

## A Semiotic Deconstruction of Symbols in Print Advertising Contents: Implications for Consumers Purchase Decisions in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Anchored on the expositional exploits of Pierce (1958), Barthes (1973), de Saussure (1984), Fiske (1989) and Akpan (1996) in the field of semiotics, this study examined first, the communicative values of symbols in print advertisements copies of selected Nigerian products; second, the relative influence of symbolic interpretations on consumers purchase decisions as well as the implications of such influence on product marketing. Adopting twin methodological approaches of qualitative content analysis and the Survey, the study investigated the Signifier-Signified relationships and interpretation in the Iconic, Linguistic (referential, emotive and conative) and Ideological values of elements of the studied product. Findings from the study revealed the dominance of synchronic convergence in the signifier-signified values of symbols found in the studied advertisements, and also, a relatively insignificant diachronic relationship between the symbolic values of the advertisements and consumers claim of influence on product purchase decisions. Findings also showed strong ideological influence in consumers' interpretation of copy values vis-a-vis their purchase decisions. The study concluded that semiological inputs in advertising and marketing are extant and relevant to contemporary promotional strategies. The study made a strong recommendation for the inclusion of semiotic appraisals as a component of advertising effectiveness test during campaigns.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Advertising, Signifier, Signified, Symbols, Ideology, Marketing

### 1.0 Introduction

Studies in advertising are multidimensional. While some focus on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the message variable in advertising copies, others focus on the structure, the media, the context and even the individual elements that make up the format of the advertising copy.

In all of these dimensions, there is always a common point of interest. This interest is reflected in definitions pertaining to the ways that usage of sign systems of copies translates ideas or images about products and services into ideas or meanings in social relationships; a deconstruction. By this, one is implying that most of the studies attempt to interpret the extent to which advertisement copies or forms help readers, listeners and viewers locate the values of products in their need hierarchies or in various aspects of their social interactions.

One scholar that has approached the study of advertisements from this perspective is Gillian Dyer. The study showed how the sign systems - in their iconic, indexical and symbolic forms - negotiate meanings about relations. In demonstrating this, Dyer (1982, p.119) analyzed an advertisement copy about a gold bracelet, to show how the 'signifiers' of the copy interpret the 'signified' images of relationships. She identified a profile of a man and a woman, a woman, a wedding ring, a gold bracelet and a linguistic caption proclaiming "the strongest links are forged in gold". All these serve as *signifiers* of the copy. The *signified*, Dyer concluded, could be found in the objective level of meaning technically referred to as the denotation. At this level therefore, the signifiers, particularly the gold bracelet mean that the relationship between the man and the woman are fold-like. That is so say strong, long lasting and therefore a valuable investment.

Going beyond denotation into connotation, Dyer suggests that 'gold' is also seen as the basis of the 'link' between the man and the woman. Thus the gold bracelet creates a context of sensuous relationships which ordinarily extemporizes itself in the fold. In this direction, the object, gold, lacks meaning on its own until people validate what it means to them and their relations.

In a related study by Roland Barthes (1971), as cited by Woolacott (1982, p.99), a Panzani product advertisement inserted into the natural disposition of scene *en abyme* was analyzed. In it Barthes identified a number of signifiers, which were described thus:

the signs of marketing, the string-bag stocked with Panzani tins, spaghetti and pepper and tomato, with the commutation of freshness of product and household used; to the colour tints of the poster (yellow, green and red) which signify *Italianese*, reinforced by the Italian announcer of the Italian name, *Panzani*; to the assembly of different objectives which suggest the idea of a whole culinary service and in which Panzani tins are equated with the natural products surrounding them; and finally to the aesthetic signified of still life.

From this analysis, Barthes is said to have identified three sets of messages in the Panzani copy - a message from the linguistic lines, a coded iconic message (picture) and an uncoded iconic message (a contextual interpretation of the copy not really obvious in the advertisement).

By the discovery of the various forms of messages in Barthes' analysis, it is implied that the interpretation of meaning is not limited to the individual elements of the copy but to the interaction, juxtaposition of the differences, and the banalities of the other components of the copy. Similarly too, making meaning from the symbol requires corresponding interactions and/or negotiations of meaning through the code systems and conventions validated by the experiences or uses of the users. For the print copy of an advertisement, the copy elements constitute part of the code of sign systems.

Studying the persuasive and informative values of advertising copy elements of select magazine and cosmetic advertisements, Ekpo (1997, p.38-63) analyzed nine products and copies and found out that the elements of headline, body text, pictures and slogans were generally used to capture attention and inform about the products' benefits and uses. Among the persuasive elements of cosmetic advertisements were the use of testimonial devices and the repetition of brand names, values and benefits.

