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Revisiting the forgotten pandemics: Using multimodality in crafting images of HIV/AIDS in Kenyan newspapers

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Abstract

The advent of COVID-19 towards the end of the year 2019 led to radical paradigm shifts in public health management strategies across the world. This at a time when the HIV and AIDS pandemic has been in existence for close to half a century and continues to ravage poor populations of the Third World and developing nations. The World Health organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020. Since then, COVID-19 has been considered a social phenomenon because of the complex nature of the virus' infection, efforts to develop treatment and the public's responses to the disease and how it has affected human interactions. Countries around the world responded to this novel pandemic by instituting measures aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. The Kenya Ministry of Health for example, gave several directives aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 such as setting up hand washing stations in all public places including homes, banning public gatherings, and wearing protective face masks among others. All attention was thus focused on the novel pandemic, and HIV and AIDS which has been in existence for over four decades seems to have been forgotten. It is against this background that this paper revisits the public health management efforts on HIV and AIDS prior to the advent of the COVID-19 virus as seen in one newspaper advertisement in Kenya about HIV and AIDS.

Keywords: COVID-19, HIV and AIDS, pandemics, public health, virus

Public Interest Statement

This study one newspaper advertisement on HIV and AIDS which appeared in the Kenyan print media as a public health campaign in the fight against the pandemic. This is a purely academic investigation of language use in newspaper advertisements and the authors do not wish to be seen to in any way infringe on the private lives of the characters depicted in the advertisement.

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Introduction

The world has witnessed two great pandemics in the past 40 years; HIV and AIDS from the early 1980s and recently COVID-19 which emerged towards the end of the year 2019. The fear and trepidation with which the world received the news of the outbreak of COVID-19 in China led to swift implementation of public health measures to protect the public. Funds were re-directed towards combating the immediate imminent danger. This led to a great paradigm shift towards fighting COVID-19 at the expense of HIV and AIDS. In that process, HIV and AIDS which has been in existence for over four decades seems to have been forgotten. The fight against HIV and AIDS in Kenya had roped in the concerted efforts of government, medical practitioners, religious organizations and the media. Efforts to combat and manage the impacts of the scourge included the development of Information, Education and Communication materials such as newspaper advertisements. This paper explores the multimodal representations of images of HIV and AIDS as seen in one newspaper advertisement. It entails a critical content analysis of the multimodal discourses that are prevalent in advertisements in the print media.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had great impacts on all spheres of human life. Firstly, it has had serious ramifications on the health sector the world over and in Kenya specifically (Oduor and Kodak, 2020). With the rising number of COVID-19 cases, health institutions as well as the medical practitioners have been overwhelmed. The cost of treating the disease is still very high therefore, a majority of citizens cannot afford it. This is compounded by the fact that majority of the population do not have health insurances thus, in the event that they contract COVID-19, the cost of their treatment will have to be shouldered by family and friends. Insurance companies have also declined to cover conditions arising out of covid-19 infections. The health sector in Kenya has had challenges since the country attained independence. Ouma et al. (2020) note that apart from the current pandemic that is causing fear and undisclosed suffering in the country, Kenya has also had to grapple with tenacious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and AIDS and measles. Other problems such as corruption in the health sector, inadequate allocation of resources and unproductive policies make it almost impossible for citizens to access quality health care. Moreover, recurrent strikes by health care workers, exorbitant prescriptions, the unattained ratio of health practitioners-to-population and unequal distribution of health facilities across the country have been the norm (Ogembo et. al. 2021).

