

ADVERTISING AND IDENTITY RE-CONSTRUCTION: THE CASE OF JUMIA AND DREAM COSMETIC

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the extent to which advertisement contributes to the process of identity re-construction. It explores ideological features in advertising slogans and their effects on consumers. The analysis focuses on lexical and syntactic choices in advertising taglines to sort out the linguistic clues that influence and shape the identity of audience. Using the theory of pragmatic to explore the type of language used in order to establish the interaction between discourse, ideologies and identity reconstruction, the study reveals that the messages in these advertisements do not only describe products, but also convey certain ideologies in order to shape or re-construct consumers' identities. Referring to a pragmatic analysis, this work shows that the contextual use of some syntactic structures, words and visuals in advertisements re-construct some identity features of consumers.

KEY WORDS: Advertisement- Discourse-Identity-Ideology- Re-construction-Shape

RESUME

Cette étude porte sur l'implication de la publicité dans le processus de la reconstruction identitaire. L'analyse se focalise sur le choix des éléments lexicaux, syntactiques et visuels dans les slogans publicitaires afin de mettre en exergue comment ils influencent sur les consommateurs et refaçonnent leurs identités. En se basant sur la Pragmatique pour explorer le type de langage utilisé pour établir l'interaction entre discours, idéologies et reconstruction identitaire dans la publicité, l'étude révèle que les messages véhiculés par ces publicités ne décrivent pas seulement les produits mais aussi transmettent certaines idéologies afin de façonner l'identité des consommateurs. Se referrent à une analyse pragmatique, cette étude montre que l'utilisation contextuelle de certaines structures syntactiques, mots et visuels dans les publicités reconstruit certains traits identitaires des consommateurs.

MOTS CLES : Discours- Façonner-Identité-Idéologie-Publicité-Reconstruction

INTRODUCTION

The issue of identity and cultural propaganda in the domain of commercial advertising is widely discussed by many investigators. For instance, Okan T. (2013, p.1) asserts: “Advertisements stand amongst the most influential cultural factors in structuring and influencing social life in contemporary society”. In other words, cultural aspects are represented in advertisements and such representations are able to influence social pattern, shape behavior and impact people identity. To understand the involvement of commercial advertising in the influence of culture and identity, it is useful to question the way advertising discourse is built, the content of its messages and the effects they have. In fact, the discourse of commercial advertising is based on particular linguistic forms in order to implicitly act upon the target. Thus, Chilwa. I. (2007, p.29) mentions that advertising is “ a discourse type which performs actions”. To put it bluntly, advertisers do not simply promote products or services to the general public but they also act upon the target audience by influencing and shaping their identities. These observations are made in many advertisement services among which one can quote Jumia and Dream cosmetics.

Regarding this research paper, it is entitled “advertising and identity re-construction: the case of Jumia and Dream Cosmetic”. This research explores the contextual use of some lexical and syntactic choices in advertising slogans and their influence on consumers. as far as the objective is concerned, this article aims at analyzing the linguistic clues in commercial advertising and their influence over the audience for the sake of shaping their identity. In doing so, advertisers make the propaganda of some ideologies in the promotion of their products in order to reach an influential goal. Moreover, the notion of identity is defined referring to culture and way of living to help understand the interrelation between culture and identity and their inclusion in advertisements.

The analysis, thus, is drawn on Pragmatics to reveal the type of language used to establish the interaction between discourse, ideologies and identity re-construction. Analyzing such an issue paves the way to the following questions: To what extent can advertising contribute to identity reconstruction? How is identity re-construction shaped in advertising messages? For the sake of a logic analysis, this article is composed of a guideline presented into twofold. The first part deals with a criticism of advertising and the second part sheds light on the re-construction of identity in advertising messages.

