos. Messages intended to persuade will require a clear argument and reasoning. Argument involves presenting clear claims substantiated by compelling evidence: facts, statistics, examples, expert opinion,

analogies, anecdotes etc.

Ethos (ethical appeal): Persuading through communicator credibility. How we are viewed has a very powerful influence on whether or not we successfully persuade the receiver of the message. If the audience is not convinced by credible personality, they are unlikely to be swayed by our arguments. Ethos is the credibility or trustworthiness that we establish in advertising. It is about demonstrating our personal belief, commitment, competence, passion, sincerity and authority. While the communicator’s ethos is important for most communications, it is especially significant for relational messages designed to establish goodwill and build relationships. Coca cola company has built a credible products, personality and persuasive messages over the years, hence it has powerful influence on consumers of carbonate drinks globally. Credibility is evident in three main ways:

1. The quality of the message. We need to ensure that the message is worthy of believing, recognizes the audience’s needs and be motivational. The message must contains all the necessary facts , clear and understandable, meaningful, logical; avoids careless mistakes, is honest and ethical.

2. The audience’s perception of the persuader or communicator. Persuader identity need to march the message.our He must build up confidence by dresing appropriately; and be acquitted to the subject or hire a professional model to deliver the ad message.

3. Persuader’s reputation as a communicator is independent from the message. This can be shown by referring to appropriate sources of credibility such as rank, goodwill, expertise, image, or common ground (Jefkins, 2000).

Pathos (emotional appeal): Persuading by appealing to audience emotions Pathos is about empathy - thinking about others. It involves appeals to an audience's beliefs, feelings, emotions, desires, and fears. An appeal to pathos causes an audience not just to respond emotionally, but to identify with the communicator's point of view.

There is an emotional dimension in most advertising messages; some may be highly charged, some more neutral. Where logical arguments fail, emotions often have the power to motivate people to respond. Persuader should understanding which emotions to tap, and which to avoid, this is one of the most important aspects of communication strategy. The simplest way to determine the most effective emotional appeal is to analyse the audience’s needs and concerns and concentrate the message in that area, just as coca cola company ads are. What kind of appeals would help create a positive response to public relations or advertising messages?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on Individual differences theory and De Saussure’s semiotic model.

Individual Differences Theory

The proponent of this theory, Melvin De Fleur proposes two major assumptions: 1.Members of the mass media audience are made up of different people (in terms of

psychographic characteristics) 2. Members of the mass media audience will react to the same message in different ways as a result of Psychographic characteristics differences. Hence Anaeto et al (2008) point out the differences in perception and cognition play a dominant role in individual psychological processes such as responding to advertising by selective retention, selective attention, selective perception, and selective exposure; which helps individual decide what to pay attention to, sees or perceives from the “share a coke” advertising. This theory justifies the personalized strategy of the “share a coke” advert campaign.

De Saussure’s Semiotic Model

De Saussure (1965) proposed a semiotic model in form of dyad comprised of a signifier and a signified. The signifier may consist of actual objects such as background or lines, while the signified is a concept in someone’s mind. The distinction between the signifier and the signified can also be expressed in terms of form and content (Chandler, 2002). A particular signifier/signified combination does not exist in isolation but needs to be combined with other signs in order to enable a definite understanding of what is the signifier and what is signified. In summary, de Saussure (1965) proposes a “structural” semiotic model. A coke logo sign exemplifies these ideas - the sign includes white letters spelling the name coca cola, and red background as signifiers, whereas the consumers obtains the signified in the form of the obligation to enjoy drinking the coke to cool down thirst.

A concept that applies to semiotics was introduced by Levi-Strauss (1983) under the name of “bricolage.” “Bricolage” represent the process of creation by using materials that are not necessarily best adapted to the task in hand. Instead “bricolage” constitutes an eclectic dialogue among available materials, thus suggesting adaptive courses of action, whereby the “bricoleur” (the initiator of the “bricolage”) might even modify his/her initial aim. With respect to semiotics, bricolage is the process of interpreting symbols and signs using available cultural aspects. If the required aspects are not available, people adjust or modify existing ones (Floch, 2001).