Secondly, the pandemic has affected the economy of the country. There have been serious interruptions in the economy leading to massive job losses. Odhiambo and Okungu (2020) posit that the COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted worldwide supply chains which Kenya has heavily depended on thereby impacting heavily on the economic growth of Kenya leading to laying off of many workers in the Kenyan economy. Moreover, the pandemic has put pressure on the Kenyan shilling leading to scarcity of foreign currency. This pandemic has also led to the reduction of diaspora remittances further affecting the economy. The disease has had a great negative impact not only on the economy of many countries but also on the political and social stability of their citizens (Okal et. al. 2020)

Thirdly, the education sector has also been on the receiving end in the wake of the pandemic. When COVID-19 was reported in Kenya, the government closed all learning institutions as one of the measures to contain the disease. According to Ngwacho, (2020) institutional

closures affect not only learners, instructors and households but have substantial societal and economic consequences. Institutional cessations in reaction to COVID-19 has brought forth countless economic and social issues including homelessness and food insecurity among others. Ngwacho further notes that the effect of the pandemic is more acute for destitute children and their households leading to disrupted learning, nutritional challenges, children challenges and resultant financial cost implications to households who do not work.

Fourthly, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (2020) reports that efforts to suppress the spread of COVID-19 has disrupted agri-food supply chains in Kenya and constrained the millions of people whose livelihoods depend on the food system as well as citizens who rely on purchased food. At the onset of COVID-19, food chains faced 'triple menace' of mutually aggravating calamities: COVID-19, a locust invasion and erratic weather conditions causing floods in some regions and droughts in others. A survey conducted by the Center for Agriculture and Biosciences International in September 2020, revealed that the proportion of people who are food and nutrition insecure had increased by 38% in Kenya compared to pre-COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic thus has had immediate serious impacts on all spheres of human existence. Given its endemic nature, all attention has been focused on the novel virus alone, at the expense of other pandemics and diseases such as HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. It is possible that HIV and AIDS have continued to ravage the poor populations without much notice. The role of the media spreading information is crucial during such times. The WHO recognizes the role of the media in public health management of pandemics. The media helped spread the public health messages on COVID-19 and quick response has been achieved within a very short period. The WHO's (2020) guidelines on how to communicate and manage uncertainties during the pandemic advise that public communication should incorporate information about the disease, risks and prevention measures coupled with recommendations on how to counter misinformation that may already be in the public domain. Given that misinformation and confusion have become rampant during the pandemic, the press has a role to play in providing and ensuring that their audiences receive accurate and timely information regarding the disease and pandemic. Consequently, while working as a bridge between the government and the society, and following the WHO's declaration of COVID-19 a pandemic, the media all over the world have aggressively endeavoured to create awareness about the disease, correct the misinformation peddled around and encourage adoption of recommended preventive measures.

Theoretical framework

This paper operates within the Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory. Multimodality extends beyond the analysis of words in discourses; it entails a content analysis and equally investigates the verbal and visual modes of signification such as phrases and sentences, slogans and advert claims as well as the participants' body language, face-work, gestures, colour and lightings in audio visual discourses. This is a model of linguistics analysis which entails 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. In this study, there is text analysis as well as analysis of the responses of readers as the discursive practices entailing production and consumption of the texts. The study also takes note of the presentation

of participants in HIV and AIDS discourses. Discourse constitutes knowledge, social identities and social relationships between groups of people. This study further investigates the social relationships between the advertisers, the readers and public health practitioners. It examines how identities of readers and images of HIV and AIDS are constructed.

Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- To critically examine the presentation of images of HIV and AIDS in newspaper advertisements.
- To explore the media portrayal of HIV and AIDS pandemic in the face of the novel COVID-19 pandemic

Methodology

This study uses one purposively selected newspaper advertisement that depicts images of HIV and AIDS from *The Daily Nation* newspaper. This particular advertisement depicts a nude couple in bed: man lying on his back, woman on his chest, both fast asleep, mouths wide open; alcohol bottle and two half-empty glasses on the table in the foreground; an ash-tray with stubs of cigarettes partly hidden by the glass on table. Sex, alcohol and drugs are issues that young readers easily relate with since they are in the experimental stage of development. This is a descriptive research design in which the advertisement was purposively selected and presented to 50 teenage readers in Kisumu City who gave their responses to a structured questionnaire. The responses were thereafter analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Analysis also involved content description of the multimodal features of the advertisement.