1- ADVERTISING IN A SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

For Arens (2002, p.6), “Advertisements are a form of communication by which the companies and organizations come in contact with their consumers or clients, companies take help of this communicative tool”. The form of communication in advertisements is particular since it plays an economic and social role. Regarding its social role, it functions as a communicative means in manipulating and influencing life patterns of readers. Thus, Eiman N. and al. (2015, p.2) mention that “advertisements usually illustrate lifestyle, relationships, personality, values, and cultural norms”. This simply means that advertising despite its good oriented presentation function, it plays an important social role. This role lays on the transmission of new ideas and visions to consumers so as to shape their mind. Advertisement, therefore, plays an informative and manipulative role.

1-1 Advertisement as an Informative and Persuasive Tool of Communication

Advertisements work as the means by which messages about products and services are given to the public. In fact, they provide people with information regarding their needs in order to sell items. Informative advertising leads the target to get news related to changes of price, the quality of goods and also enhances what consumers require. This kind of advertisements focus on describing products and services of companies. However, there are other forms of advertisements that do not describe items in terms of their use and posology. In such advertisements, utterances are formed briefly with a display of the benefits of the products. These advertisements belong to persuasive forms of marketing because their discourses are constructed with tactics to attract without clear information about goods.

Despite advertizing is neither informative nor persuasive, it can play complementary roles. Referring to this, Chamberlin (1993) discovers that there exist three views of advertising: persuasive, informative and complementary. These views make us understand the different phases through which advertising has gone through. Thus, Chamberlin’s showed the progressive move of advertisement from informative to complementary level. Advertising language is informative, persuasive, complementary and it is woven around some discursive tactics to play complementary roles as seen in the following advertisements:

(Ad1) Get on *the best* Dressed list (www.jumia.com.ng/fashion)

(Ad2) The company of elegancy, it’s here! (www.jumia.com.ng/fashion)

(Ad3) Aqualis, a Soap *not like others*...(www.dreamcosmetic)

These advertisements are framed by the companies to inform people about the availability of goods. They support these statements with pictures in order to help audience get the list of items on sale. In the process of informing the audience, advertisers only employ the name of the product such as “Aqualis” in Ad 3, the type of products “company of elegancy” Ad 2 and “Dressed list (clothes)” in Ad 1. The use of these expressions plays double functions like sharing information about the type of item sold in each company and persuading target to the goods. These various forms of utterances allow readers to discover the existence and availability of categories of goods and services in the advertising companies.

In informing people, advertisers also attract their attention in order to create reactions toward the goods. Such a reaction is built through the use of imperative form “get on”, the deictic expression “here” and the comparative form “not like others”. The use of these deictic and comparative form are discursive tactics that show the way advertisers tend to persuade people to purchase these articles. Referring to the grammatical function of imperative, it aims at giving orders to co-speakers. Using utterances in an imperative form, copywriters persuade clients to accept the presented ideas and goods. In fact, successful attitudes and positive feelings can be triggered with the use of deictics and imperatives in ads because goods and services are displayed appealing. With imperatives, advertisers try to give order to interlocutors (audience) by making them react toward what is displayed. Advertisers resort to such types of sentences to persuade and lead audience to their messages.

Cook G. (1992) advocates that advertising is a discourse type which functions differently from others languages such as literary discourse. For him, communication in advertisement is not the same like other types of communications. Advertisements have features very specific to their own. Advertising messages can push to actions and even to certain adopt a kind of behavior in the environment due to the linguistic content in the messages.

Even if Arens (2002, p.6) asserts that “Advertisements are a form of communication by which the companies...come in contact with their consumers...”, these companies seize this form of communication to express persuasion upon clients. Using imperative form with “get on” and declarative sentence such as “the company of elegancy” are syntactic forms that can impose ideas for persuading readers. For instance, using comparatives for promoting products drive consumers to think they are singular or superior while applying the products.

