

Images of HIV and Aids in the School Environment in Kisumu City, Kenya**Kodak Benard Otieno***

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Abstract: The fight against HIV and AIDS in Kenya has been achieved through the concerted efforts of government, the media, medical practitioners, religious groups and the general public. Efforts to combat and manage the impacts of HIV and AIDS include the development of Information, Education and Communication materials targeted at adolescents in school. The Kenya government developed media campaign materials that appeared as advertisements in the local daily newspapers. This paper describes the images of HIV and AIDS in advertisements in the print media as seen through the eyes of school-going adolescents. It explains the multimodal nature of the newspaper advertisements. It entails a Critical Discourse Analysis of the images of HIV and AIDS in the print media. This paper provides an interactive sociolinguistic model through which the contradictory discourses of HIV and AIDS might be understood, drawing from Goffman's insights on stigma management and the presentation of the self in social interactions. Findings reveal that ambience, body language, colour, gaze, gesture, graphics and imagery work in complementarity to craft the overall images of HIV and AIDS. There is general awareness of HIV and AIDS among the youth and there is need to escalate the fight by highlighting the effects of HIV infection. This paper is significant to educationists and public health practitioners who will be able to assess the impact of their efforts in the war against HIV and AIDS.

Keywords: Adolescents, advertisement, discourse, imagery, multimodalities.

INTRODUCTION

Willis [1] defines pandemics as widespread epidemics, and he defines epidemics as diseases affecting the greatest number of people in communities at a certain period and moving from place to place. The spread of HIV/AIDS fits these definitions as it has swept around the world and in recent years has centered on African countries, particularly Sub-Sahara Africa. The United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) recognize that AIDS has become the world's biggest fatal disease and the largest cause of death in Africa [2].

A UN report released on the 2004 World Aids Day, reported by *Cable News Network* (CNN) and relayed by *Nation TV* on 10th July 2004 put the number of deaths arising from HIV and AIDS infections at 20 million deaths worldwide since AIDS was first reported in 1981 in the United States of America. Between 65-85 percent of HIV-infections are found in sub-Saharan Africa. Here in Kenya, the number stands at over 1 million deaths since 1984 when AIDS was first reported. The HIV and AIDS pandemic remains a national disaster in Kenya. A total of 2.5 million of our young energetic men and women are infected with HIV. More than 200,000 new infections are reported every year, 50% of whom are below the age of 25. This

scenario has the potential of resulting in the collapse of our economy if preventive measures are not taken [3].

This paper examines the presentation of the images of HIV and AIDS in the school environment through the Information, Communication and Education (I.E.C.) materials. It investigates the production of meaning from the verbal and visual images of HIV and AIDS in Kenyan newspapers. It examines one particular advertisement – the school-bus advertisement - which depicts a group of students peeping through the window of a school-bus and declaring that they “won't be taken for a ride”. This paper also explores the meanings of images in the advertisement as part of content analysis through the eyes of adolescent readers. This is a qualitative analysis of the verbal and visual modes of signification in multimodal discourses. Analysis entails applying Fairclough's model of visual semiotics to analyze the language the multimodal discourses.

IMAGES OF HIV AND AIDS IN THE MASS MEDIA

Mass media occupies a central role in society and it is the tool that the ruling elites use to perpetuate their power, wealth and beliefs [4]. This means that messages which carry the ideological view of the addressors are amplified and given legitimacy, apart from being distributed to large audiences. Repetition of

such messages sends ideas deep into the audience members' mental views of the world. This study examines how advertisements construct the worldview of readers thus constructing their social identities.

McGregor and White [5] postulate that people process messages from the electronic media differently from how they process messages in the print media. They argue that awareness, interests, evaluation, trial, adoption (AIETA) applies only to the print media. This is what they call the left-brain, verbal 'look before you leap' reasonable or rational model. The reader does not always receive the message passively. Language in the mass media is scrutinized as a site of power struggle and a site where language is apparently transparent [4].