Representations of HIV and AIDS in the mass media

Mass media interventions aim to prevent HIV and AIDS by increasing knowledge, improving risk perceptions, changing sexual behaviors and questioning potentially harmful social norms. Campaigns utilize radio, television, and other outlets and ideally operate as part of multi-level efforts, in which mutually reinforcing messages are offered through interpersonal, community, and national channels. Mass media interventions are a critical part of an effective prevention approach. Language in the mass media is scrutinized as a site of power and struggle, and a site where language is apparently transparent (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Power relations obtain between advertisers and readers as they construct the messages and negotiate meanings as seen through the eyes of teenagers. Readers are generally portrayed as the likely victims, people under threat or already suffering, while the advertisers adopt a lofty social standpoint from where they address the 'lowly' readers. This study further examines how advertisements serve the interests of the powerful in society by selling their products such as condoms, while advocating responsible behaviour by avoiding extra-marital sex and exercising general self-control. This article thus investigates the production of meaning from the verbal and visual representations of HIV and AIDS in newspaper advertisements. Hence it is an investigation of the role of drugs and alcohol in the spread of HIV and AIDS and whether advertisements have a bearing on personal decisions that can help mitigate the spread of the scourge. The study further examines the meanings of images in the advertisement as part of content analysis. This is a critical analysis of the verbal and

visual modes of signification in newspaper advertisements. Analysis entails application of Kress and Van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis to advertisements in the print media.

Application of multimodality to the discourse

Below is the analysis of the graphic and visual modes of signification in the newspaper advertisement. This particular advertisement makes use of a number of verbal and visual semiotic devices such as body language, colour, gaze, graphics, gesture, imagery and symbolism. Transcription was done using the two-column mode by Jones (1997) to present the verbal and visual semiotic features of multimodal discourses. The analysis that follows below treats the multimodal discourses as the semiotic devices that construct the images of HIV and AIDS in the print media.



Courtesy Daily Nation

Drinking too much alcohol can lower the accuracy of one's judgment and increase the likelihood of sexual behaviours that put one at risk of HIV infection. If you enjoy alcohol, remember to drink in moderation.

Transcript of the Advert (Using Jones, 1997 Transcription model)

Visual Textual Language	Graphic Textual Language
<p><u>Photo size</u> A full-page size photo of a nude couple in bed, man lying on his back, woman on his chest, both fast asleep, mouths wide open. Alcohol bottle and two half-empty glasses on the table in the foreground. An ashtray with stubs of cigarettes partly hidden by the glass on table.</p> <p><u>Setting:</u> Inside their bedroom or hotel room.</p> <p><u>Facial expressions.</u> Both man and woman fast asleep. Eyes shut, mouths wide open- a sign of tiredness that comes with too much drinking and sex.</p> <p><u>Characters:</u> A strong, healthy looking man on his back in bed. An equally strong, healthy looking woman lies on the man’s bare chest.</p> <p><u>Colours:</u> bedroom is generally dark since light are off. Blue sky visible through the window. Dark shadows cast by light from outside the window. Bedding generally creamy white in colour. Clear bottle and glasses with the brownish contents. Words in black and white against red and black backgrounds.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ALCOHOL 350m 2004 (33.8FL OZ) 88proof</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kunywa Zaidi, Teleza Zaidi.</p> <p>Drinking too much alcohol can lower the accuracy of one’s judgment and increase the likelihood of sexual behaviours that put one at risk of HIV infection. If you enjoy alcohol, remember to drink in moderation.</p>

Visual semiotics of HIV and AIDS in newspaper advertisements

Multimodality is an integral feature of newspaper advertisements. Ambience, body language, colour, gaze, gesture, graphics, imagery and symbolism were identified as the modes of signification in the advertisement. These modes of signification work in complementarity to construct the images of HIV and AIDS in the print media.

Body language

Body language refers to the nonverbal signs that we use to communicate. According to experts, these nonverbal signals make up a huge part of daily communication. From our facial expressions to our body movements, the things we *don’t* say can still convey volumes of information. It has been suggested that body language may account for between 60 to 65% of all communication (Cherry, 2019). Understanding body language is important, but it is also essential to pay attention to other cues such as context. In many cases, it is advisable to look at signals as a group rather than focusing on a single action. Newspaper advertisements being still photos, makes it impossible 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. Both characters in the advert are ‘healthy-looking’, a testimony to the fact that they have not yet started suffering

from the effects of HIV and AIDS, and that they may or may not be infected as yet. It could also be an indication that they are already on ARV treatment, hence the lurking danger of infection and reinfection. This is juxtaposed against the potent risk of alcohol, drugs and sex which are presented as the major avenues for infection.