1-2 Advertisement as a Tool of Ideological Manipulation of Consumers

The concept “Ideology” denotes a set of beliefs, especially one held by particular group that influences the way people behave. Teun van Dijk (2008, p.253) considers ideology as “the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group”. He qualifies ideologies as “political or social systems of ideas, values or prescriptions of groups or other collectivities, and have the function of organizing or legitimizing the actions of the group”. It is actually the representation of ideas in connection with an abstract world through linguistic strategies in advertisements.

Regarding the words culture and identity, they generally refer to the way of living of a given community. Both culture and identity go along with the nature and behavior of people. Hall and al. (1987) qualify culture as “the means and values which arise among distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their historical conditions and relationship”. Culture is what identifies people of different groups, races, identities and lifestyles. Through the features of cultural identity, one may characterize the origin of others. Advertisements are sometimes built on some cultural ideologies and they are also framed with images to portray systems of ideas and values that can influence consumers’ culture:

(Ad4) Perfect White, you are perfect!

(Ad5) L’Abidjannaise

(Ad6) Bioskin

These three advertisements promote skin lightening products in a Black area. The use of white skin products in a context of Black environment embodies cultural messages and this can impact readers’ culture. Copywriters of these advertisements qualify White skin as “perfect” and “Bio”. Such qualifications tend to show that White skin complexion is natural, original and better than other skin colours like the Black one. The representation of White skin as perfect in a Black area conveys an ideology of cultural domination based on skin colour because skin colour belongs to the features of cultural classification.

Through skin colours, one can image racial and cultural belonging in order to discover the identity of a person. Culture, race and identity are sometimes interrelated in terms of classifying communities and social groups. Thus, advertisers display “cultural product which...reflects our ideals, values, lifestyles...thoughts and...shapes these feelings and thoughts” (Elden Muge and al. 2014, p.723). These ideas, lifestyles, thoughts and their counterparts mentioned are the types of messages conveyed in the advertisements to reflect cultural ideologies for the sake of

influencing audience's identity. Such a way of exposing complexion in products promotion are meant to tell the target to change or abandon their natural complexion at the expense of the promoted one. These kinds of messages in advertisements reflect ideological manipulation for the sake of new identity or culture adoption.

Cultural ideologies in advertisements play the role of influencing the lifestyles of audience through manipulation. In advertisements, the use of particular foods, skin colours and ways of clothing in other social context influence the life patterns of viewers. In most of the selected advertisements, one can observe the promotion of Sandwich, dress and mini-dress and lightening items as perfect goods. Thus, the displaying of these foreign goods in an African context transmits the idea of cultural representation because ways of dressing, eating and acting points out one's cultural features of a community. This cultural representation in ads implicitly implies an idea of inviting people to adoption of new culture and identity through a mental transformation.

2- Advertizing Messages and the Re-construction of Cultural Identity

2-1 Sexuality Exaltation and the Myth of Superiority in Identity Re-construction

Expressing sexuality, superiority and seduction are among the ideologies constructed in some advertisements to re-construct people's identity. Sexuality exaltation refers to the celebration and affirmation of diverse sexual orientations and identities. Therefore, regarding the context of advertising, sexuality exaltation consists in exhibiting some garments displaying intimate parts of the body. It is mostly characterized by wearing short clothes such as mini-skirts and underwear that show some of your intimate body parts. In this modern world, sexuality is considered as one of women features to seduce, express power and identity of femininity. Promoting such a way of clothing in advertisements is to tell consumers that they are trendy and updated and belonging to the world of fashion. Whoever wants to deserve respect, consideration, superiority and be seductive has to adopt this identity of fashion.

In the selected advertisements, either visual or verbal discursive tactics display intimate parts of body in Africa where the issue of sex is a taboo. Some verbal aspects come out with the use of adjectival words like *sexy*, *Smart* in the advertisements. In the context of advertising, adjectives have various functions such as describing the product to compare and seduce for manipulation. The following advertising slogans display the role of some nouns, adjectives, adverbs, figurative and comparative forms in influencing the audience for the sake of making them

reconsider their being. The sexual way of dressing promoted through these advertisements does not belong to African way of dressing therefore it can lead to reconstructing the identity of African audience.