Advertising can do the following: convey information, alter perceptions and attitudes, direct actions, provide assurance, remind and give reasons for buying. These in turn tend to manipulate the reader to see the advert from a certain point of view [6]. This paper reveals how readers are influenced by advertisements and how the advertisements construct the readers' social identities.

HIV and AIDS discourses in Kenya have undergone the full cycle of reportage, that is, announcement, definition, debunking, judgment and conversion. The cycle of reportage can be compared to the identification, revelation and demystification of Magic Johnson in the American Press. In their analysis of perhaps the world's most renowned 'AIDS celebrity', Magic Johnson, Payne and Mercuri [7] point out how the construction of Johnson's 'mediated image' drew from already well-established cultural conventions of reportage, particularly those used in media coverage of political figures. Thus, like a candidate for a public office, Johnson's image went through various stages of 'announcement', 'definition', 'debunking', 'judgment' and 'conversion' through which he finally emerged as a credible national symbol and spokesman against the spread of AIDS. These are the stages through which a novel phenomenon has to go before it is accepted in the public domain as an authentic and reliable reference point from which other conclusions can be made. Images of HIV and AIDS in newspapers have evolved from those of fear, misery, suffering to positive messages of hope, hygiene, promise and reward. This paper explains the presentation of the sanitized version of HIV and AIDS in Kenyan mass media.

Readers are generally portrayed as the likely victims, people under threat or already suffering, while the advertisers adopt a lofty social stand from where they address the 'lowly' readers. The paper also examines how advertisements serve the interests of the powerful in society by selling their products, while

advocating responsible behaviour by avoiding pre-marital sex and exercising general self-control.

Having declared AIDS a national disaster in 1999 [1], the Kenya government has continued to conduct advocacy and mobilization of all sectors of the community, resulting in the formulation and implementation of a multi-sectoral HIV and AIDS response programmes. Intervention measures include the development and dissemination of Information, Education and Communication materials (hereafter IEC materials) such as posters, billboards advertisements in the newspapers. The IEC materials are supposed to create awareness, inform the public and advocate for behaviour change. They also advocate for the protection of the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses one purposively selected newspaper advertisement that depicts the images of HIV and AIDS in *The Daily Nation* newspaper. This is a descriptive research design in which the advertisement was purposively selected and presented to 50 teenage readers in Kisumu Municipality who gave their responses to a structured questionnaire. The fifty teenage respondents were identified from five schools in Kisumu City. These were twenty-five boys and twenty-five girls; twenty boys and twenty girls from two boys-only and two girls-only high schools respectively, while the five boys and five girls were selected from a mixed high school. The schools were identified as those which provided newspapers to students in their libraries. The advertisement was presented to the students to observe for 10 minutes and thereafter a related questionnaire was given to each student to which they responded. The responses were thereafter analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Analysis involved content description of the multimodal features of the advertisement. This involved the application of Fairclough's [8] model of semiotic analysis in which he postulates that any analysis of multimodal discourse should be in three dimensions: analysis of the text, the discursive practices entailing the production, consumption and interpretation of texts, and the social practices in which the text is embedded.

DISCUSSIONS

Following hereafter is the analysis of the verbal and visual modes of signification in the school-bus advertisement. The advertisement makes use of verbal and visual semiotics devices such as body language, colour, gaze, graphics, gesture and imagery. Transcription was done using the two-column model of visual frame as developed by Jones [9] to present the verbal and visual semiotics features of multimodal discourses. The multimodal discourses are the semiotic devices that construct the images of HIV and AIDS in the print media.

