

**Discourse of Traditional Medicine Street Advertisement in Kisumu, Kenya**Yakub Adams<sup>1</sup>, Damaris Gechemba Nyakoe<sup>2</sup>, Benard Odoyo Okal<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, Maseno University, Kenya<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Languages, Linguistics & Literature, Rongo University, Kenya<sup>3</sup>Assistant Lecturer, Department of Kiswahili & other African Languages, Maseno University, Kenya**\*Corresponding Author:**

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**Abstract:** Information is a very important concept during an interaction between interlocutors within a particular health communicative context. In matters concerning individuals' health and other emotive issues, subjective information of any kind would provide sustaining knowledge to the seeker of knowledge. It is, therefore, of immense significance for people to have access to credible information that would satisfy their questions, curiosity and emerging problems of wellness. In Kenyan towns and villages, certain strategic street pathways are replete with Traditional Medicine advertisements by herbalists and witchdoctors. As a vehicle for promoting social modernization, the impact of utilizing advertising to promote trade in developing society remains a key subject. Although audiences are exposed to a number of advertisements, advertising may deceive either by increasing a consumer's false belief or by exploiting true beliefs in the ways designed to sell the product or offer services. This paper has interest in the discourse of advertisement of traditional medicine. Health issues have always been an important and emotive phenomenon in the lives of humans. Being in good health and able to go about one's business without ill-health is a desire longed for by everyone. Hence, people become very much interested in matters touching on their health and the inherent rhetoric accompanying the offered 'solutions' as a means of persuasion. Are herbal medicine practitioners' genuinely reaching out to fill the void possibly left out by modern medicine? Are these practitioners ably 'treating' all the 'illnesses' they advertise? These questions form the discourse matters sought in this paper.

**Keywords:** Discourse, traditional medicine advertisement, rhetoric, persuasion

**INFORMATION AND ADVERTISEMENT**

Information is a very important concept during an interaction between interlocutors within a particular communicative context. In matters concerning individuals, subjective information of any kind would provide sustaining knowledge to the seeker of knowledge. It is, therefore, of immense significance for people to have access to credible information that would satisfy their questions, curiosity and emerging problems.

For one to acquire knowledge on a particular issue, he must come into contact with it. Hence, it is of significance to state that there are various mediums of communication delivering a sought after information. These mediums have been developing over the decades to suit various human needs for successful communication. The most traditional media used for years by man is the passage of information by word of mouth. However, in the modern world, the electronic and print media has surpassed the word of mouth source. The electronic media encompasses the use of the internet, television, radio and telephone while the print media includes the newspapers, magazine, leaflets and so on.

People with certain information to pass would prefer particular media depending on their clientele as well as their set objectives. The target audience's population and ability to access a particular media would make the informant select a particular method of disseminating the information. It is important to state at this point that inasmuch as people may receive information, it is not obvious that such messages would solve their problems, satisfy their curiosity and answer their questions. Information is usually intended to reach the target audiences successfully. One such way of passing information is through the use of advertisements. This paper was more focused on the use of street posters as a form of outdoor advertisement.

In Kenyan towns and villages, certain strategic street ways are replete with Traditional Medicine advertisements. This paper considers Traditional Medicine advertisement to include herbalists as well as those considered as witchdoctors. As a vehicle for promoting social modernization, the impact of utilizing advertising to promote trade in developing society remains a key subject. [1] Posits that the debate about the influence of advertising in most societies, especially

developing nations, revolves around the issue of reinforcement of the consumption habits of the capitalistic aspects of the world. With the growth of the world as a 'global village', certain technological developments have a way of changing, controlling and dictating the societal behavior.

Also, the role of advertising in market economy is to inform as well as educate consumers about products and services. [2] States that advertising relies on overwhelmingly persuasive and symbolic images to sell products and services by "associating them with certain socially desirable qualities and they sell, as well, a world view, a life style and a value system congruent with the imperatives of consumer capitalism" [2:37]. Moreover, to achieve the goals of advertising, advertisers employ a variety of values in their appeals. An advertising appeal may be defined as a creative attempt to motivate consumers towards some form of activity, or to influence attitudes to make a product or service attractive or interesting to the consumer [3].