In order to construct new arrangements, the “bricoleur” work with signs, by adopting existing signifieds as signifiers and by choosing from limited possibilities. A “bricoleur” in other words is some “tinkers” by actually using tools not meant for their designed purpose but only as seems fit. Furthermore, the “bricoleur” always includes parts of his/her self when facing the choice of what material to call up for modification, reinterpretation and adjustment to his/her way of thinking. In the context of interpretation, semantic nihilism cannot exist if the bricoleur/interpreter properly adopts and accepts the role of creating new, individually-understood and individually-initiated meanings of one or more signs as it is in coca cola “share a coke” advertising campaign.

‘Share a Coke’: The Advertising Campaign Analysis

Advertising is aimed at persuading consumers to patronize a product or service. Coca-Cola Company is doing her best to persuade customers to consume more of its flagship brand Coca Cola. This semiotic analysis is only possible because of the vehicle of advertising campaign. What does advertising campaign means, who is the audience that the Coca-Cola

Company was trying to persuade and finally, where are these audiences located. These questions are answered in this paper through the analysis of the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign.

O’Guinn., Allen, Semenik, & Schinbaum, (2015 p.9) described advertising campaign as “a series of coordinated advertisements that communicate a reasonably cohesive and integrated theme about a brand” . There are three critical factors for the success of the campaign that can be deduced from the description of advertising campaign above.

Firstly, **Persuasive appeal through integrated media** The ‘Share a Coke’ campaign identified the vast number of integrated promotional tools that was used to communicate and persuade more people to drink Coca Cola.

Secondly, **the persuasive message targeted a defined consumers:** The message carried by the integrated promotional tools was directed at a defined targeted audience or customers. The defined targeted customers that the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign were focusing the message of the brand on can be classified as the household consumers. There are several categories of consumers, which are also within the Coca Cola target audience. Some of these include members of business organizations (the product is sold in office and eateries across the world and at other business events). Members of a trade channel (retail outlets such as supermarkets, provision stores, restruants and bars). Others are government offices, schools and health centres. All the examples given here were targeted with different campaigns that are not the focus of this analysis. Household consumers’ category was the focus of the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign. This the largest consumer category in the world. The large number meant more people can be influenced within this category for the benefit of the brand. O’Guinn (2015) highlighted the significance of the household consumer category declaring:

Household consumers are the most conspicuous audience in that most mass media `advertising is directed at them...There are about 115 million households in the United ` States and approximately 316 million household consumers who spend trillion of dollars a year on retail goods and service (O’Guinn, 2015 p.12).

When these figures and extrapolated to the world, the enormity of the market becomes clearer. These is the reason when the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign targeted this category of consumers through the media that reaches them best, the mass media. The campaign targeted the specific audience that it wanted to reach with its persuasive messages using the appropriate media. It is no surprise then that the campaign succeed. Within the household consumer category is the highly profitable teenagers and young people who does not require parental input to make the type of buying decision required for other goods. While effective integrated communication through the mass media and persuasive message through integrated brand promotional tools are an absolute necessity for the success of the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign. The two factors above will be completely useless and ineffective if the audience geography is wrong. This brings the analysis to the third of the key success factors, that is, global geographical coverage.

Thirdly, **Global geographical coverage:** The ‘Share a Coke’ campaign used effective integrated communication to

