

# **The Manipulation of Kenyan Television Viewers through the Modes of Signification in Television Advertisements**

**Kodak Benard**

Department of Linguistics Maseno University, MASENO, KENYA

**Prof. Peter M. Matu**

Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Technical University of Kenya, NAIROBI, KENYA

**Dr. Omondi Oketch**

Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Technical University of Kenya, NAIROBI, KENYA

## **Abstract**

Television advertisements come in multi-modes, that is, they use verbal and visual modes of signification. This poses a challenge in that in multimodal discourses, television viewers are faced with the changing phenomena in which language per se is being displaced by sound and image, taking over tasks associated with the role of language. This paper analyzes the modes of signification of Kenyan television advertisements in relation to consumer reactions and responses to the advertisements. This paper examines how the modes of signification are used to craft advertisements that appeal to television viewers and determines their impact on Kenyan consumer culture. Using Kress and Van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis theory, the study examines the manipulation of six modes of signification in ten Kenyan television advertisements so as to project the desired images. Multimodality typically refers to the multiple modes through which social semiosis takes place. In this paper we argue that television advertisements create meaning through the careful manipulation of verbal and visual modes of signification so as to craft the desired interpretations that are advantageous to the advertisers. The study critically analyzes the advertisements and determines that advertisements manipulate language in such a way that the interpretations made are often to the advertisers' advantage. The locus of interpretation is placed on the viewer, and the discourses are manipulated in such a way that the readings made are to the benefit of the advertiser. Findings reveal that viewers do not necessarily read the modes of signification as individual images but rather as episodes in the entire discourse that help create the whole message as one complex entity. It also posits that advertisements are effective in eliciting the desired responses from television viewers thus advertisements promote consumerism and globalization.

**Keywords:** advertisements, modes of signification, multimodality, viewers, visual semiotics

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Modern technological advances have stretched all forms of communication and even created new modes of communication. Communication in the mass media is no longer a mono-modal phenomenon but a combination of various modes hence multimodality. Television advertisement is one such area of multimodal communication that poses challenges to viewers who have to negotiate the preferred interpretations. Advertisers often assume that viewers always interpret their advertisements as they so wish. This brings us to the following questions: what is it that makes viewers follow the advertisements and interpret them as intended by advertisers, and how do television viewers work out the meanings from verbal and visual images? Television advertisements exploit both linguistic and pictorial resources. The multimodal resources are manipulated in such a way that they always influence viewers to behave as intended by the copywriters. It is often assumed that advertisements communicate the intended message to all viewers and that the potential buyers understand the messages in their entirety. The locus of interpretation is placed on the viewer, and the discourses are manipulated in such a way that the readings made are to the benefit of the advertisers. This article examines the modes of signification in television advertisements and how they impact on viewers as they interact in the meaning-making, meaning-negotiation process.

## **2.0 TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS**

Advertisement is a form of communication intended to promote the sale of a product or service, to influence public opinion, to gain political support, to advance a particular course or to elicit some other response desired by the advertiser (Roberts, 1987). Advertisements enable consumers to be aware of the existence of a product or service. Advertisements draw attention when they are positioned strategically (Roberts, 1987). Television advertisements employ verbal and visual modes of signification and offer specific strategies for viewers to infer meanings. One such strategy is to craft visually intense and highly persuasive discourses in the television advertisements, which can be manipulated to lead viewers into making interpretations that are in the advertisers' favor. The advertisements are crafted using modes of signification such as speech, writings, participants, face-work, soundtracks, lighting and color.

In media studies, the term “language” often refers to more than just verbal language. This idea of language involving all systems of communication is associated with the modern study of language as proposed by the French theorist, De Saussure (1922). He believed that all the ways in which human beings communicate, such as through flags, smoke signals, religious ceremonies and clothes, could be looked at and analyzed as if they were languages. Saussure called this method of studying all signs as language “semiotics”. He maintained that one of the chief tasks of linguistics was to define itself and secondly, that the objects of study in language, unlike other sciences, are not given in advance. For linguistics, it is the definition of language espoused by a theory that actually creates the object of study.