[4]mentions Burnett who states that researchers in advertising asserted that the main function of advertising is the act of persuading consumers to buy the product. [4] Adds that there are even researchers like [5] who claimed that the manipulation facet of advertisement is more important than its persuasion facet. Also, [6] claimed that the goal of the advertisement is to pay attention to the taste of ordinary people and simultaneously help the industries to produce goods in harmony with the consumers' tastes. These assertions guided the direction this study took.

In an earlier study, [7] states that the effects of advertising can be approached from the perspective of their influence on the individual at one level and at another level from the influence on the society in general. This means that what has been advertised would have a form of influence on the purchasing behaviour of the target audiences. [7] Further asserts that advertising uses language distinctively and that there are certainly advantages in making bizarre and controversial statements in unusual way as well as communicating with people using simple and straightforward language.

[8] Who was concerned with the analysis of presupposition in discourse, says that one is capable of saying one thing and meaning another. This is what can be said to make up what is asserted and that which is implicated. Sperber and Wilson, cited by [8] expand this to include the inter-textual nature of implicatures. This means that implicatures can be construed to mean what is echoed in another person's utterance. This is evident in the obvious mismatch between what is

apparently meant from the surface meaning and the situational context of what is said.

[9] Posited that although audiences are exposed to too much advertisement, advertising may deceive either by increasing a consumer's false belief or by exploiting a true belief in the ways designed to sell the product. He further distinguished between several types of linguistic constructions that may deceive the consumer without actually lying. Such claims may invite the consumer to infer beyond the information stated and thus construct a stronger interpretation. The constructions described by Harris are hedges, elliptical comparatives, implied causation, implied slur on competition and pseudoscience. These constructions provide useful information on the language techniques employed by the advertisers and thus assist this study as the interpretation of advertisements from the visual entity is of a major concern in this study. This study has looked at the use and manipulation of language in relation to health and services claims made by Traditional Medicine advertisements and tried to investigate how the advertisers exploit language in order to attract clients to their 'clinics' and make the people believe that their claims as demonstrated by the advertisement are true, though sometimes they might not be credible.

#### **TRADITIONAL MEDICINE**

This study has interest in the discourse of advertisement of traditional medicine. Health issues have always been an important and emotive phenomenon in the lives of humans. Being in good health and able to go about one's business without ill-health is a desire longed for by everyone. Thus, people become very much interested in matters touching on their health. [10] Avers that governments around the world strive to ensure that their populations have access to the best of the basic necessities of life such as education, shelter, food, water and healthcare. The Kenya government has enshrined certain clauses in her constitution; specifically under Article 43 subsection 1 (a) which states that every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care [11].

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that traditional medicine is used to refer to traditional Chinese medicine, Indian *ayurveda* and Arabic *unani* medicine, as well as to various forms of indigenous medicine around the world. Traditional medicine accounts for approximately 40 per cent of health care in China, and 80 per cent in Africa, with methods including herbal medicines, the use of animal parts and/or minerals, manual therapies and spiritual therapies to maintain well-being, to diagnose and treat illness [12].

Medical herbalism, or simply, herbalism or herbology, is “the study of herbs and their medicinal uses”. This definition can be extended to include the cultivation, collection, or dispensing of aromatic plants, especially those considered to have medicinal properties. Other terms substituted for medical herbalism, include herbal or botanical medicine, or phytotherapy, previously defined as the use of plant materials to prevent and treat ill health or promote wellness [13].

It had been noted that the practice dates to antiquity, and that the primacy of herbalism in medicine is evident from the large number of modern drugs that owe their origin to ethno-botanical remedies. [13] Cite WHO and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) who state that whereas up to 80 % [14] or even 90% [15] of some populations depend almost entirely on Traditional Medicine (TM) for most of their primary healthcare needs. However, the dramatic irony is that among these same populations, TMs, including herbal drugs, are hardly regulated by the State. It is noted also that about 80% of people in developing countries depended on herbs [13].

According to the [16], advertisement and promotion of medicines and medical services remain an important means of creating awareness and disseminating information to the public and healthcare professionals. The board further states that advertisements can, also, if not carried out correctly, pass the wrong information and in turn affect the health of the consumer. This, therefore, means that unethical or amoral advertisements that are also based on false claims affect the lives of consumers.