Body language is an important semiotic device because the presentation of an advertisement by a healthy-looking character 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 from buying the product being advertised. This is the sanitized version of HIV and AIDS in the mass media. It is an identity project negotiated by the copywriters, participants and the general public. The message here is that even those who are healthy-looking may be carriers of the HIV and so one needs to exercise maximum caution in matters of sex.

Colour

Each year companies such as Pantone and PPG Paints, announce a colour of the year. As designers, it is essential to know what colors were picked and how they can impact brands (GRIT, 2019). Colour trends determine advertisement appeals. Colour is used in advertisements to achieve specific 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 (Shutterstock, 2020). The characters, background and even the words used are presented in specific colours. Dim light in the room indicates the setting as night time. The graphics are in black and white. White foregrounds the slogan of *Kunywa Zaidi, Teleza Zaidi*. The red ribbon at the bottom right was designed and developed by Population Services International (PSI) as a symbol of solidarity with PLWA.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions in newspaper advertisements include smiles, frowns, grimaces, eye contact and sneers. The smile shows satisfaction and a feeling of well-being. The frown on the other hand is a sign of worry. The facial expressions work in complementarity with graphics to enhance the meaning of the advertisement (Cherry, 2019). Both man and woman in the advertisement are fast asleep, with their mouths wide open. This is a sign of drunkenness and tiredness due to too much alcohol and sex. 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. This is an ideal site in which to observe the contradictory discourses of HIV and AIDS in the mass media. HIV and AIDS discourses offer hope, fear, despair, promise and death all at the same time.

Gestures

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) defines gesture as a movement of your body (especially of your hands and arms) that shows or emphasizes an idea or a feeling. Gestures involve the conventional use of hands for communication (Cherry, 2019). The advert shows the man cuddling the woman with his left hand on her bare back while his right-hand hangs loosely from the bed. The woman is holding the man's bare shoulder in her left hand. Her right hand is not visible. Both

holds are not firm because the man and woman are tired and fast asleep. Gestures reinforce the other activities of the characters and help to emphasize the words which also illustrate the discourse as it is enacted by the characters. The use of gestures makes the advert message more explicit.

Responses to graphics in newspaper advertisements

Since the beginning of advertising, ad campaigns have often employed popular terms and lingo (Kraus, 2011). We see some idioms, simulations of dialect, plays on words, clever double meanings, famous song lyrics, and even biblical verse. Still, if you pay close attention, the source of the original phrase has significance. Newspaper advertisements use words, phrases or sentences as slogan to reinforce the visual images in advertisements. Slogans have a direct relation with the images as they tend to illustrate or summarize the visual content of advertisements. Graphics are presented in English and Kiswahili. 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 advertisement that they found particularly striking and memorable. Table 1 below show their responses:

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

Striking Words, Phrases and Sentences	Frequencies	Percentages
<i>Kunywa Zaidi, Teleza Zaidi</i>	31	62%
If you enjoy alcohol, remember to drink in moderation.	16	32%
Drinking too much alcohol can lower the accuracy of one’s judgment and increase the likelihood of sexual behaviours that put one at risk of HIV infection.	3	6%
Total	50	100%

The most preferred slogan is the Kiswahili expression *Kunywa Zaidi, Teleza Zaidi* (which translates to *Drink More, Slip Further*). This is in line with Kraus (2011) who posits that when advertisements use colloquial language, they mainly target teenagers. The source of the phrase counts. Kiswahili is an official language as well as a national language that most urban youth use in their daily communication. This slogan is particularly directed at the youth and married adults and advises them to avoid alcohol and drugs as these may lead to risky sexual behaviours that expose them to HIV infection. The target age group of teenagers seems to have been reached as this phrase in Kiswahili emerged the most popular slogan (62%) among the respondents.