Ekpo's study in a way appears to support the understanding about this study's focus on the sign systems as a context for the interaction of codes that produce mutually exclusive meanings. Like Barthes (1971), Dyer (1982) and Ekpo (1997), this work recognizes the place of signs in the meaning creation and generation processes of advertisements.

Akpan (1993), in a study of the semiotic features of Nigerian print advertisements found out that there exist pragmatic, syntactic and semantic values, and also ideological interpretations in advertisements. The study generally concluded that Nigerian print advertisements are significant signifiers of the signified. However, the implications on consumers' purchase decisions were not stressed. In buttressing this observation, the copy elements were found in Akpan's work to identify the advertiser's images adequately; to rework the cultural values of the Nigerian society into ideological appeals of love, glamour, nature, professionalism, romance and luxurious lifestyles; and to rely extensively on the 'simple commonsense' level of meaning generation or understanding otherwise referred to as denotation.

Generally inquiries relating to perceived myths and realities about sign systems and their meanings are located in studies on the communicativeness of symbols and this study is not distanced, like the others, from the dimensions of interests already existing in the world of semiotics. Therefore, some linguistic modes would be introduced into the analysis of symbols in the studied advertisement copies.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Communication and Semiology: Sign, Signal, Symbol**

In everyday usage, a *sign* is any mark that reveals what is normally concealed. In principle, signs are not associated to voluntary communication, but may serve as accessories when they reinforce or modify the knowledge that the receiver may have of either the communicated contents or the communicating intention.

According to Baylon and Mignot (1996) two types of signs exist, signal and symbol. The first is the *signal* which is any sign carrying information that would have been deliberately produced by a sender anticipating that the meaning would be understood as originally intended by the receiver. Within this context, *signals* manifest as phonic, graphic or visual and by nature voluntary, conventional and explicit.

In linguistics, the word 'sign' has since the time of Saussure, the celebrated Swiss linguist, acquired very distinctive meaning. It is a complex unity comprising of *signal* and *meaning*. For signal, Saussure (1984, p.99,

144) proposed the term *signifier* and for meaning, *signified*. Therefore a signified (the conceptual content of the sign) is what it is, because a signifier (the physical, acoustic or visual representation) corresponds to it and vice versa. Meaning is therefore negotiated and agreed upon through the union of the signifier and the signified. This is where the audience needs to properly deconstruct such symbols and signs to make meaning.

Having noted these, it must be mentioned that certain signs are arbitrary in the sense that their understanding in a given society is dependent upon usage and convention. This presupposes that there is no direct analogy between the signifier and the signified. Convention and usage consequently determine the accepted signification or perceived (intended) meaning. This further presupposes that there are non-arbitrary and therefore *motivated* signs. Pictures are good examples of motivated signs and communication through them, as advertisers know very well, is likely to be more effective since the signification is embedded in the picture itself. Nevertheless, the major limitation of pictures is the fact that they can only transmit the meaning they 'resemble'. However, this limitation does not seem to be a major handicap for advertisers who have myriad ways of conveying information. One of such ways is through the use of another type of sign, the *symbol*.

In the percept of Saussure (1984, p.101), symbols are signal which are not entirely arbitrary in nature. For example, the weighing scale of the blind mantra is a symbol of the abstract idea of justice because metaphorically, justice weighs actions. Therefore there is a natural rudimentary link between the signifier and the signified. For some scholars, however, the symbol is an arbitrary sign. While not delving into the polemics of arbitrariness of symbols, rather the interests would converge on the meaning of signs in their forms, within given social contexts; and the cultural study of signs as communication tools. This is what underscores the subject matter of semiology or semiotics.

To Saussure, semiology is the science which studies the life of signs within a society. Barthes, his counterpart in Dubois et al (1973, p.434) sees it instead as a branch of linguistics since every semiological system has something to do with language. In other words as Baylon and Mignot (1996) observed, Saussure approaches give priority to language and society, the social function of the sign, and to communication; while Barthes is more interested in signification, the modes of meaning. There could at a point be some form convergence between signals and meanings for communication to be regarded as effective.

Consequently, it is argued, that other types of communication originate from semiology (or semiotics). These include animal communication (zoosemiotics); machine communication (cybernetics) and communication by living cells (bionics). Nevertheless, these subjects are off the limits of this study which pertains itself to the nature, forms and functions of social signs.