According to [17], herbal medicine has a long history in the treatment of several kinds of diseases. [18], in an earlier study, avers that the use of herbal medicine for the treatment of diseases has been practiced by man for many years and is still being widely practiced even today. Subsequently, it is important to realize that western scientific medicine provides only a small portion of health care in most countries of the world and Kenya is no exception. Most health care takes place in traditional setting.

Traditional medicine in Africa is as old as African culture and is therefore related to cultural beliefs and health-seeking behavior. It is widely accepted in African culture that there is a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe of which God is the source and controller [18]. The African may sometimes start with scientific medical treatment and then default and turn to traditional healers which also include the witchdoctors as per this study.

In most developing countries, human health services are still very poor and are compounded by many people living far away from the closes nearest centre. According to [19], the prohibitive cost and declining potency of western drugs in the treatment of certain life threatening ailments have made herbal medicine a popular and essential part of our healthcare delivery system. While advertising their wares, the local herb dealers, through deft linguistic manipulations, tell people about the various health conditions that their local herbs can effectively control.

[19] Adds that a large number of hitherto obscure local herb dealers throng the major streets, road junctions, and market centers in various towns hawking their wares with microphones in their hands and loud speakers mounted on top of their cars. They are now very popular and constitute an essential part of our healthcare delivery system. There is, however, a lack of scientific validation or evidence of efficacy found in the treatment.

In West Africa, trust in traditional herbalists significantly worsened the outlook in the unprecedented Ebola outbreak of 2014-2015. In Tanzania, authorities banned witchdoctors entirely after years of attacks on the nation’s ‘magical’ albino population. Kenya has eradicated the practice of unlicensed medicine and now has let certified physicians to advertise their services to the public [20]. This is to counter the massive number of witchdoctors and herbalists advertising their services in the various modes of print and electronic media. This study focused only on the posters as source of data.

Trees, electric poles and walls around town are filled with posters advertising traditional healers’ claims to have all manner of cures and solutions. The adverts promise to sort out issues such as family counseling, love life, financial advice, success in the job market, medicinal services among others. No advert should be misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive. Therefore, all adverts should be prepared with due sense of responsibility [21].

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study used Rhetorical Theory as an appropriate theory of communication. The theory is based on the available means of persuasion. One of the most influential figures of rhetoric is the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle defined three genres of rhetoric: deliberative (examines the future), epideictic (examines the present, how we should feel) and forensic (examines the past). He also outlined three “proofs” a rhetor could use to make persuasive claims: pathos (the rhetor’s ability to invoke emotions), ethos (the rhetor’s ability to be perceived as a credible figure), and logos (the rhetor’s ability to use logical reasoning). These three rhetorical proofs are negotiated by the rhetor

based on the audience's needs and expectations. Hence, rhetoric is transactional. This study also includes what Aristotle calls rhetorical syllogism which requires the audience to supply missing pieces of speech.

Other scholars such as [22] and [23] hinge their view on this theory on the background provided by Aristotle. In addition, [24] states that rhetoric revolves around three main characteristics: it is discursive, refers to public communication, and is functional. Being discursive means that rhetoric relies on words and symbols to create and exchange meanings. In rhetoric, such communication is specifically directed at a public audience. Rhetoric serves a function for both the audience to which the message is addressed and the one who delivers it basically referred to as the rhetor.

#### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed purposive sampling to select the *street posters* that were relevant

for use in the study. A total of sixteen advertisements were photographed from the various places where they were posted. Only one of these is used because of its relevance and applicability to the objective of the current paper. The researchers used qualitative data collection technique of interview and direct observation. The researchers also used snowballing technique to sample the population of respondents in order to come up with a sizeable and controlled number that would make the work manageable and practical within the time frame and resource available for the study. A total of ten respondents were engaged in audio-taped interview sessions. Data analysis was done using content analysis method. When used qualitatively, emphasis is laid on social meaning both explicit and implicit in the categorizations used. The content analysis was critically done alongside the parameters of the Rhetoric Theory as expounded by Aristotle and the later modern rhetoric theorists.