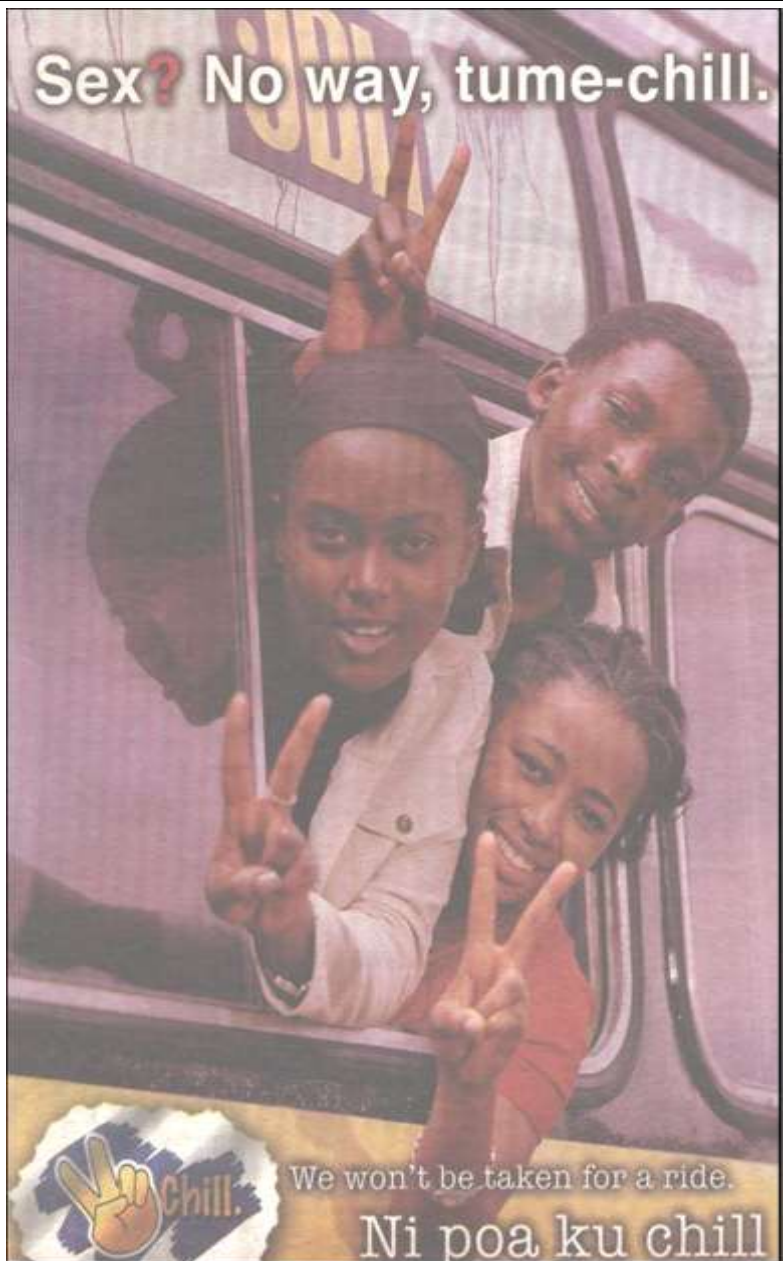


Fig-1: Transcript of the school-bus advert

Visual semiotics discourses	Verbal semiotics discourses
<p><u>Photo size:</u> A ½ - page size photo of three school children looking through the school bus window and flashing the two-finger V-salute.</p> <p>The V-salute is also set at the bottom of advert with the slogan: Chill.</p> <p><u>Setting:</u> On a school bus taking children to school. All three students have their heads popping through one window.</p> <p><u>Gaze:</u> All are smiles, direct eye-contact.</p> <p><u>Characters:</u> Upper windows of bus reflects sky-blue colour. Lower windows are tinted pink.</p> <p><u>Colour:</u> Yellow runs across lower body of bus. The V-salute and Slogan Chill set against a blue background which is in turn set against white.</p> <p>Windows in white and yellow. The question mark after the word Sex? Is in red.</p>	<p>Sex? No way, tume-chill</p> <p>Chill</p> <p>We won't be taken for a ride.</p> <p>Ni poa ku chill.</p>