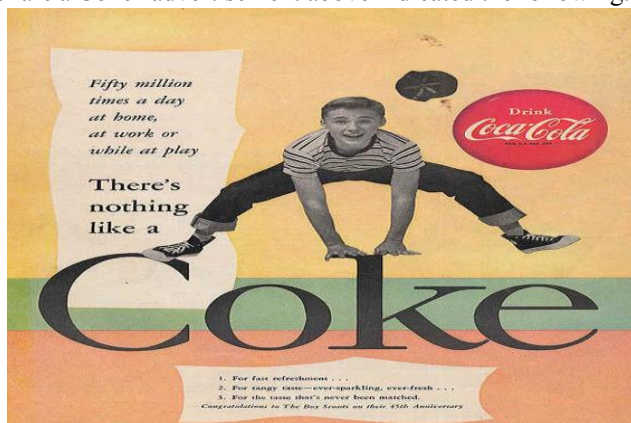
persuade consumer around the world meaning global geographical coverage. There are different geographical locations in advertising coverage and there are the local, regional, national, international and finally global advertising. O’Guinn (2015 p.13) postulates that audiences need to be broken down by geographical location because of cultural differences that often accompany geographical location, as only a limited number of advertisement can be effective for all consumers worldwide. This is so because culture is one of the most important influence of consumer buying behaviour. A simple example is the type of clothing that may be consider appropriate in say the United State may be seen as offensive in the Middle East and as such the advert may not get the permission from the authorities to even air. The ‘Share a Coke’ campaign deployed a global advertisement campaign.

O’Guinn et al., (2015) described global advertising as “advertising that is used worldwide with only minor changes in the visual and message content” . The difference between the global and international advertising campaign is that while the global requires minor changes in the presentation; in the case of international advertising there are completely different adverts of the same brand in different nations adapting the message, content and visuals to match the local cultural requirements. The ‘Share a Coke’ campaign is a global advert with minor changes in its presentation. The campaign started in Australia, its global ‘citizenship’ was tested in Prague in the next section of the analysis.

The ‘Share a Coke’ Campaign: The Semiotic Analysis

This paper approached the semiotic analysis from different perspective to try and draw meaning from the nonverbal communication expressed in the advertising campaign. Chandler (2002 p.1) postulates that semiotics is simply the study of signs. If semiotics is the study of signs, symbols and meaning, then it is given that signs and symbols are studied to derive a meaning from their understanding. On the other hand, Danesi (2007 p. 11) argued that “semiotics can be defined simply as the science of meaning”. In respect of this paper semiotic analysis is simply concerns about analysing the samples of “Share a Coke” advert campaign pictures in order to deduce an understanding the campaign and explain its phenomenon success across the globe.

The semiotic analysis of this research applied the Saussure semiotic analysis model. The model is made up of two parts, the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’. The signifier is the form the sign takes and the signified is the concept, which it refers (Chandler, 2002, p.18). The signifier in the three samples of “Share a Coke” advertisement above indicated the following:

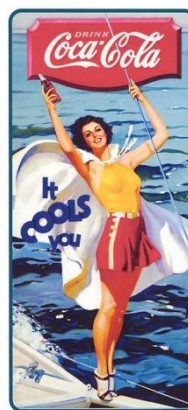


The Signifier

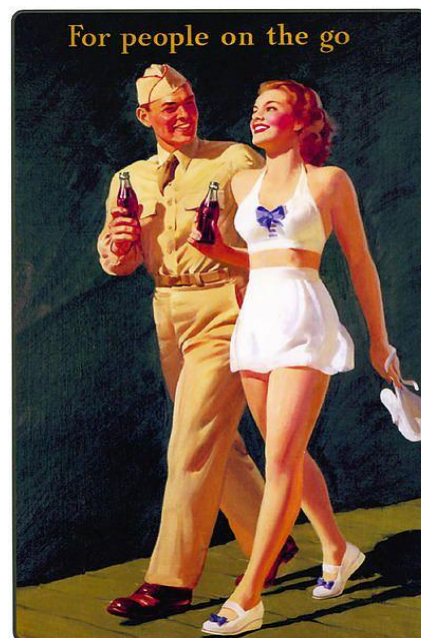
- 1.A young man jumping and a hand touching coke name and logo of Coca cola on the background.



2. A couple smiling and drinking coca cola drink together.



- 3.A young beautiful smiling woman displaying her personalized bottle of Coke.



4. Energetic couple sipping personalized bottle of coke while on the go

The Signified

1. The jumping young man expresses youth, health, strength and joyfulness. The hand touching coke symbol expresses the cause of the young man’s health, strength and joyfulness.
2. The couple expresses love, joy and happiness derived

from sharing coke drink together com

3. The young woman smiling displaying her personalized bottle of Coke expresses the fact that the Coke is responsible for her happiness.