Advertisement # 1: Prof.

#### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study used the photographs to elicit the various forms of rhetoric and used themes to discuss the data collected. These themes are advertisement as discursive, advertisement as syllogistic and advertisement as credible.

The advertisement #1 is in Swahili language and the rhetor makes claims of being able to sort out issues concerned with *Biashara* (Business), *Elimu*

(Education), *Promotion Kazini* (Promotion at work), *Kuwacha Sigara* (to stop smoking cigarettes), *Kukinga Boma* (Protecting one's home) and *Kuita Aliyepotea* (to

bring back a lost person). The advertisement equally demonstrates the fact that the proprietor is a Professor. Most likely the said 'doctor' is a 'professor' in his or her field of business. The advertisement conforms to [25] view that advertising is one of the specific forms of communication which is designed to perform an appropriate communicating function. These claims by advertisement #1 have exhibited clearly what it intends for the public to consume. This outdoor form of advertising has flexibility and high repeat exposure as it will be there every time someone passes by. There is normally also low message competition and good positional selectivity [26].

In line with this, [27] asserts that keeping business, product or brand names prominent and in the forefront of an audience's perception is itself a form of persuasion on at least two levels. First, awareness of a business or product is the first step to acceptance. The more we hear a brand name, the more aware we are of it, and the more likely we are to choose it when we are deciding between comparable products. On a second, more abstract level, the very existence of advertising foregrounds the importance of goods and materials in and to our lives. It's therefore clear that by outlining the services on offer, *Prof* is persuading the public to visit his/her premises to find solutions to their problems. However, some of the respondents gave reasons why people may go to these 'doctors':

**Researchers:** Do you think the witchdoctors get customers? Expound.

**Respondent 1:** Yes, they do. You know people are disillusioned and in desperation and the witchdoctors offer ready services. When they advertise, they give people immediate solutions. The people are looking for results immediately but at the end of the day there is nothing much they give them.

**Respondent 2:** Yes. The reason why they advertise is because they want to 'catch' more customers. I cannot blame them for getting customers...they are in their own business. They do their own thing. The constitution allows them to advertise.

On this discursive level, the rhetoric therefore relies on words and symbols to create and exchange meanings. By using Kiswahili, the proprietor of this business intends to reach a wider clientele as the language is for wider communication, a *Lingua Franca* in Kenya. The inclusion of telephone numbers from the two leading telephony service providers enhances the accessibility of the 'doctor' to everybody. The discursive nature of this advertisement ensures that the various social classes in the society are not left behind. For instance, the clients in formal employment seeking

promotion and the clients in informal businesses are both taken care of by the doctor. Hence, the public find themselves consuming the products advertised without much effort. This is supported by [28] who say that public or social advertising is oriented to the audience, united mainly by people's social status. It surely refers to the concept of *logos* which is a parameter of logical reasoning. The advertisers reason out that the people would want 'treatment' for what the mainstream medical world does not offer.

From the interviews conducted, it was averred that most people go to the witchdoctors out of desperation and disillusionment as most of them think that they are likely to get quick and ready solutions. It was also noted that the government is very much aware of this business hence the presence of the print advertisements all over the urban centers and some being electronically broadcasted over the local radio stations. However, it is not clear whether the clients succeed in their endeavors to get immediate remedies to their problems. According to Aristotle's work penned in 1378 as cited in [29], *pathos* is referred to in such circumstances which encompasses the emotional influence on the audience and that the goal of each speech is to persuade the audience. The aim of *pathos* is to reduce the audience's ability to judge. The respondents interviewed stated that they cannot know for sure because they have never gone to the 'doctors'. They, though, cited cases of some clients reporting to the police of being conned.

In rhetoric, such communication is specifically directed at a public audience. The audience has to make a decision about whether to seek for 'treatment' from the doctor or not. Aristotle talks about rhetorical syllogism. Aristotle builds a thought that advertising discourse models attitudes and expresses those attitudes rhetorically. The less we notice it and think about it, the more easily it can exert its influence because, in not noticing it, we think that we are impervious to it and, the result of that thought process is that we have no critical protection from it because we do not employ our critical skills to examine its inherent assumptions. This confirms [30] claims that the goal of the advertisement is to pay attention to the taste of ordinary people and simultaneously help the industries to produce goods in harmony with the consumers' tastes. The consumers seem to be the 'makers' of these advertisements.