Modes of Signification in Newspaper Advertisements

According to Hodge and Kress [10] language and any visual images can be ideologically encoded; hence they have a symbolic meaning in social semiotics. Modes of signification are semiotic features that carry meanings in a discourse. Semiotics recognizes the relation between the signifier and the signified, and deals with all aspects of discourse including body language, colour, gaze, gestures, graphics and imagery. The semiotic theory is relevant to this study as it enabled us to explain the presentation of HIV and AIDS discourses in verbal and visual modes of signification. Multimodality is an integral feature of newspaper advertisements. Discourses in multimodal media appeal to both the intellectual and aesthetic senses of readers. Semiotics is important for analyzing the images constructed through the linguistic sign. Ambience, body language, colour, gaze, gesture, graphics and imagery were identified as the modes of signification in the advertisement. These modes of signification work in complementarity to construct the images of AIDS in the print media.

Body Language

Newspaper adverts being still photos, it is not possible to discern body movement but the mere appearance of a character tells us a lot with regard to his/her state of health, lifestyle and what he/she is most likely engaged in.

All the characters in the school-bus advert are “healthy looking”, a testimony to the fact that they have decided to abstain hence may not get infected. The presentation of advertisements by healthy-looking characters creates a positive image that promises hope and continuity. An evidently sick character, with a bony, wasted body on the other hand would create fear and even scare the readers. This is the sanitized version of AIDS in the media. It is an identity project negotiated by the copywriters, actors and the general public.

Colour

Colours are used in advertisements to achieve special effects with regard to the symbolisms associated with the colours. For example, white symbolizes purity, red stands for danger, black signifies mourning and yellow stands for hope and life [11]. The characters, background and even the graphics are presented in specific colours. The sky-blue colour that is reflected on the bus window in the advert gives it a natural setting. Yellow runs across the bottom. The graphics are in

white. The V-salute is in shades of orange that tend towards yellow. The V-salute is a symbolic gesture developed by PSI to mean *Chill*, i.e. Abstain.

Gaze

Gaze includes smiles and eye contact. The smile shows satisfaction and a feeling of well-being as seen in the faces of the smiling teenagers. The facial expressions work in complementarity with graphics to enhance meaning in the advertisement. All the teenagers in the advertisement wear smiles on their faces. They are happy, knowing that they are safe from HIV and AIDS because of the life-choices they have made. Facial expressions also reveal the participants’ moods and attitude towards the issue of HIV and AIDS. Personal feelings and idiosyncrasies emerge from the mere presentation of facial expressions. The direct eye contact creates a vector for the reader in a demand-offer situation [12].

Gestures

Conventionally, gestures involve the use of hands to indicate communication [13]. Gestures are culture-specific. The significant gesture in this advertisement is the V-salute. Newspaper adverts being still photos, the reader has only one opportunity to see gestures if the photo was taken at an instance when a character used gestures. It is possible to read much into even one instance of gesture. The two-finger V-salute is a sign of abstinence developed by Population Services International (PSI) to promote abstinence among the youth. The V-salute is ostensibly pointed at the reader. Gestures blend well with other semiotic signs such as facial expressions and body language in constructing the images of HIV and AIDS in the print media. Gestures reinforce the other modes of signification to construct explicit discourses.

Graphics

Newspaper advertisements use graphics to reinforce the visual semiotics. These are words that illustrate the visual semiotics of the advertisement by complementing the messages. Some graphics are in English and Slang. Advertisements require highly direct representation within a sparse textual framework because they have to take care of costs while aiming at reaching the audience with the terse message. They are an ideal site from which to observe the constructive function of linguistic labeling and categorization. The respondents were asked whether there were any words, phrases or sentences used in the advertisements that they found particularly striking and memorable. The table below shows their responses:

Table-1: Striking Words, Phrases and Sentences in the Adverts

Striking Words, Phrases and Sentences	Frequencies	Percentages
Sex? No way, Tume chill	26	52%
Ni poa ku chill	13	26%
We won't be taken for a ride	11	22%
Total	50	100%

The most preferred graphic is the slang expression: Sex, No way, *Tume chill* (Slang for: Sex? No Way, We are abstaining). Abstinence is foregrounded as the only sure way for the youth to avoid getting infected with HIV and AIDS. This slogan is particularly directed at the youth and the unmarried adults and advises them to wait until they are married before engaging in sex as this may lead to HIV infection. The objective of reaching the target age group of teenagers seems to have been achieved as it emerged the most popular slogan among the respondents. According to Leech [14] when advertisements use colloquial language they mainly target teenagers. Leech (Ibid) further asserts that the use of colloquial language is useful in enhancing readability and memorability. The use of slang targets the youth as they find this language quite appealing. By using slang, the youth are able to develop a communication code among themselves which effectively excludes adults. This gives them the feeling of independence and privacy. Slang is an effective tool for advertisers as they can effectively select and target their audiences with the right messages.

Advertisements exploit ambiguity for memorability. The phrase *we won't be taken for a ride...* is ambiguous as the teenagers are already in the bus, ready for a ride. The actual meaning is that the teenagers will not be tricked into premarital sex.

Imagery

Imagery are words or phrases used in a way different from the literal meaning in order to create a particular mental image or effect. This is language that produces pictures in the mind of the reader or listener [15]. Imagery includes the use of figurative language such as metaphors and symbolisms. An image is a sign that is conventionally used to represent another conventionally agreed-upon item [16]. The V-salute is an image of abstinence developed by PSI for the youth. It is a sign of danger to the youth in case they engage in premarital sex. Imagery are culture-dependent and so, for one to comprehend the underlying message in the symbol they need to have some acquaintance with the cultural background of the environment in which the symbol is used. Imagery helps the copywriter to reach the audience by using sparse texts and signs while saving on the costs of advertisements.

Sontag [17] points out the way the metaphors around AIDS shape our perceptions of it. One of the metaphors that Sontag and others trace is that of AIDS as a battle. The body has its defenses; these are sabotaged from within, thus allowing invasion. Another common metaphor has to do with what the press calls 'carriers' that is people with the HIV virus who have not yet developed AIDS, so 'we' cannot recognize 'them'. In the Kenyan print media, HIV and AIDS was originally presented in images of war, poverty, disease,

and suffering. These have evolved into the current images of hope, reward and morality as seen in the advertisement under study. One response to these metaphors of battle in the body or vampire-like carriers is to try to reject them and stick to the scientific facts. But HIV and AIDS activists who analyze culture have tended to take a different line; they say that there is no going beyond metaphors that the scientific facts themselves are based on metaphors, and that activists should struggle to define which metaphors will circulate. They examine and criticize popular newspapers and media representations, and offer their own alternative metaphors and language [18].

CONCLUSIONS

This research found out that advertisement in the newspapers use both verbal and visual modes of signification in constructing images of HIV and AIDS. The verbal and visual modes of signification work in complementarity. Visual semiotics alone has enough striking appeal and the reader can get the overall message without reading the words. But visual images blend with graphics to construct more explicit images of HIV and AIDS in newspaper advertisements. Graphics occupy a smaller proportion of the advertisement space in comparison to the rest of the visual semiotics.

The images of HIV and AIDS are presented in contradictory discourses of hope and fear, reward and threat, and these operate to define the image of AIDS in the media as something that transcends all spheres of our society. HIV and AIDS have medical, social, economic, ethical and legal implications for the Kenyan public. HIV and AIDS affect members of diverse social groups, including school-going adolescents.

Advertisements have to earn the right to paper space as people do not buy newspapers to read adverts. The advertisements themselves have to compete for attention with other features and articles on the same pages. They therefore have to be crafted in such a way that readers simply have to notice them.

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