4. The energetic couple drink the coke on the go shows that energy is derived from the coke drink

The semiotic analysis of the "Share a Coke" confirmed a reoccurring concept throughout this paper. Youthfulness, high energy, joyfulness, love, sharing and of course love. From the various radio jingles, television and movie theatre videos to Internet and outdoor billboards. All these concepts were always in full display. Coca-Cola Company was able to project the universality of youth in their various activities while at the same time attaching the Coca Cola drink as an ever-constant partner in these activities. The Coca-Cola Company through the "Share a Coke" campaign was able to create what Mike Hall and Doug Maclay () described as "involvement" and Ernest Dichter called "motivation" on two levels. The involvement or motivation simply stresses the important of symbol and metaphor in communication (as cited in Clifton, 2010, p.135). Clifton (2010) argued that a careful look at any selection of successful campaigns usually reveals that there is an element of persuasive communication that is not based just on information or salience. The other element that is not information or salience is what the semiotic analysis of the advertisement above about the "Share a Coke" campaign that made it so successful.

IV. WHY THE 'SHARE A COKE' CAMPAIGN IS SO SUCCESSFUL

Evan Tarver, (2018) observes with satisfaction that Coca-Cola Company is one of the largest multinational corporations in the world and has had many successful marketing campaigns. According to him, the company's "Share a Coke" campaign is one of the best-performing [marketing campaigns](#) in Coca-Cola's history. It trades out the company's iconic logo on 20-ounce bottles for 250 of the country's most popular names. Consumers are encouraged to find bottles with names that hold a personal meaning for them and to share them with friends and family. Additionally, consumers can share their experiences and stories on social media with the hashtag #ShareaCoke. The following are the top four reasons why the "Share a Coke" campaign is so successful according to Tarver (2018).

1. Consumers Are Prompted to Create Online Media Content

Coca-Cola has generated massive amounts of [social media](#) content by specifically targeting consumers who use social media and asking them to share photos and stories. The company gives full creative control and brand ownership to these consumers, prompting people to feel like they aren't promoting the company so much as they are starting their own social media conversations.



Fig.1 share a coke through social media platform

Online conversations have become organic, driven by consumers rather than the brand itself. This has integrated the Coca-Cola Company into the homes of its consumers, becoming part of their lifestyles.

The online results of the campaign have been a massive success. Within the first year, more than 500,000 photos were shared using the #ShareaCoke hashtag, consumers created over six million virtual Coke bottles, and Coca-Cola gained roughly 25 million Facebook followers.

2. The Brand Connects With Consumers on a Personal Level

For teens and [millennials](#), personalization is not just a fad, but a way of life. These consumers place a high value on self-expression, individual storytelling and staying connected with friends. The "Share a Coke" campaign gives them the ability to do all of these things while unknowingly promoting the Coca-Cola brand. For example, when a consumer shares a name-branded Coke bottle with her mother, she feels as if she is honoring her mother rather than promoting the Coke brand itself.



Fig. 2 Coca cola Personalised brand for share a coke advertising campaign 2015-2018.

Source: Evan Tarver (2018)

While 250 common names were used in the 2014 U.S. campaign, over 300 names were used in Nigeria; although not everyone's name is common, which could have decreased the effectiveness of the campaign. Knowing this, Coca-Cola created a 500-stop, cross-country "Share a Coke" tour that allowed fans to customize a mini can for themselves and a second one for someone special. The company also provided alternative preprinted options with monikers such as "bestie," "star" or "BFF" for those whose names weren't included.

3. Powerful Call to Action

The main slogan in the campaign, "Share a Coke," is a great call-to-action phrase. This slogan prompts consumers to buy a physical Coke to share and also share their Coca-Cola stories online. The slogan is catchy and easy to remember, making the call to action "sticky" and a constant reminder to consumers. Further, it is reported that Coca-Cola purposefully used the "Share a Coke" phrase to encourage consumers to not only have a Coke themselves but also to give one to someone else.



