

Chapter 14

Marketing Christianity and Men of God Through the Use of Signs: A Study of Advertising Copies by Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Nigeria

Floribert Patrick C. Endong
University of Calabar, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Most advertising copies designed by Nigerian Pentecostal Churches are rarely monosemic and hardly understandable from a literal exegesis. This is partly due to the fact that they most often integrate various typologies of signs and symbols. These signs are aimed (i) to quickly and effectively convey specific meanings to the readership and (ii) fashion the overall advertising messages according to the taste of the time. Based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 490 advertising copies, this study reveals that 68.77% of the print advertisements generated by Nigerian Churches contain signs and symbols. Majority (56.08%) of these signs and symbols are Christian in nature (they are inspired by the universal Christian symbolism and iconography); while, 30.26% of them are rooted in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. The latter category of signs is commonly used in a postmodern or sensational manner, to make reference to local religious myths and specific socio-political events which seriously affect or shape Nigerian Pentecostal Christianities. This postmodern use of signs implicitly reveals that, the advertising message designers are conscious of the highly competitive environment in which churches and men of God operate in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian Christian organizations have, these last years, embraced various postmodern paradigms in their conception and execution of marketing and advertising campaigns. To propagate, sell, and/or defend their doctrines, products and services (faith-based programs), they have often embarked on techniques which go beyond the mere mobilization of linguistic and paralinguistic tools. Their marketing and advertizing messages have most often integrated the use of signs and symbols, which either refer to a wide range of metaphysical and spiritual phenomena, or point to some Nigerian socio-cultural realities. Some of these Christian vitalities have come to the understanding that the act of marketing or advertizing their faith, services and programs is really non-dissociable from the culture of promising enticing benefits such as political or spiritual power, wealth, life (everlasting), healing, deliverance and ‘fruit of the womb’ among others. Others have similarly tended to be of the persuasion that marketing Christianity imperatively entails presenting it (the Christian faith) or specific men of God and Christian denominations as the infallible elixir of the persisting social, economic and political malaises of Nigeria. All these maxims have motivated them to deploy a vast array of captivating and thought-provoking signs bordering on some Christian myths and imageries, as well as on some aspects of both the traditional and modern life in Nigeria.

This thesis can be well illustrated through a critical exploration of advertizing copies designed by the burgeoning Pentecostal and charismatic churches based in the country. This chapter opts to focus on such an endeavor. Based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 490 advertising copies randomly collected in some South-eastern Nigerian cities, the chapter sets out to answer four following research questions: (1) to what extent are signs and symbols deployed in the advertising copies designed by Nigerian Pentecostal/charismatic churches; (2) to what extent are these signs tapping into the Nigerian socio-cultural or political experience; (3) to what extent are the signs making reference to imageries and myths structuring the Christian worldview in general, and; (4) to what extent are these signs used specifically to advertize or market particular men of God (ecclesiastic figures). In tandem with the above-mentioned questions, the chapter is structured in three main parts. The first part provides a review of literature, which critically explores issues like semiotics as a method of analyzing the media text, the use of sign in advertising and the state of religious advertising in Nigeria. The second part deals with the methodology adopted by the author for the study and the third part provides results and analysis of findings.

SEMIOTICS AS A TOOL FOR ANALYZING MEDIA TEXTS

Semiotics – as a discipline – is concerned with the construction and conveyance of meaning. In simple terms, it could be defined as the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. According to Saussure (1974), it is “a science that studies the life of signs within society” (p.16). In other words, it is the study of the social production of meaning through the use of sign systems. As a science, semiotics shows what constitutes signs as well as the laws that govern them. It, thus, focuses on the examination of signs or symbolic systems, the way they are produced, disseminated and consumed within a specific socio-cultural context. A sign, in this context, is construed as anything (word, image, sound, facial expression or gesture among others) which, in some capacity or respect, stands for something other than itself. The International Commission of Illumination [CIE] defines it as “a device which provides a visual

19 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/marketing-christianity-and-men-of-god-through-the-use-of-signs/213101

Related Content

An Integrated Framework for Sustainable Schools

Ting Wang (2016). *International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing* (pp. 30-38).
www.irma-international.org/article/an-integrated-framework-for-sustainable-schools/152205

Online Marketing Induced Performance Volatility

Manoj Kumar (2017). *International Journal of Online Marketing* (pp. 37-63).
www.irma-international.org/article/online-marketing-induced-performance-volatility/175826

The Relationship between Purchase Intentions and Recommend Intentions in Assessing Market Potential for Graduate Degree Programs: Uncollapsed and Collapsed Recommend Intentions

Michael J. Roszkowski (2015). *International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing* (pp. 1-18).
www.irma-international.org/article/the-relationship-between-purchase-intentions-and-recommend-intentions-in-assessing-market-potential-for-graduate-degree-programs/143183

Spanish Food Private Labels: In Search of a Differential Positioning

Rafael Marañoñand María Puelles Gallo (2016). *Handbook of Research on Strategic Retailing of Private Label Products in a Recovering Economy* (pp. 126-153).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/spanish-food-private-labels/157652

Evaluating the Performance of e-Government in Egypt: A Public-Value Approach

Safaa Ahmed Hussein (2018). *International Journal of Online Marketing* (pp. 1-20).
www.irma-international.org/article/evaluating-the-performance-of-e-government-in-egypt/198324