Semiotics and linguistics share certain fundamental elements: the notion of forms related to meanings (linguistic sign in language and any other sign in semiotics) that function as part of code systems (language, gestures, art, music, cinema, etc) which are used to communicate information. De Saussure focused on the sign as the theoretical and methodological unit of linguistic and semiotic analysis. Semiotics and linguistics are connected and can actually function together provided that linguists adhere to the original Saussurean suggestion to adopt the *sign* as the primary shared unit of both linguistic and semiotic analysis. The sign is presented as the most crucial link connecting linguistics and semiotics as part of a larger structural paradigm. The above notion of the sign is the core of Systemic Functional Linguistics in which language is seen to represent and construct our perception of reality in the form of “goings-on” or processes of various types (for example doing, being, happening, etc) which incorporate different categories of participants (for example, actors, goals, receivers, sensors, attributes, etc). Using the Systemic Functional Linguistics Model, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) posit the existence of two main categories of processes of which the participants represented in those images come to take part. This study uses the linguistic sign as the unit of its analysis of the discourses in television advertisements. The paper analyzes how the linguistic sign is used to create the overall message of television advertisements. The linguistic sign in this case includes the verbal and visual properties of the advertisements. The study also examines how the modes of signification in television advertisements impact on the viewers’ perceptions of advertised goods and it analyzes how the modes of signification are used in shaping the messages to aid meaning interpretation and determines their impact on the viewers’ perceptions.

The mass media, through advertisements, serves as a perfect vehicle for promoting production, sales and consumption of goods (Pateman, 1983). Advertisement enables consumers to be aware of the existence of a product or service. Advertisement discourse is implicated as a vehicle for selling goods, services, organizations, people or ideas. Advertisements are widely available in the mass media and it is often taken for granted that the public readily and easily understands them (Harris, 1983). Advertisement promotes consumerism, that is the social and economic order that is based on systematic creation and fostering of a desire to purchase goods and services in ever greater amounts, and there is need to understand its impact on human life. Advertisement promotes the belief that free choice of consumers should dictate the economic structure of society. It addresses the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings. Other societal influences on consumers include the shaping forces that economic and cultural globalization exert on consumption and marketplace practices, identity politics undertaken through consumption, political and ethical consumerism and transformative consumption projects and mobilization of marketplace resources which are effectively managed through advertisement (Bloor and Bloor, 2007). This study also explains how advertisements are manipulated to project the preferred interpretations, which in turn promotes consumerism and globalization.

The melting of national boundaries through globalization is impacting on the nation state and communal cultures, and advertisement is one avenue through which this change is taking place hence scholars need to study the wheels of this social transformation. Advertisement is a

vehicle for promoting social modernization and trade in developing society. Roberts (1987) posits that the debate about the influence of advertising in most societies, especially the developing nations, revolves around the reinforcement of the consumption habits of the capitalistic aspects of the world. With globalization, certain technical developments have a way of changing, controlling and dictating societal behavior. Globalization therefore, is the process by which regional economies, societies and cultures become integrated through a globe-spanning network of communication and trade (Bhagwati, 2004). It is the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology. Advertisement is one channel that promotes consumerism and globalization and there is need to study this wheel of societal transformation.

### **3.0 MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS THEORY**

This paper uses the Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) Multimodal Discourse Analysis theory as its analytical tool. Multimodal Discourse Analysis is a theory of reading images, in which Kress and Van Leeuwen posit that the theory was introduced to highlight the importance of taking into account semiotics other than language-in-use. Multimodal discourse analysis is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, soundtracks and music. When one watches advertisements on television, both verbal and visual entities come into the viewers' eyes and ears as images. A comprehensive interpretation of the advertisements therefore calls for employment of more than just one mode of interpretation. Multimodal discourse analysis has its roots in Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1978; Fairclough, 1989), which is a critical approach to linguistic analysis in which they postulate that any analysis of discourse should be in three dimensions: 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. Halliday (1978) recognizes three main kinds of semiotic work, which are always performed simultaneously. Halliday calls these three kinds of work "metafunctions", and distinguishes between: the ideational metafunction, the function of creating representations; the interpersonal metafunction, the part language plays in creating interactions between writers and readers or speakers and listeners; and the textual metafunction, which brings together the individual bits of representations and interaction into the kind of wholes we recognize as specific kinds of texts or communicative events. Multimodal typically refers to the multiple modes of communication (for example spoken, written, printed and digital media, embodied action, and three-dimensional material objects and sites) through which social semiosis takes place. It provides the means to describe a practice or representation in all its semiotic complexity and richness. This research analyzes the verbal and visual features of Kenyan television advertisements.