Semiotics as a term is mostly used by Anglophone specialists of signs who modeled their works after the American philosopher and semiotician, Charles S. Peirce (1931-58). In Peirce's terminology as found in Fiske (1989, p.51), the symbol, as opposed to the *icon* and the *index*, is the notation of a relationship, constant in any given culture, between two elements. Thus while the icon reproduces by transference, (an example being a portrait which is the reproduction on canvass of a sensorial experience), the index makes meaning or reasoning possible by inference (as in the case of smoke being an index of fire), and the symbol proceeds by the establishment of a convention. This is the line of thought to be identified with in this study. The symbol as Fiske (1989, p.51) agrees therefore, signifies according to "convention agreement or rule"; and hence makes meaning by virtue of an arbitrary habit of usage.

Meaning, in this case, as Akpan (1993, p.47) explains is found not in the symbol but in the user of the symbol who, cognizant of the attributed interpretation to or emotional dimension of the symbol in his culture, understands what is being referred to. By so doing, the receiver "gets the message", where the message comprising signals, is decoded by the receiver and understood as intended. When this happens, communication would have taken place.

## 2.2 Signs and Symbols in Advertising

The essence of communication is the sharing and understanding of message meanings. This is only possible if there is an understanding between the senders and receivers of their backgrounds, otherwise known as *field of experience*. Dunn et al (1990) made us understand that signs transmitted through words or even pictures have many meanings, the most common being *denotative, connotative and contextual*. The denotation of a sign is the reality that involves the literal association of signs with what they represent. The connotation of a sign pertains to secondary/subjective realities designated by the sign, as well as eventual (favorable or unfavorable) evaluations,

which are associated with the primary or secondary realities, depending on the society. The contextual meaning (mental, visual or oral), is influenced by the context in which the advertisement appears, and more often than not, the factors determining the understanding of the sender's message are rooted in signs and symbols.

Advertisers capture the interest of (potential) customers or maintain the loyalty of those who already patronize their products by the use of symbols which through time sometimes (mentally) represent what they are supposed to signify. This is why they have come to be referred to as *visual identifying symbols*. The most common of them as stated in Dunn et al (1990, p.286) are trademarks, brand names, trade names, logotypes, licensed names, trade characters, slogans and headlines

A trademark, according Dunn et al (1990, p.286) is any word, name or symbol, device or combination thereof adopted and used by a manufacturer or merchant to identify the origin of a product and distinguish it from products manufactured or sold by significant competitors. For products, a trademark is called a product mark, and for services, it is a service mark. For people separated from the manufacturer in order to certify the geographical origin of the product, it is called a certification mark, and for members of a distinguishing or particular organization, it is referred to as a collective mark. A trademark is legally protected and by inference, it protects manufacturers from those who would unlawfully use their products. It also protects the public from fraudsters.

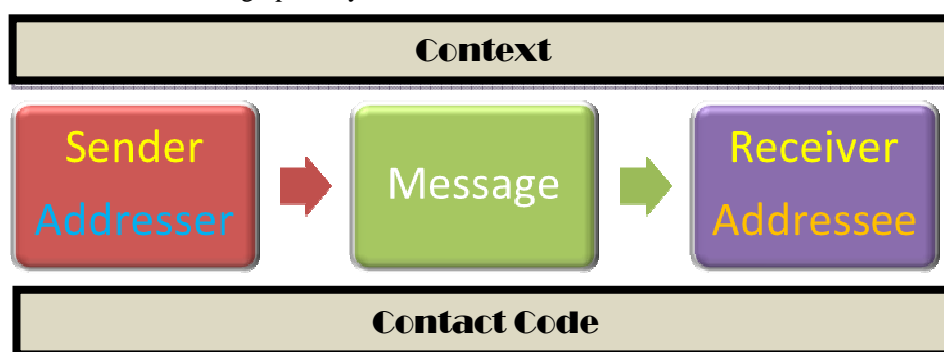
Brand name refers to the marketing equivalent of a registered trademark. It is basically used to identify and distinguish a product from what the competition is offering. It sets aside a product from among its brand offerings. The logotype/logo is a graphic or pictorial design often paired with a brand name while the trade name refers to the name under which a company does business.

In advertising, licensed name implies the legal use of a renowned company's name and sometimes logo to sell products or services of sometimes other manufacturers. For trade characters, they are generally, specific people, things or animals adopted to build product, company or brand recognition. A slogan is seen by Akpan (1996, p.162) as a clear, distinctive, easy to remember phrase, symbolic to a product quality, benefit or promise. Headlines on its part are visual (copy) elements which are meant to introduce the product, capture the attention of prospects and encourage them to take the action advertisers hope for. Some headlines incorporate the company logo or slogan; and they vary from punchy, soporific, emotional and intimidating, to coercive, 'loud' or funny. In most case, body text/copy is an elaboration of the theme in the headline.