The next most appealing expression is: *If you enjoy alcohol, remember to drink in moderation* (preferred by 32% of respondents). This generally advises readers to drink in moderation in order to avoid risky sexual behaviours that may lead to HIV infection.

The sentence: *Drinking too much alcohol can lower the accuracy of one’s judgment and increase the likelihood of sexual behaviours that put one at risk of HIV infection* was preferred by

6% of the respondents. This was a rather long expression given that advertisements depend on brevity for the quick reception of messages by readers.

The advertisements of images of AIDS help to achieve various scores on the part of the copywriter. It is possible to sell a product while at the same time passing across a serious medical message. Advertisements have to earn the right to paper space as people generally do not buy newspapers to read advertisements. The discourses themselves have to compete for attention with other advertisements and articles on the same pages. They therefore have to be crafted in such a way that readers simply have to notice them.

Advertisements in newspapers use verbal and visual modes of signification in their presentation of images of HIV and AIDS. The graphics in newspaper advertisements use such stylistic devices like imagery, repetition, hyperbole, slang, Kiswahili, advert claim and point of view while the visual modes of signification of advertisements include colour, gestures, facial expressions and body language.

Pictures blend with words to construct images of HIV and AIDS in advertisements. Graphics occupy a relatively smaller proportion of the advert space than does the whole photo. Visuals take up to three-quarters of space and words appear in small print to illustrate the message on the photo. The visuals alone have enough striking appeal and the reader can get the overall message without reading the graphics. The graphics carry implicit messages that might pass a not-so-keen reader. The slogan is highlighted in white, against the dark background. This has the effect of drawing readers' attention hence the high rate of preference for the slogan *Kunywa Zaidi, Teleza Zaidi*. Colour is used for aesthetic and foregrounding purposes. The words appear at the lower bottom of the advert space. This is to give more room for the photo which generally carries the overall message of the advert. Aspects of visual modes of signification as body language, gaze, gestures, imagery and symbolism are only observable at one instance since newspapers present their adverts in still photographs. But it was possible to observe deliberate gestures like the two-finger V-salute that stands for abstinence. The use of appropriate colours in the photographs helped to construct the images of AIDS in the newspaper adverts, with the red colour being used symbolically on the red ribbon to show solidarity with PLWA and on the question mark on the word SEX? in the advert to show danger- the lingering threat in premarital sex.

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. AIDS has medical, social, economic, ethical and legal implications for the Kenyan public.

Our understanding of disease and health has been transformed in the four decades that HIV and AIDS have been in Kenya. Willis (2002) 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 and AIDS and COVID-19 fits these definitions as these two pandemics have swept around the world with devastating effects on human health, world economies and politics.

Despite major progress, HIV and AIDS remains one of Kenya's most significant public health challenges. The possibility of an HIV-free Kenya by 2030 could be stalled by the fact that not all HIV-positive people are aware of their status. There has been a great paradigm shift towards

fighting COVID-19 at the expense of HIV and AIDS.

The Kenyan Ministry of Health published a report in June 2014, the *Kenya HIV Prevention Revolution Road Map* which aims to dramatically strengthen HIV prevention, with the ultimate goal of reducing new HIV infections to zero by 2030. The report made the following observations and conclusions:

- Sexual transmission accounts for 93.7% of all new HIV infections (MOH, 2014).
- The HIV epidemic in Kenya exhibits extreme geographical and gender disparities. National estimates and modeling indicate that 65% of new adult infections occur in nine of the 47 Counties. There is higher prevalence among women at 7.6% compared to men at 5.6%. There is a treatment gap of over 99,500 women and 64,900 men, in need of ART but not currently receiving treatment. ART coverage is 77% in eligible women compared to 80% in men.
- Key populations contribute a disproportionately high number of new HIV infections annually despite their small population size. According to the MOH (2014), although these populations represent less than 2% of the general population, they contribute a third of all new HIV infections. Key populations in Kenya include sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM) and people who inject drugs.