Ad7- *the Best Fashion* Ad 8-Victoria's secret, *Forever Sexy*

Ad 9-The *Smart* of Seduction

Ad 8 is about the selling of a woman perfume called *Victoria's secret*. The first message it conveys is that the product can help women be like "*Victoria*" as she appears on the packaging through the word "Secret". Thus, women who want to be like Victoria; that is sexy must therefore buy this product. In addition, the adverb "forever" means that there would not be a return to their initial appearance anymore. The change is irreversible; hence a new identity is constructed. By trying to shape African women's perception of sexiness, copywriters display sexiness as a prominent feature of the former queen of the United Kingdom named Victoria. Referring to the context of the utterance, to be sexy is something hidden (a secret) that should all women have as another identity to seduce and dominate. Sexiness is appreciated and advertised as a social need that African women must adopt and manifest as an identity. This kind of advertising manipulates and lead to think that to be sexy gives an identity characterizing them as ideal women. The slogan tells nothing about the use but rather makes believe that the product makes you stay sexy and no matter your age, sexiness is essential. At the same time, the message is the propaganda of sexiness for all ideal women.

Advertisement can shape consumers' vision, their real nature and leads them to a new identity by means of seduction. The expected goal is to lure consumers into adopting new stances. Adopting "Victoria's secret" means rejecting one's being to follow the style of Victoria who is characterized as an ideal woman. The slogan tells nothing about the use but rather makes believe that the product makes women be sexy no matter the age. Through the analysis of this advertisement, one can say that advertisers implicitly aim to re-constructing the cultural identity of women by means of persuasion contained in the semantics of chosen words. Women are persuaded and influenced by the verbal and visual references used to promote their items.

Moreover, Advertisements implicitly tend to impose new cultural identity through the exaltation of Sexuality. Through the analysis and interpretation of this advertisement, one can reveal that advertisers want to re-construct the cultural identity of women. Women are persuaded and influenced by the verbal and visual references used to promote their items. Advertisements implicitly position Sexuality as a cultural identity for female gender to be seductive and influential

in society, shown as very feminine, as a sexual object. So, for a woman not to be set apart, she is compelled to consume the product and accept the ideology of sexuality. Products that give unlimited effect in terms of time are wished, for this reason advertisers used adverbs expressing timeless action of the products to assure the audience. Including the adverb *Forever* in this advertisement is a proof of this reality. It implies that the product is giving you an everlasting beauty of sexiness. In an African context, such an advertising slogan reconstructs women identity by redefining their sexual conception and ideology. Such an ad impacts the mental of women by transforming their way of conceiving sexuality to adhere the new one proposed in ads.

For the comparative words: *the best, not like others*, they represent the channel through which advertisers tend to show that the advertised goods are unique and have a very high quality. Comparatives in these advertising slogans also permit advertisers to build myth of superiority in the mind of the customers. These two slogans have both comparative features and each show different communicative functions. For other slogans, using *the best* which is a superlative form of *good* is a tool to intensify the quality of the products. The use of superlative pushes the audience toward the product with the intention of being in the high level of fashion and beauty comparing to others. They serve as techniques for copywriters to manipulate people. Such Superlative and comparative forms are built to manipulate by making targets believe that they are socially superior. A process of advertising like this influences the lifestyle of audience by shaping their identity. A regular use of such products and a long exposure of these kinds of advertisements can lead people to endorse or adopt another behavior that may be part of their new identity.