Every culture has specific meanings attributed to colours and their combinations. Colours have many functions and in advertising, they serve to attract, give an air of reality to a product, emphasize symbols and generally aid in the overall appreciation of advertisement in question. Finally, the entire advertisement, comprising the logical arrangement of all the elements that have been mentioned above form the layout. Together, they knit the message, present a balanced picture and constitute the entire symbol package of the advertisement in order to achieve maximum communication potential.

### 2.3 Types of Advertising: the Linguistic Dimension

Dubois et al (1973, p.99, 216) discussing the views of Jakobson (1961) and Baylon and Fabre (1990, p.75) conceived of verbal communication as a canonical process involving a sender, a context, a message, a contact, a code and a receiver. Presented graphically, we have this:



*Fig. 1: A model of communication process*

The sender sends a message which is dependent on a context to be operational. The receiver must be capable of understanding this context. The communication process also requires a common code for both parties who are at the same yet intertwined times the encoder and decoder. Finally both the sender and the receiver must be in a position to establish a physical or psychological connection if they are to engage themselves in the communication encounter. This analysis of verbal communication is functionalist in the sense that language as a system is used not only to communicate but also because it serves other functions.

For this paper, the functions of language as elaborated upon by Guiraud (1971, p.10-13), Dubois et al (1973, p.216-227), Mounin (1971, p.70), Fiske (1989, p.36-39) and Baylon and Mignot (1996, p.77-79) were adopted. These are:

- a. **Referential/Cognitive/Denotative/Informative Function:** In this case, the referent of the message is considered the most important element.
- b. **Emotive/Expressive Function:** The message in this case is centered on the communicator who exteriorizes himself by making his opinions about the subject known, with a view to influence the receiver.
- c. **Conative/Injunctive/Imperative/Rhetorical/Directive Function:** The emphasis in the message is on the receiver whom the sender expects will react as desired.
- d. **Phatic Function:** This function revolves around the medium used to communicate, to really ensure its effectiveness. It creates social relationships in immediate communication situations and is thus channel oriented.
- e. **Aesthetic/Poetic Function** The message itself is the focal point in this case, and is presented in more appealing and distinctive way.
- f. **Meta-lingual Function:** This (abstract) function is used every time the code used becomes the object of the message transmitted. It could be an unfamiliar word.

These functions are not mutually exclusive and often superimpose on one another. Three of them – referential, meta-lingual and aesthetic – are related more to the content of the message; while the other three – emotive, conative and phatic – pertain more to the relationship existing between the sender and the receiver. By analogy therefore, these constitutive functions of language can inspire certain types of advertising.

## 2.4 Advertising typology: The Linguistic Dimension

### Referential Advertising

Ideas in this case, are expressed in relation to the nature of the referent. It is purely informative and this espouses the content of the message without committing either the sender or the receiver. The information provided must be real, and this implies that it must be objective, observable and verifiable. This type of advertising is likened to a testimonial and in most cases the brand manufacturers are simply content with the display of their product, and their signature.

### Meta-lingual Advertising

In meta-lingual context, the code or language used by the sender becomes the object of description or the object of the copy. The main objective is to define the meaning of signs that are likely to be misunderstood by the receiver. Emphasizing words in inverted commas, for instance, comes in handy to explain this phenomenon.

### Aesthetic Advertising

This kind of advertising revolves around the message which is in turn given additional value to its meaning. Stylistic devices are normally used to reinforce meaning sharing. With this kind of advertising, it is not strange to find advertisers creatively crafting graphic representations in order to make their points.

### Emotive Advertising

The message in the advertisement revolves around the communicator or sender, who attempts to make his character or personality known. It is affective and subjective given that the communicator's attitudes in relation to the referent are part of the advertisement. It is therefore the communicator that the consumer is buying and the provision of salient information concerning the referent is not the focus. With this type of advertising, reality is manipulated so that the receiver only sees what the copy projects.

### Conative Advertising

In this type of advertising, the sender need not share the expected receiver's reaction, but he tasks himself to research and pay much attention to the targeted receiver's field of experience before sending out the final copy. The referential content of the message more often than not in this case, eclipse itself when it comes into contact with the signs that are specifically employed to motivate the receiver. The motivation could be achieved in a number of ways, and one of such is the (subtle) sensitization of the receiver's subconscious affective reactions.

### Phatic Advertising

It is concerned with regrouping all the efforts made by the communicator of the message, not only to establish a contact with the receiver but also to maintain it once it has been realized. Messages built around the Shakespearean style "lend me your ears" are good examples. Products in this category are presented in other redundant but suggestive ways to show the receiver that the said products can be used in other creative situations even if the basic underlying message from the advertiser remains the same throughout the variations of the advertisements.

## 2.5 Theoretical Framework

This work hedges itself on the advertising communication and symbols conceptual planks.