Even as the prevalence of the HIV and AIDS virus continues to decline among the general adult population, hyper-epidemics persist in parts of the country and among certain groups such as sex workers, the gay and people who inject drugs. Nearly one in three persons newly infected with HIV is a teenager or youth, aged between 15-24 years. There is genuine fear that with world attention focused on the novel COVID-19 pandemic, HIV and AIDS cases may be rising unabated.

Discourses of HIV and AIDS in the Kenyan mass media 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 (1993) 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. This is very much in line with WHO (2020) advice that communication on novel pandemics and epidemics should incorporate information about the disease, risks and prevention measures coupled with recommendations on how to counter misinformation that may already be in the public domain. This paper examines the readers' perceptions of the possible factors that contribute to increased HIV and AIDS prevalence.

Alcohol, drug abuse and addiction have been inextricably linked with HIV and AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic. The link has to do with heightened risk - both of contracting and transmitting HIV and of worsening its consequences (Karen, 2014). Having declared HIV and

AIDS a national disaster in 1999, 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 (Willis 2002). Intervention measures have been put in place by the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (hereafter CBOs) to sensitize the general public, create awareness and help combat the disease. Among the intervention measures is the development and dissemination of Information, Education and Communication materials (hereafter IEC materials) such as posters, billboards and advertisements in the newspapers. The IEC materials are supposed to create awareness, inform the public and advocate for behaviour change.

Conclusion

Each day we inch toward the end of COVID-19. The end is not when cases go to zero, but rather when we accept what has been true all along. Because of multiple animal reservoirs, because vaccinated people can still experience breakthrough infections, and because billions of people globally have yet to be vaccinated, the truth is clear: SARS-CoV-2 is an endemic virus (Gichango 2021). Over the next decade, give or take a few years, every single person on earth has a date with this virus. We will all be exposed, and the virus might replicate in some of our respiratory mucosa. A few of us might get very sick, while many of us may only get mild illness or not get sick at all from our encounter. I prefer to meet the virus on the best terms: after two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine (ibid.). The implication of the above statements is that the quick response by medical research institutes and pharmaceutical companies has led to the development of vaccines against the COVID-19 virus within a very short period, unlike has been the case with HIV and AIDS. Further, COVID-19 will continue to be with us for the next decade or so. This means that, just like HIV and AIDS, the pandemic will continue to have long-term medical, economic, social and political ramifications in countries across the world. The magnitude of the effects will depend on the economic power of countries. Thus, we are likely to witness great disparities on the effects of COVID-19 between countries in the developed world and countries in the developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia are likely to bear the brunt of the pandemic for a long time to come. It is therefore important to note that the fight against both pandemics must be sustained in medical, economic, political and social fronts.

In order to understand how representations are produced and reproduced, it is important to explore not just the theories that elucidate the art of representation, but to also examine the characteristics of the media content that lead to the construction of these representations. The WHO's (2020) guidelines on how to communicate and manage uncertainties during the pandemic advice that public communication should incorporate information about the disease, risks and prevention measures coupled with recommendations on how to counter misinformation that may already be in the public domain. Given that misinformation and confusion have become rampant during the pandemic, the press has a role to play in providing and ensuring that their audiences receive accurate and timely information regarding the disease and pandemic.

This study will enable advertisers to assess the impact of advertisements on readers, giving what modes of signification are effective in mass media communication. The advertisers will be able to assess their sales pitches depending on the impact of the discourses on the readers.

In describing the language of newspaper advertisements, the study will benefit researchers interested in descriptive linguistics on such views as how to describe styles used in different types of texts. It also enables those interested in semiotics to consider the various aspects of the print advertisement that construct the semiotic field of discourse. The Ministry of Health and public health practitioners such as Population Services International (PSI) and National Campaigns Against Drugs and Substance Abuse (NACADA) will be able to assess how newspaper advertisements of HIV impact on readers and help develop more effective Information, Education and Communication materials for the campaign against HIV and AIDS.

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Disclaimer Statement

This is a stand-alone paper that is not part of any thesis or project submitted to any university for examination.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

The authors equally contributed in the research and development of the work.

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