Most accounts of visual semiotics have concentrated on lexis, that is, denotative and connotative, the iconographical and the iconological signification of the individual people, places and things depicted in images (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). The "grammar" of visual design examines the way these depicted people, places and things are combined into a

meaningful whole. Visual grammar here describes the way in which depicted people, places and things combine in visual “statements” of greater or lesser complexities and extensions. Just like grammar of language describes how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, visual grammar here describes the way in which depicted people, places and things combine in visual “statements” of greater or lesser complexities and extensions. Visual design plays a vital role in the production of meaning. Grammar is the means of representing patterns of experience. It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them (Halliday, 1985). The grammar of visual design therefore explores the interpretive paths in advertisements and how these are manipulated to influence television viewers to behave as desired by the advertisers. It explores how the various modes of signification are manipulated by advertisers to craft a reading position that serves the interests of the advertisers. This study explores how the overall message of television advertisements is constructed and negotiated by the producer and viewer respectively through the interplay of the various modes of communication.

#### 4.0 METHODOLOGY

This descriptive research was carried out amongst supermarket shoppers who are also the television viewers and consumers of advertised products in Kisumu, Kenya. The research used 100 respondents to whom 10 television advertisements and a related questionnaire were administered so as to elicit the desired responses. The ten (10) advertisements are: *Always, Blue Band, Coke, Dettol, Doom, Harpic, KIMBO, Lifebuoy, NIVEA* and *Sunlight*. A further 20 interviewees formed the focus group from whom responses were sought on their opinion about the influence of television advertisements on consumer reactions. The ten advertisements formed the stimulus from which the multimodal phenomena described comprised the primary data. These were collected in frequency tables and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The analysis of the multimodal features of each advertisement elicited secondary data from which further inferences were made. It entailed a content analysis of each advertisement using Frith’s (1998) table for Analysis of Layers of Meaning and Baldry’s (2000) Visual Frame. According to Baldry (2000), multimodal transcription allows a television advertisement to be reconstructed in terms of a table containing a chronological sequence of frames. This technique goes a long way to resolving the difficulties of taking linguistic, musical and pictorial modes into account.

#### 5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section we present an analysis of two out of the four objectives around which the television advertisements were examined in a larger project (Kodak, forthcoming). These were: to examine how the interpretive paths appeal to Kenyan television viewers and to determine the impact of advertisements on Kenyan consumer culture. The section explores how television viewers interact with the advertisement discourses to negotiate the desired interpretations and examines whether they make decisions to buy products on the basis of how they are advertised. Responses were gathered through interviews and questionnaires administered to viewers who are also consumers of the advertised products.

For the purposes of this paper, six modes of signification were identified in the advertisements and a related questionnaire presented to the respondents. The modes were: speech, writings, participants, soundtracks, lighting and color. The modes of signification were thereafter analyzed against the viewer responses. The modes of signification were identified from ten (10) adverts used by the writer in a wider research (Kodak, Ibid.). The ten adverts were: *Always*, a sanitary pad; *Blue Band*, a margarine popular with bread; *Coke* an international soft drink; *Dettol*, a medical soap promoted as disinfectant and antiseptic; *Doom*, an aerosol mosquito spray; *Harpic*, a hygienic liquid disinfectant; *KIMBO*, a cooking fat; *Lifebuoy*, a bathing soap promoted as medicated and helps kill germs; *NIVEA*, a body lotion for smooth skin and *Sunlight*, a washing powder for laundry use.