From the platform of advertising, Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance theory applies. This is obvious from the purpose of advertisers to inform or persuade consumers (real and potential) to respond favourably towards the appeals of the products or services advertised. The theory itself is a product of Leon Festinger's contribution to postulates about cognitive consistencies.

In McQuail and Windhal's (1981, p.22) explanation of the theory of cognitive dissonance, decisions, choices and new information have potentials for creating feelings of inconsistency regarded as dissonance for individuals. Such dissonance seen as psychologically uncomfortable helps to motivate the concerned individual to seek information which supports the choices that have been made about advertised products or services. The import of this theory is that copy elements in print advertisements have the potentials to generate the much needed supportive information required by readers/consumers to bring consonance to their decisions or choices already created by dissonance in cognition; that is amplifying meanings from inherent initial distortions.

From the symbols plank, Peirce's and Saussure's theories of signs becomes the basis for our understanding of the way symbols work. According to Fiske (1982, p.48-51), Peirce and Saussure attempted to explain in different ways how signs convey meaning. Peirce produced three categories of the sign and its objects, or its referents.

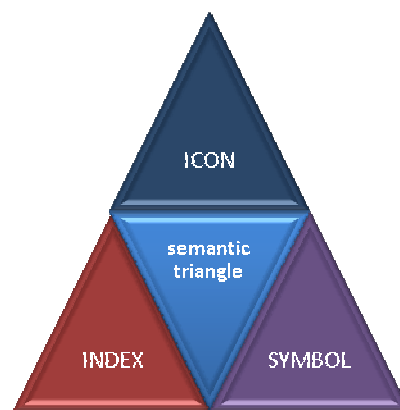


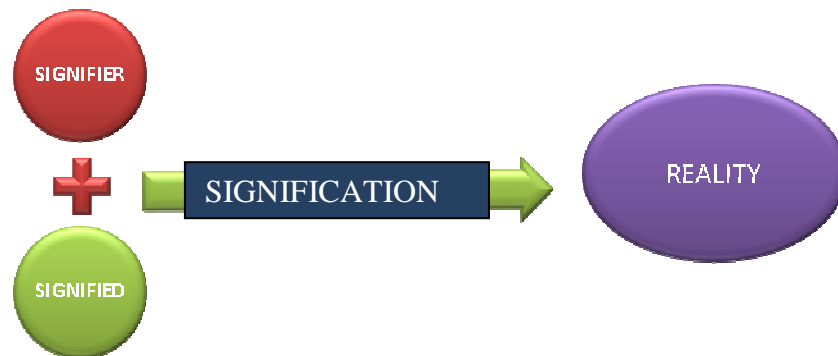
Fig 2: Graphical representation of the semantic triangle by Peirce

In an icon, the sign resembles its object in some way, for it may look or sound like it. With an index, there is a direct link between the sign and its objects, the two actually being connected. When it comes to the symbol, there is no connection between the sign and the object, because a symbol communicates only because people agree that it shall stand for what it does. A picture is an icon, smoke is an index and the word, is a symbol.

Saussure on his part was concerned with symbols rather than indexes. He attempted to distinguish between the physical forms of the sign which he calls *signifier*, from the mental form of the sign, which he calls the *signified*.

For both scholars in the world of semiotics – the science of sign systems is central to any understanding of messages, and consequently, meanings.

In this paper, the focal point of the sign is recognized and applied, and the position of the symbol is identified as that whose meanings have to be validated and accepted as such.



*Fig. 3: A graphic representation of Saussure's idea of sign relationship and interpretation.*

### 3.0 Research Questions

This study is mainly concerned with how advertisement copies in select Nigerian magazines communicate themes, USPs and ideological appeals using symbols. Primary amongst the pertinent considerations imperative to sharpen the research focus were:

- a. The extent to which the symbols in print advertisement copies communicate the unique selling propositions of what is advertised, and
- b. The extent to which the symbols in advertisement copies validate the common ideological values of Nigerian societies.

The study sought to address the above concerns by posing the following research questions:

- i. What types of symbols were favoured by advertisers in Nigeria who use the print media?
- ii. How did symbols used enhance the main unique selling propositions of the products and services in the advertisement copies studied?
- iii. How communicative are the symbols adopted by the advertisers?
- iv. What ideological appeals do the symbols in the studied ad copies present to the public?

### 4.0 Methodology

The content analysis method was used. A total of ten (10) select advertisements drawn from the select magazine copies formed the sample for the study. Five content categories were generated and they include linguistic values, semantic values, pragmatic values, syntactic values and ideological appeals.

The units of analysis comprised the headline, sub-headline, body text, illustration, pictures, logotypes and slogans. Data collected were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively while findings were discussed based on the four research questions raised in the study.