The picture on the ad *L'abidjanaise* is representing a white skin woman in an advertising targeting Ivoirian girls and women. The image of the "woman" is seen as sitting comfortably with a smile. The colour of the name of the product is similar to the skin colour of the portrayed woman, sexy or partially dressed and feels joyful in her body. In this advertising, the aspect of reconstructing identity is embedded in the use of the same colour for both the brand "*L'Abidjanaise*" and the women on the picture. Advertising with white skin in a Black area is influential and ideological because it aims at seducing and influencing the culture and identity of audience. Based on the skin colour, this advertisement wants to persuade viewers about physical appearance of Black. The use of white skin colour associated with the name of the national anthem of Côte d'Ivoire suggests an idea of reshape the physical trait of identity of the target.

Ad10 *BioLight*

Using this particular prefix *Bio* in advertisements to associate with the products, advertisers want to keep in the mind of women that a real woman is the one having this nature: Light skin. According to Cohen (1988), advertising is a business activity that employs creative techniques to design persuasive communication in mass media that promote ideas. The idea represented in this advertisement is mainly to highlight the importance of physical body conditions of women on the basis of white skin. The word *Light* is an utterance that carries significant idea of identity reconstruction. In fact, when advertisers apply the utterance *light* with the co-text an image of a White woman on the bottle, they attempt to make audience have the same lightening skin. Africans are known to have black skin and promoting lightening items as a bio nature in a Black African context is to drive audience to a new identity, an identity based on physical body appearance.

Lexical selection or choice in advertising slogans are very fruitful for a marketing, persuasive and influential goal. This linguistic strategy should not be neglected because of the great communicative function and impact on readers. The choice of words such as adjectives, affixes, comparative and personification in advertisement intend to impact or act upon the audience. Such impact can lead people adopt another lifestyle, attitude and identity.

2-2- Promoting better Lifestyle in Advertisements to impose new Identity

Gender stereotypes, lifestyle and cultural identity are highly promoted in many advertisements' communication. For Piller Ingrid (2006, p.153), "Advertising continues to invest in the creation of consumer identities". Advertisements are among the most influential means used to impact identity, social life and also create changes in this contemporary world. They are almost seen everywhere and at any time on TV shows, posters and internet. Appropriate words, sentences and pictures are employed by copywriters to reach this aim of spreading new beliefs to the targeted population and push them into the adoption of new behaviors and attitudes to form their identities.

Okan Tan (2013, p.3-4) asserts that "In the contemporary world, however, along with changes in the production and marketing strategies, the role and form of advertising in the aforesaid processes has changed and strengthened with the inclusion of the strategy of segmentation and lifestyle targeting in the marketing structure". Both men and women are targeted in advertisements by selling them not only products but also new ways of living and acting in the society. In the Ad 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, the set of the words convey some hidden information that want to influence both men and women to adopt new identity and lifestyle:

Ad 11 Lifestyle Ad 12 With MAGGI, Every Woman is a Star

Ad 13 PerfectWhite, *you are perfect* Ad 14- Jumia Food

Ad 15- It is the *house of elegancy*

These advertisements implicitly promote lifestyles and reconstruct audience' identity by indirectly suggesting to consumers new ways of behaving. In Ad11 *Lifestyle*, advertisers show an image of man with kitchen accessories making coffee. This kind of promotion is made to motivate the change of behaviour and the adoption of new lifestyles and identity for men. It urges men to accept the idea of cooking or helping their wives in kitchen activities. In fact, in the context of African culture, cooking belongs to female gender. However, the displaying of male gender to these advertisements reshapes male conception and identity regarding the issue of cooking.

Promoting ways of clothing like in Ad 15 is implicitly influential and leads to the change of behaviour and identity. The fact of presenting western dressing code as original, authentic and symbol of elegancy is persuasive for the sake of constructing new identity to the target. This idea infers that advertisements can manipulate the audience in order to shape their mind and determine new ways of living. Advertisers promote some social assumptions, lifestyles in order to drive consumers to their realization. Such an act for the realization of the proposed ideas in advertisements impact the identity of the target population.