Television advertisements use words, phrases and sentences both written and spoken to illustrate the action in the discourses. Words generally construct the slogans, messages and songs and blend in with other modes of signification to construct the narrative processes that tell the story in advertisements. Striking phrases and sentences include slogans, advertisement claims and advertisement promises. They are an ideal site from which to observe the constructive function of linguistic labeling and categorization. When the respondents were asked to identify phrases or sentences that they found particularly striking and memorable, twelve phrases or sentences emerged under this category. 32% of the respondents identified the Coke slogan *I love you Africa* as the most memorable.

This is a line in the *Coke* song in which the choir, led by Steve Kekana, invokes the pride of Africans by illuminating the achievements and dreams of Africa. Steve is a celebrity figure who has great influence on television viewers and the fact that he presents the song with the most striking phrase attests to the fact that celebrities influence consumer behaviors (*Osho Times*, 2001). The song extols the African renaissance. As Alpert and Alpert (1989) observe, music provides different characteristics which makes it especially interesting for usage in advertisements. The *Coke* advertisement had other sentences such as: *There are a billion reasons to believe in Africa* and *The most admired man is African and so is the most beautiful woman*. These are promotional campaign slogans in which the African is challenged to be proud of his continent and the values and virtues therein. The African population is believed to have reached one billion by the year 2011 and the reference to *a billion reasons* implies that one billion Africans drink *Coke*.

*Harpic* had the phrase *Sparkling clean* preferred by 11% of the respondents. The *Harpic* slogan uses hyperbolic words that present the *Harpic* detergent as way above its competitors in cleaning toilets. The striking phrase *Sparkling clean* is uttered by Susana, a celebrity figure in the music industry. In it we see the impact of star power as proposed by Herméren (1999) who distinguishes various kinds of power through which an advertisement may have a persuasive influence. He says that in the star power the product is associated with a celebrity figure. This study establishes that star power leads to paradigm shifts in our consumer culture.

The third most striking phrase is *Stay happy always* in the *Always* advertisement which was preferred by 10% of the respondents. *Always* uses repetition and rhyme to create rhythm in other phrases such as: *I've got issues with tissues* (mentioned by 6% of the respondents), *Better always* and *Up to 8 hours long* (5%) and *no stain, no check, check* (5%). Thus *Always* had striking phrases/sentences constituting 26% of all memorable words. All these phrases are carried in the lines of the song which the girls sing and which is also written at the bottom of the screen for viewers to read and sing along. Active engagement in the case of the song in *Always* involves watching, reading and singing the song. McGregor and White (1990) posit that an active interactive process goes on between the viewer and the advertisement in which the preferred meaning is negotiated. Viewing, reading and singing along as the advertisement unfolds encourages viewers to actively interact with the discourses. This promotes the creation of interactional metafunction as proposed by Halliday (1985). Alpert and Alpert (1989) posit that a major component influencing audience responses is background music accompanying commercials. Audience moods and purchase intentions may be affected by background music without necessarily affecting intervening cognitions. Viewers associate the pleasantness of the song with *Always*. Use of song in advertisements is an effective strategy and viewers ranked *Always* as the second item they would buy on the basis of the song therein.

The *Doom* advertisement had two phrases: *Come on, they are asleep* and *Kills fastest* being mentioned by 8% of the respondents as striking. According to Crystal (1997) the language of advertisements is generally laudatory, positive, unreserved and emphasizing the uniqueness of a product. The phrase *Kills fastest* is an example of the language of advertisements as described by Crystal (1997). It is also a perfect case of the use of weasel words as proposed by Shrank (1990) in which he says that advertisements often use misleading words. Advertisers use weasel words to say things that are not necessarily true. Viewers probably find the phrases striking because animations speak and they find it strange that mosquitoes should be able to speak. It is fantasy and respondents described this advertisement as unrealistic, exaggerated and inappropriate. These are negative descriptions that explain why it ranks last in the order of merit. This study determines that advertisements come in contradictory discourses in which advertisements with highly ranked phrases/sentences still rank last on the overall scale of liking. *KIMBO* and *Lifebuoy* each had their phrases mentioned by 2% of the respondents.