This view from Aristotle demonstrates the concept of syllogism whereby the audience or public participates in the advertisement by supplying the missing pieces of speech and information. The advertisement simply mentions *business*, *education* and *to protect the home* as some of the services being offered, however; it fails to be more informative about the specifics. The public are supposed to provide the

lacking information and still expect to get the appropriate medicine for their problem from *Prof.* For instance, the vagueness of medicine for *education* is to make the public fill in the void and be part of the whole process. Also, the public are the ones to be specific about their business problem.

This is closely related to the concept of credibility. Aristotle calls this *ethos* which is the rhetor's ability to be perceived as a credible figure. The advertisement avers that *Prof, Dr. wa Mitishamba ana Dawa ya...* (*Prof, Dr.* of herbals has the medicine for...) as an introductory line to the public. By using titles such as *Prof.* and *Dr.*, the rhetor wants to appear well read and someone with expertise and know how in this medical field. This was corroborated by some of the respondents interviewed during the study:

**Researchers:** What is your view at the way they call themselves?

**Respondent 2:** Even the way they call themselves is mysterious. They try to paint some picture that makes one not understand them well. They even call themselves Professors, Doctors...*Dumba wa Dumba* (has deadly magical power), *Mama Saidi Kutoka Zanzibar* (Saidi's mother from Zanzibar), *Daktari Kutoka Kitui* (Doctor from Kitui)... even those names alone are meant to create some mystery around them. Most of them claim to be from Tanzania and Congo. They even have agents who work for them.

These field responses confirm [27] assertion that advertising is both pervasive and persuasive and seeks to influence not only our actions, but also our beliefs because it is an axiom of persuasion that action is motivated by belief. The public are, therefore, led into the belief that they are dealing with an expert with the right knowledge to solve their problems. The name *Maji Marefu* (literary translated as a long stream of water), for instance, is most likely fictitious, a trademark and is supposed to catch the attention of the consumers. Another interviewed respondent said that:

**Respondent 3:** These people want to hide their identity. They want to identify with Uganda, Tanganyika, the Coast, *Ukambani* (Kamba land)... regions stereotyped for black magic, even if they are just locals.

Aristotle builds a thought that advertising discourse models attitudes and expresses those attitudes rhetorically. Moreover, Aristotle posits that *ethos*, which can be noted in the advertisement #1, is concerned with the self-portrayal of the speaker. Thus, it deals with the conscious and unconscious demonstration of the speaker's character during the delivery of speech. The less we notice it and think about it, the more easily it can exert its influence because, in

not noticing it, we think that we are impervious to it and, the result of that thought process is that we have no critical protection from it because we do not employ our critical skills to examine its inherent assumptions. The way the advertisements are shaped reflect the societal values and beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

We use language to interact with other people and this interaction invites identification which may result in persuasion. Rhetorical critic like [30] notes that persuasion is a result of the interaction between man and his language and man is capable of persuasion because of his ability to respond both linguistically and semantically. She adds that language builds identification, and identification opens a channel through which influence can be exerted. It is from this perspective that it can be noted that the advertisement #1 used language in such a way to reach its audience and influence their response.

From the study it was inferred that the odder the 'treatment' claims the more potential the 'doctor' is. The kind of names, mostly pseudonyms, is supposed to make them look mysterious and hence enhance the public's believability in the services they offer. That influences the public's belief and ends up being persuaded. The vagueness of medicine for the various claims is to make the public fill in the void and be part of the whole process. Syllogism, *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* are features highly exploited by these 'medical' advertising.

Also, as some respondents stated, most consumers of their services are a desperate and disillusioned lot who are after quick and total solutions. Advertisements should therefore not mislead the public by making exaggerated claims. This would certainly lead to the abuse of trust and equally exploit the consumers. It can also be drawn from the interviews that it is what society accepts that drives what these advertisements show us. These claims made by the advertisements reflect what the society readily accepts. Hence, advertising is always linked with the audience's societal values.

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