

Chapter 12

The Semiotics of the Logos of Selected Universities in Southwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Abstract coloured logos of universities are one of the foremost visual elements representing the beliefs of higher institutions of learning and which are difficult for the audience to ignore. This study examined how the combination of colours and logos is employed as a branded identity by universities to tell the world about their beliefs and values. The study examines the use of colour in the logos of six universities in Southwestern Nigeria using Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's approach to multimodality. A socio-semiotic study of the selected logos provided insights into what these Nigerian universities stand for and what they do. Apart from the beauty logos added to the social media platforms, they have also become means by which higher institutions of learning sell themselves. Their ideas and beliefs are subtly advertised through the logos. The socio-semiotic approach helped in deconstructing how this is done.

INTRODUCTION

There is a proliferation of higher institutions in Nigeria. Sasu (2023) notes that there are 170 universities in Nigeria. As of February 2023, there were about 79 private universities, 43 federal universities and 48 state universities. As important as education is, the multiplicity of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has turned universities, even the good ones, into competitors. Parents, potential students and their relatives are, thus, left with no choice, then to compare and contrast the qualities of these universities, using their websites and logos. Since the continued survival of these institutions relies, heavily,

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on a regular increase in the enrolment of new students, the management of each school is always seen devising strategic means of outsmarting the other.

Branding is one of the strategies often used by institutions to represent their identities and ideologies. Education is, thus, objectified by these institutions, in a bid to survive the competitive market. The logo is utilised as one of the means by which each university brands and advertises its uniqueness. Apart from the ability of a logo to say something nice about a university, it also provides the opportunity to utilise creativity to one's advantage, leveraging the resource of colour deployed in the design. According to Fairclough (2001), sometimes, images have the ability to capture what words are unable to. This means, an image, especially if it is a creative one, is not likely to be unseen. McIntyre (2008) stated that "the reason for this is that colours (and graphics) capture the consumers attention then causes them to read your advertisement. Psychologists have suggested that color impression can account for 60% of the acceptance or rejection of that product or service".

Before now, the love for education was enough to make students pick their preferred schools. Such decisions were also helped by the fact that there were few schools and there was really no competition then; the schools were solely owned and run by government across different regions in the country. However, things have changed. As the population is growing, the number of higher institutions is also increasing. Students are, thus, forced to decide, based on the programmes and basic amenities the schools offer, through their advertisements. This could help in making the best choice for some students. However, as interesting as this method may seem, it could also be tedious. Virtually all these universities 'advertise' themselves through the same means. Students are, thus, faced with the task of picking from a variety of 'similar', yet 'different' alternatives.

Logos are symbols of identity employed by higher institutions of learning to differentiate one from the other. Even before education and these universities became objectified through advertising, existing universities employed logos to tell the world about their ideas. Logos were also used by the corporate world as a market strategy to give their products peculiar identities. Now that the school management of universities are not hiding the fact that their schools have become goods in need of customers, every available means of outsmarting others 'in the game' is employed by those concerned. The school management, members of the governing board, lecturers, non-academic staff members, and especially university employees in the Information and Communications Technology sector of universities are encouraged, and, sometimes, forced to look for means of becoming Nigeria's most celebrated means of getting university education.

Logos provide a creative means of advertisement because it combines both words and images to communicate. In addition, logos are designed with the use of colour. Colour, especially when creatively used, takes an image from the usual level to that of an extraordinary one. It brings together other parts that could have been left unnoticed. It draws attention to itself and the product. "Beyond such aesthetic motivations, colours could assume another level of significance relative to the world being depicted" (Adegoju, 2008, p. 25). According to Bottomley and Doyle (2006), an appropriate use of colour gives inherent and immediate value to a brand. Logos often encode different meanings, useful for a systematic identification of a group of individuals. They are associative and symbolic references. Generally, logos are useful in branding and creating a distinctive identity for products and services. They are used by educational institutions to encode their core values. Apart from the provision of a means of advertisement and the creation of a kind of demarcation, logos are useful in the establishment of what each university stands for. They visually represent the core values and belief systems of higher institutions in a catchy and an interesting manner. The use of visual signs for the purpose of communication and other related

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