Television advertisements use songs and soundtracks as accompaniments to the actions and speech in the advertisements. According to Alpert and Alpert (1989) a major component influencing audience responses is background music accompanying commercials. Music is a mode of signification which influences audience moods and purchase intentions without necessarily affecting the intervening cognitions. It is used for entertainment, information and to capture the viewers' attention. All the ten advertisements used in this study sample had soundtracks or songs in them. The respondents were asked to identify those advertisements which they found appealing because of the soundtrack in them. Majority preferred the *Coke* advertisement (73%). Next in terms of preference was the *Always* advertisement (14%) and finally the *Sunlight* advertisement (13%).

**Table 1: Most appealing songs**

<b>Advert</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<i>Coke</i>	73	73%
<i>Always</i>	14	14%
<i>Sunlight</i>	13	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Whereas all the advertisements had soundtracks or songs, viewers identified only those with songs as appealing enough to make them buy the products in the advertisements. In all the three advertisements, dance accompanies songs. The song in the *Coke* advertisement is appealing because of the choreography, actors, colors and the message. The lead singer is Steve Kekana whom viewers identified as a celebrity figure. Interactional meaning manifests in the advertisement when the lead singer is presented in close personal distance, with the face and shoulder facing the viewer directly. The song in the *Always* advertisement was the second most appealing (14%). Viewers reported that it is easy to follow and master as it is written on the television screen so they can sing along. It is interesting, entertaining and moving. The *Always* song is the only verbal mode of communication in the advertisement. The fact that it is written and scrolls at the bottom of the screen makes it a visual mode of signification as well. The viewer is manipulated into reading and singing along. This creates an interactional metafunction in which the viewer becomes part of the participants. Singing like the girls gives the viewer an actor role. Yet as a television viewer, he is at the same time the goal of their actions. Thus multiple roles are crafted for the viewer. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) explain that in television discourses, interactional meaning is created when the viewer feels that he is being addressed or when he is part of the in-group. The song is used to illustrate the actions of the girls as they demonstrate how to use the sanitary pad. It enhances the narrative processes in the advertisement and is an effective stylistic device in its own right.

13% of viewers preferred the song in the *Sunlight* advertisement because it depicts actors of all ages dancing to it. The elderly couple in the street and the three elderly women at the salon were particularly mentioned as interesting in the way they dance. There are two other younger women who also dance to the song. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) adopt the SFL model in the analysis of images, and they posit the existence of two main categories of processes, that is, narrative and conceptual processes of which the participants represented in those images come to take part. In television advertisements, one actor interacts with multiple goals which include fellow participants and viewers. In the case of the song in *Sunlight*, we see representational meaning created when, as the actors smell the sweet fragrance from the flower petals, it makes them dance. They dance to the song but they also dance because they have “smelled the clean”.



Advertisements use different colors to achieve special effects with regard to the symbolic meanings and significations associated with the colors. Colors are culture-dependent in that different cultures associate certain colors with certain symbolic meanings (Berlin and Kay, 1996). Copywriters use color to appeal to viewers' emotions and create the desire to purchase products. Colors in advertisements are seen in the product packaging, participants' dresses, wall paintings and the general setting of the advertisements. Respondents were asked to identify the products they would buy because of the colors in them and they identified only *Sunlight* (by 82% of respondents) and *Coke* (by 18% of the respondents) advertisements as having the best colors. The *Sunlight* advertisement had actors and goals dressed in multi-colored clothes. Respondents identified blue, pink, red and yellow colors in the *Sunlight* advertisement as appealing enough to make them buy *Sunlight*. Berlin and Kay (1996) posit that colors are used in advertisements to achieve special effects with regard to the symbolisms associated with colors. Berlin and Kay (Ibid.) further say that colors are associated with certain symbolic meanings. The blue, pink, red and yellow colors in the *Sunlight* advertisement are generally pleasant, soothing, energizing and stimulate brain wave activity (Berlin and Kay, 1996). The *Coke* advertisement had the white and red color of the uniform of choir reported as appealing enough to make them buy products. White color symbolically stands for cleanliness, innocence and purity while red stands for love and it is said to increase heart rate (Marsland, 2006). This explains why respondents found the *Coke* advertisement appealing enough to make them buy the product.