Fig. 3 Share a coke with Chris, Ojo, Tolu, Edefe ... campaign.

V. CONCLUSION

Even though the marketing campaign as successful as "Share a Coke" was, it has to be constantly updated to maintain interest, and the company has successfully done that. In 2015, they increased the personal names printed on bottles to 1,000 and opened an [ecommerce](#) shop where consumers could order personalized bottles. Song lyrics were added to packaging, allowing fans to share music with their friends instead of names. The music continued in 2017 as shareacoke.com added a feature for consumers to hear a short jingle with their name in it. And in 2018, Coke made their now iconic name labels removable stickers that could be stuck on clothing, cell phones, notebooks, etc., and might reveal a prize on the bottle underneath. When sales started to stagnate, Coca-Cola rose to the challenge and rolled out one of the most successful marketing campaigns in the company's history. What started in Australia in 2011 is now a worldwide marketing strategy that shows no signs of stopping.

REFERENCES

[1] Anaeto, S.G; Onabajo, O.S and Osifeso, J.B (2008). Models and theories of communication. USA. African Renaissance books Inc.
 [2] Armstrong, G., & Cunningham, M. H. (2012). Principles of marketing. Pearson Australia.
 [3] Audience watch (2013) Recency theory. at <http://audiencewatch.neilson.com> on .

[4] Bucherati, E. (2013). Tune in to Coca-Cola's Radio History. The Coca-Cola Company. Retrieved from <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/history/tbt-tune-into-coca-colas-history>
 [5] Chandler, D. (2002). Semiotics: The Basics. Abingdon: Routledge.
 Clifton, R. (2010). The Economist: Brands and Branding. London: Profile Books Limited.
 [6] Cheek, R.G, Kunz, M.B and Osborne, P (2001) "Web advertising: A look at types and costs" [http:// www.sbaer.uca.edu](http://www.sbaer.uca.edu).
 [7] Clow, K.E and Baack.D (2007) Integrated advertising, promotion and marketing communications (Third edition) New Jersey; Pearson Education Inc
 [8] Coca-Cola Company (2016). About the Company. Data retrieved from <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/Coca-Cola-sponsorships>.
 [9] Danesi, M. (2007). The Quest for Meaning: A Guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice. London: University of Toronto Press.
 [10] Davis, M. (2005). More than a Name: An Introduction to Branding. Switzerland: AVA Publishing SA.
 [11] De Mooij, M. (2014). Global Marketing and Advertising: Understanding Cultural Paradoxes, (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
 [12] De Saussure, F. (1965) Course in general linguistics, W. Baskin (transl.), New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
 [13] Eco, U. (1976) A theory of semiotics, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
 [14] Floch, J. (2001) Visual identities, London, UK: Continuum. 7
 [15] Donovan, R. & Henley, N. (2010). Principles and Practice of Social Marketing: An International Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 [16] Esiri, J.M; Ajilore, K; Oloyede, D.B & Ogunbamigbe K.O (2014). Determinants of Media Selection Among Advertising Practitioners In Nigeria. Singaporean journal of business economics, and management studies vol.2, no.6.
 [17] Evan, T. (2018). Why the share a coke campaign is so successful. <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marketingcampaign>.
 [18] Freeman, L.(1997) Media buying & planning: Added theories drive need for client solutions: Ephron Turner studies helping to redefine how TV fits in the media package.
 [19] Ibidunni, O.S. (2010). Marketing Research for Excellence. Lagos: Concept Publications.
 [20] Jefkins, F (2000). Advertising. Essex. Pearson Education Ltd.
 [21] O'Guinn, T.C., Allen, C.T., Semenik, R.J., & Schinbaum, A.C. (2015). Advertising and Integrated Brand Promotion, (7th ed.). Stamford: Cengage Learning.
 [22] Sailesh, S. (2005). Management of Public relations and Communication. New Delhi. Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd.
 [23] Severin, W.D and Tannkard, J.W Jr. (2010). Communication Theories, Origin, Methods and Uses in the Mass Media. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc. pp. 211-229.