### 5.0 Discussion of Findings

#### **Question 1: What types of symbols are favoured by advertisers who use the print media?**

Symbols, we have explained are 'signs' that stand for something else, and are conventionally accepted as such. They are used extensively by advertisers to sell products, services and concepts, among other goals. Bearing in mind the selling points of the subject under consideration, as well as the fact that some symbols lend themselves to better interpretations and understanding than others, especially when put alongside what is being advertised in a specific context, advertisers capitalize greatly on the potentials of such symbols to meet their marketing objectives.

Four main types of symbols were identified, isolated and appraised in the advertisements selected in this study, and they are *words, objects, pictures and illustrations*. This finding suggest that words employed in advertisements are not limited to their denotations; that objects are not limited to their immediate use alone (if they even have one) since they connote other things; and that the pictures and illustrations express something more or different from what they represent at first glance. Findings show that of the ten (10) ad copies studied, five (5) of them had illustrations, eight (8) used pictures, and all of them employed words (see table 5.1). In sum, symbols in their various forms as used by advertisers to influence the public and effect purchases on their part, were deemed communicative even though the extent of their effectiveness could only be assumed, against a recognizable setting incorporating familiar values that the public relate to.

It is the communicative essence in the copy elements that have nudged advertisers on to keep employing these symbols, expecting a corresponding consumer decision as dictated by the identified linguistic functions.

### **Questions 2: How did symbols used enhance the main unique selling propositions of the products and services in the advertisement copies studied?**

The unique selling proposition (USP) is a facet of advertising strategy. Whatever is being advertised is extolled or positioned in a way that makes the consumer believe the product is the best in the market. All the advertised products and services presented and analyzed in this study had specific distinguishing qualities bestowed on them by their advertisers. This was to make them superior or equal to the existing competition in the market place (Table 5.2).

In a way, products and services as colourized by specific symbols in the select ads stood a better chance of being noticed by the public, and consequently being patronized if, when advertised, they are supplemented or qualified by (outstanding) selling points that seemingly gave them an edge over the existing competition. The products and services analyzed all had selling values presented in various symbolic colourations to make the customer cognize, perceive and conceive need(s) which would be fulfilled or an objective accomplishment.

### **Question 3: How communicative are the symbols adopted by the advertisers?**

When it comes to products and services, advertisers employ all the acceptable, disposable and accessible means to persuade consumers (prospective of actual) and ensure patronage of their products or services by specifying benefits. One of the tools of communication adopted in advertising is the symbol, but for it to be effective, it must communicate the intentions, visions and messages of the advertiser in relation to what is being 'sold'. The symbols chosen must conform to the social norms of those concerned, and must also be capable of being assimilated positively into the psyche of the consumers.

From the data presented and analyzed in table 5.3.1, the symbols adopted relate to a large extent, to the promises made about the advertised products and services and are seen as pragmatically positive. The only advertisement which seemed not to make a strong impact as far as the juxtaposition of USP and picture was concerned was the *Peak Instant Milk Powder* copy. However, the body text, which incidentally also served as the basis for the selling points, testifies to what the product was communicating or symbolizing as seen in table 5.3.2 where it is the only ad in the discourse that utilized both the connotative and denotative semiotic values of textual matters. Others were polarized as either connotative or denotative. The symbols in the copies analyzed contributed, in or submission, towards the interpretation and understanding of the main or sub-themes in the advertisements.

### **Question 4: What ideological appeals do symbols in the ad copies present to the public?**

In advertising, many things get sold and sometimes unsold to the public. Among the things sold are ideological appeals which are incorporated to reflect either the contemporary society as it is, or the underlying intentions of the advertiser. From the copies analyzed and presented in table 5.4, six (6) major appeals were appraised and they are those relating to tradition, nature, love/romance, professionalism, gender stereotypes and comfort/wealth. To a large extent, these portrayals of common and contemporary ideological values show the level of responsiveness of advertising creators towards the audience needs, interests and contexts.

Specifically, issues of nature, love/romance and to a lesser extent gender/stereotype which are perceivably alien to the Nigerian cultural mien had little appeals (from 2-4) as compared to the comfort/wealth appeal, traditional and professionalism. Expectedly, products for everyday usage were advertised using symbols that throw up traditional, wealth/comfort and professional appeals; while those with occasional usage had ideological values far from the settings/context which would have meaning deconstruction.



## 6.0 Conclusion

Advertising, as we have come to appreciate it, is a very dynamic and important means of communication in any society. Advertisers have at their disposal various ways of transmitting messages, selling goods and services, propagating ideologies and establishing behaviours. To these ends however, they cannot simply be content with throwing pictures in the minds of the public. They must pay great attention to the symbols they wish to utilize in order to meet their basic marketing objectives, without offending or confusing the prospective or actual customers, and also, without harming instead of valorizing their products and services.