Lighting is a mode of signification that reveals phases and scenes in the plot of an advertisement. It is used to signal the start and end of scenes. It depicts the setting of a scene in the advertisement. Lighting is also used to highlight density by concentrating and focusing on the items and episodes for emphasis (Hutchison et al, 2011). There is a natural preference by viewers for a leftward bias in luminosity for frame composition. Daylight scenes are marked with bright natural sunlight while night scenes are marked with room and electric bulb lightings. A strong vertical gradient of luminance reflects natural daylight distribution while a minor vertical gradient of luminance reflects pictures taken inside rooms or at night. Lighting appeals to viewers by focusing on certain episodes in the advertisements. Viewers reported that six products appeal to them because of the lighting used in them. These are *Sunlight*, *Coke*, *Doom*, *Always*, *KIMBO* and *Dettol*. Table 2 shows their responses.

**Table 2: Lighting appeals**

Advertisement	Frequencies	Percentages
<i>Sunlight</i>	71	71%
<i>Coke</i>	8	8%
<i>Doom</i>	7	7%
<i>Always</i>	6	5%
<i>KIMBO</i>	4	4%
<i>Dettol</i>	4	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

The *Sunlight* advertisement, which is cast in daylight, is the most appealing, with 71% of the respondents reporting that they like it because of the lighting. Lighting creates salience by focusing attention to certain episodes in the adverts and thus making them appeal to viewers. It has been posited that regardless of where the elements are placed, salience can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others. This explains why the *Doom* and *KIMBO* advertisements were the only other advertisements reported as appealing because of lighting. They are the only ones cast in room/bulb light that made it to the rank of liking because of lighting. However they reported very low scores of only 7% and 4% respectively.

Although *Coke*, *Always* and *Dettol* are cast in daylight, they also reported low mentions of only 8%, 6% and 4% respectively on the scale of liking because of lighting. This is a perfect case in which to observe the contradictory nature of television advertisements (Jones, 1998). While the number of advertisements cast in daylight is more than those cast in room/bulb light, on the lighting appeal scale, the above three advertisements reported low mentions because, as a mode of signification, lighting blends in with other modes to construct the advertisement discourse. Other modes such as participants, colors, songs, speech and writings also have a role in determining viewer preferences. The compositional metafunction as propounded by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) draws from salience of components in advertisements. They further posit that regardless of where elements are placed, salience can create a hierarchy of importance among elements selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others. This study determines that salience in television advertisements is created by lighting as well other modes of signification such as participants, colors, songs, speech and writings. All these modes of signification have a role to play in creating the compositional meaning in television advertisements.

Advertisements on television employ the use of actors and goals to “tell the story”. Participants speak and act with a view to convincing the viewers to take up the advertisement message and buy the advertised product. They are the ones who present the advertisement narrative through their actions and speeches (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Where the viewer is addressed directly, he/she becomes the goal of the discourse. Participants in the

advertisements include men, women, youth and children in various roles. The *Always*, *Blue Band* and *Harpic* advertisements exclusively depict women while the *Coke*, *Dettol*, *Doom*, *KIMBO*, *Lifebuoy*, *NIVEA* and *Sunlight* advertisements depict both genders in their respective roles. Women are presented in the domestic and career environments. Lukas (1998) posits that unfortunately the roles of women in all forms of media are stereotypical and limiting. There have been attempts in various spheres to bridge the gap in gender disparities that exist between men and women, and studies have been carried out to determine the nature of gender relations that exist in our society. This study found that women are generally depicted in the domestic front. However there are three instances in the *Blue Band*, *Harpic* and *Lifebuoy* advertisements in which women are seen challenging the stereotypical traditional gender roles. In the *Blue Band* advertisement we see an aggressive mother riding a bicycle and doing all it takes to deliver *Blue band* to her daughter who has left for school in the van. In *Harpic* there is Susana who is an international singer and in *Lifebuoy* we find Yvonne who is also famous for her songs. Female characters appear in all the ten advertisements.