Through Ad 12, advertisers promote a cooking ingredient named MAGGI. This article is advertised to women according to the slogan and it is represented as something very precious for women. In fact, using only MAGGI which is an ingredient for food to represent women's status seems directly shocking. Copywriters in using the lexis *star* in this advertisement to qualify women who cook, try to give value to this identity. They are persuading women audience in creating the idea of being a high personality in cooking with MAGGI. The utterance *star* used to qualify women who cook plays an influential role by reconstructing their identity of being only cooks. Such advertisement re-establishes the identity of African women as being cooks and housewives. Thus, Lopukhova O. (2015, p.101-102) asserts that "advertising can not only establish gender stereotypes but also transform gender guidelines" and the "perception of different gender characteristics of female and male images in commercials has a specific impact on gender self-consciousness".

Without a linguistic mitigator or softener, the slogan presupposes that contemporary women still remain in an archaic system of only playing the role of housewife. To hide such a presupposed idea and deceive the target in order to manipulate them and create acceptance of this

identity, the copywriter of the accompanies employs the noun *star*. Advertisers implicitly play the role of transforming and reinforcing one of women's social identities that is cook.

In advertisements, the use of language basing on lexical and syntactic tactics are tool to create influence and adoption of new behavior. As Sadia H. (2015, p.1) asserts, "language has a powerful control over people and their behavior. It influences us or creates the desire to act in certain ways or accept view or thoughts". Sadia adds that without language the whole idea of advertisements is vague and useless because an advertisement cannot convey the exact messages. It is the strategic and artful use of language that gives life to advertisements to influence the identity of the target. Organization of different words and expressions in utterances leads to re-constructing cultural identity.

These Advertisements provide a meaning system that potentially influences the ways in which people consuming the item perceive and make sense of their own social lives based on consumption of manufactured goods and services. Advertisement is an influential apparatus that shape people identity since they are able to reproduces original lifestyle to be linked to the product for the sake of changing behaviors and attitudes. According to Hradiskà Elena (1998, p.213) "advertising presents the product in compliance with criteria related to a supposed lifestyle of a certain social group and the presented products may become symbols of social status". Then, using advertisements for the re-construction of cultural identity is obvious.

Conclusion

The analysis of the selected advertisements from the two advertisement companies revealed that advertisers use specific linguistic means such as comparatives, affixes and syntactic forms to manipulate their audience and anchor some social ideologies in their mind. The texts advertisers add to advertise the products and services are not only to inform but rather to manipulate and influence the identity of people through some ideological messages. They use specific adjectives, deictic, affixes and syntactic structures to anchor in people mind that to be beautiful is to have a white body and be dressed in a sexy way. The regular exposition of White skin to promote cosmetic goods in Black environment reflected the adoption of new identity or the re-construction of new identity through manipulation.

Investigation on these print advertisements of the products and services showed that they are not only to inform but also to influence the thought of the target audience and shape their behavior and culture. Specific words and syntaxes were chosen for advertising such as adjectives, prefixes,

abstract words, metaphors, adverbs and comparatives. These references played a manipulative action that is to capture more clients' attention by influencing their identities. Deep analysis on the features of these advertisement slogans also demonstrated that the use of superlative served as techniques for copywriters to claim uniqueness and a myth of superiority in consumers' spirit.

The contextual interpretation of all these words drove to reveal some ideologies hidden in most of commercial advertisements. The paper emphasized on some different ideologies that are perceived while analyzing advertisements discourse. Among them, there were the propaganda of beauty based on skin, dressing, authentic lifestyle, behavior and identity, gender stereotypes, sexuality, seduction, superiority and differentiation. Advertisers relied on these social need or desire through adjective, adverbs and comparatives to manipulate by reconstructing people culture

Then, the issue of identity and cultural re-construction through commercial advertising was highly exposed in the analysed slogans. Cultural aspects were represented in most of advertisements and such representations were means to influence social pattern, shape behavior and lead to re-constructing cultural identity of targeted people. Advertisements are therefore channels through which culture and identity of a community can be constructed or reconstructed.

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