Based on the data collated, the criteria for analyses and the findings made, the study concluded that to a significant extent, the symbols in the copies selected communicated the main themes intended, as well as the selling values of the products and services advertised and as such consumers could easily make meanings out from them which are intended to influence patronage and engender consumer purchase decisions. It was also deduced that through advertisements, cultural values pertinent to or inherent in the societies targeted played significant roles in advertises and consumers decision making processes.

Advertisers, it is stressed, must not take their audiences for granted because advertisements, depending on how they have been crafted, have the power to reflect, revolutionize, influence, offend, attract and magnetize, among other concerns.

## 7.0 Recommendations/Implications

From on the analyses, findings and observations of the advertisements studied the following recommendations which have far reaching implication for consumer purchase decisions, are proposed.

First, in their quest to make consumer goods more pleasant or satisfactory, and to turn corporate services into consumer-friendly necessities, advertisers must strive to positively affect the minds of the target audiences by creating a balance in their choice of words and symbols. This will go long way to project the unique selling values of products, without intentionally encouraging indifference on the part of the prospective or actual consumers.

Second, instant communication is something that gives advertising a competent edge over other fields and bearing this in mind, it is recommended that advertisers should be careful about the undertones of their messages or the unconscious evocations of their images. This is because symbols lend themselves to a multiplicity of interpretations, and if the copies incorporating them are not well presented, reactions from the audiences concerned may turn out to be very unpleasant.

Third, ethnic diversities provide inspiration, and to benefit from this aspect, advertisers, when crafting their advertisements, should endeavour to highlight the cultural backgrounds of their prospects while blending them appropriately with the main themes of their copies. This is to ensure maximum profitable effects and results.

Fourth, through advertisements, practitioners should make communication the focal point of their missions, and to this end, they should equally valorize their customers where possible, in their advertisements.

Finally, symbols can be the subject of many speculative bizarre or nonsensical, interpretations and in order to minimize these negative aspects, advertisers must invest sufficiently in research pertaining to the study and understanding of the contextual meanings associated with the symbols they intend to use in particular settings. In other words, practitioners should think globally about symbols but act locally because every society has its distinctive values which must be respected. For this reason, the inclusion of semiotic appraisals as a component of advertising effectiveness test during campaigns is a *sine qua non*.

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**Appendix 1:**

**Table 5.1: Breakdown of the copy elements in the select advertisement copies**

|              | Advertiser                 | Product/Service            | Headline | Sub-headline | Body text | Illustration | Picture  | Logo     | Slogan   |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1            | VITAFOAM                   | VITA FOAM                  | +        | +            | +         | --           | +        | +        | +        |
| 2            | NIGERITE LIMITED           | NIGERITE ACOUSTILE CEILING | +        | +            | +         | +            | +        | +        | +        |
| 3            | PEARS                      | PEARS BABY PRODUCT         | +        | +            | +         | +            | +        | +        | +        |
| 4            | PEAK                       | PEAK INSTANT MILK POWDER   | +        | +            | +         | --           | +        | +        | +        |
| 5            | CADBURY NIGERIA PLC        | CADBURY                    | +        | --           | +         | +            | +        | +        | +        |
| 6            | LEGEND                     | LEGEND STOUT               | +        | --           | +         | --           | +        | +        | +        |
| 7            | ADC AIRLINES               | ADC AIRLINES               | +        | --           | +         | +            | --       | +        | +        |
| 8            | CHEVRON                    | LEKKI CONSERVATION CENTRE  | +        | +            | +         | +            | --       | +        | +        |
| 9            | CLOSE-UP                   | CLOSE-UP TOOTHPASTE        | +        | +            | +         | --           | +        | +        | +        |
| 10           | FSB INTERNATIONAL BANK PLC | FSB INTERNATIONAL BANK PLC | +        | --           | +         | --           | +        | +        | +        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> |                            |                            | <b>8</b> | <b>6</b>     | <b>10</b> | <b>5</b>     | <b>8</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>8</b> |

**Table 5.2: Breakdown of product/service advertised and their unique selling values**

| PRODUCT/SERVICES |                            | SELLING POINTS AS AMPLIFIED BY THE ADS SYMBOLS EMPLOYED  |
|------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1                | VITA-FOAM                  | a) It takes good care of the baby by comforting, soothing and encouraging it.  |
| 2                | NIGERITE ACOUSTILE CEILING | a) It promises beauty, luxury and distinction that others would admire.  |
| 3                | PEARS BABY PRODUCTS        | a) They keep the baby smelling sweet and fresh.<br>b) They make the baby clean, cool and comfortable.  |
| 4                | PEAK INSTANT MILK POWDER   | c) They smoothen and soothe the baby's skin.<br>a) It enhances cereals, lightens beverages and makes meals dairy pleasures.<br>b) It comes in a refill sachet<br>c) It gives peak strength and health.   |
| 5                | CADBURY                    | a) Their products are manufactured with care<br>b) They invest in the fitness and education of the youth.<br>c) They give consistent optimum returns to their shareholders.<br>d) They promise a good future to those who associates themselves with them. |
| 6                | LEGEND                     | a) It is more satisfying than other liquor of product class.<br>b) It lights up your life.   |
| 7                | ADC AIRLINES               | a) They are safe, smooth, cozy and comfortable.<br>b) They are on time.  |
| 8                | LEKKI CONSERVATION CENTRE  | a) The advertiser promises paradise.   |
| 9                | CLOSE-UP TOOTHPASTE        | a) It promises flashing white teeth.<br>b) It guarantees fresh sweet breath.   |
| 10               | FSB INTERNATIONAL BANK PLC | a) It encourages innovation, creativity and pragmatism.<br>b) It is presented as customer-friendly.  |

**Table 5.3.1: Breakdown of the pragmatic values in the select advertisement copies**

| PRODUCT/SERVICE |                            | PRAGMATIC VALUE |          |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------|
|                 |                            | POSITIVE        | NEGATIVE |
| 1               | VITA FOAM                  | +               | --       |
| 2               | NIGERITE ACOUSTILE CEILING | +               | --       |
| 3               | PEARS BABY PRODUCT         | +               | --       |
| 4               | PEAK INSTANT MILK POWDER   | +               | +        |
| 5               | CADBURY                    | +               | --       |
| 6               | LEGEND STOUT               | +               | --       |
| 7               | ADC AIRLINES               | +               | --       |
| 8               | LEKKI CONSERVATION CENTRE  | +               | --       |
| 9               | CLOSE-UP TOOTHPASTE        | +               | --       |
| 10              | FSB INTERNATIONAL BANK PLC | +               | --       |
| TOTAL           |                            | 9               | 1        |

**Table 5.3.2: Breakdown of the semantic values in the select advertisement copies**

| PRODUCT/SERVICE |                            | SEMANTIC VALUES |            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-----------------|------------|
|                 |                            | CONNOTATION     | DENOTATION |
| 1               | VITA FOAM                  | +               | --         |
| 2               | NIGERITE ACOUSTILE CEILING | --              | +          |
| 3               | PEARS BABY PRODUCT         | +               | --         |
| 4               | PEAK INSTANT MILK POWDER   | +               | +          |
| 5               | CADBURY                    | +               | --         |
| 6               | LEGEND STOUT               | +               | --         |
| 7               | ADC AIRLINES               | +               | --         |
| 8               | LEKKI CONSERVATION CENTRE  | +               | --         |
| 9               | CLOSE-UP TOOTHPASTE        | +               | --         |
| 10              | FSB INTERNATIONAL BANK PLC | --              | +          |
| TOTAL           |                            | 8               | 3          |

**Table 5.4: Breakdown of the ideological appeals in the select advertisement copies**

| ADVERTISEMENT COPY |                            | IDEOLOGICAL APPEALS |        |              |                 |                    |                 |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
|                    |                            | TRADITION           | NATURE | LOVE/ROMANCE | PROFESSIONALISM | GENDER/ STEREOTYPE | COMFORT/ WEALTH |
| 1                  | VITA FOAM                  | +                   | --     | --           | --              | --                 | +               |
| 2                  | NIGERITE ACOUSTILE CEILING | --                  | --     | --           | +               | --                 | +               |
| 3                  | PEARS BABY PRODUCT         | +                   | --     | --           | +               | --                 | +               |
| 4                  | PEAK INSTANT MILK POWDER   | +                   | --     | --           | --              | +                  | --              |
| 5                  | CADBURY                    | +                   | --     | --           | +               | +                  | +               |
| 6                  | LEGEND STOUT               | +                   | --     | +            | +               | +                  | --              |
| 7                  | ADC AIRLINES               | --                  | --     | --           | +               | --                 | +               |
| 8                  | LEKKI CONSERVATION CENTRE  | +                   | +      | --           | +               | --                 | +               |
| 9                  | CLOSE-UP TOOTHPASTE        | +                   | --     | +            | +               | +                  | --              |
| 10                 | FSB INTERNATIONAL BANK PLC | --                  | +      | --           | +               | --                 | --              |
| TOTAL              |                            | 7                   | 2      | 2            | 8               | 4                  | 6               |

**Appendix II: Images of Ad copies studied**



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