The family is depicted in the *Blue Band*, *Dettol*, *KIMBO* and *Lifebuoy* advertisements. In *Blue Band* it is the mother and her daughter who play the actor and goal roles in presenting the discourses. In *Dettol* the family is depicted in various activities that expose them to infections and how they use *Dettol* to fight infection-causing germs. The individual family members avoid eye contact with viewers until the final moments where they have used *Dettol* and are all protected in the green halo of *Dettol*. This is when they smile at the viewer and this face-work establishes an interactional relation between actors and their goals. The *KIMBO* family is seen at table enjoying a meal cooked in *KIMBO* cooking fat. They are all smiling and this creates and interactional relation with the viewers. The interactional meaning is further created where the gaze of the rest of the family is focused at the mother when the father says in response to the question by the daughter that *mother is always right except when she is wrong*. She shakes her head in disagreement as the rest of the family laughs at her. The *Lifebuoy* family comprises mother and son who visit the doctor to seek remedy for the son's frequent ailments. They approach from the door with the mother holding her son's hands and the boy looks at the floor thus avoiding eye contact with the viewer. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) posit that at far social distance we see the whole figure "with space around it" thus the impersonal relationship is more formal. The mother and son remain formal and have an impersonal relation with the viewer.

Celebrity appeals were reported by 83% of the respondents who identified the personalities in the advertisements as people who would influence them to buy certain products. A celebrity figure is a participant who has qualities which the viewer wishes to emulate because of the perceived benefits that accrue from the association with the celebrity or out of aspiring to become another celebrity in their own rights (*Osho Times* 6<sup>th</sup> May 2001). Advertisements present a world of glamour and viewers are conditioned into believing that it is possible for them to live like the participants when they use the advertised products. Only 17% of the respondents did not find the actors appealing enough to make them buy the products they promoted.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to investigate how the multi-modes are manipulated in television advertisements to serve their intended goals, which is to appeal to viewers and motivate them to buy the advertised products. The specific objectives of this study were to examine how the modes of signification in advertisements appeal to Kenyan television viewers and to determine the impact of television advertisements on Kenyan consumer culture.

Kenyan television advertisements use modes of signification such as speech, writings, soundtracks, participants, lighting and color to create their messages. These modes of signification are cleverly crafted so as to project the desired images which serve the best interests of the advertisers. Television viewers do not receive advertisements passively. They are actively involved in the reading and interpretations of advertisements and this leads to them making the right interpretations. Advertisements on television are created to appeal to viewers' sense of appreciation of the products. The locus of interpretation is placed on the viewer. The advertisers assume that the modes of signification are applied appropriately and this should lead to a positive feedback from the viewers, which is to buy their products. From linguists' point of view the blending in of multi-modes in advertisements works effectively as viewers reported that they would buy goods based on the advert messages and advert appeals.

## References

- Alpert J.I. and Alpert M.I. (1989). Background music as an influence on consumer mood and advertising responses in *Advances in Consumer Research Vol 16 Eds.* Associated Consumer Research; 485-491.
- Baldry, A. P. (2000). *Multimodality and multimediality in distance learning age.* Campobasso: Palladino.
- Berlin, B. and Kay, P. (1996). *Basic color terms.* Bekerley: Carlifonia University Press.
- Bhagwati, J. (2004). *In defence of globalization.* New York: Oxford University Press
- Bloor, M. and Bloor, T. (2007). *The practice of critical discourse analysis.* London: Hodder Arnold.
- Crystal, D. (1997) *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language Vol. 1.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- De Saussure F. (1922). *Cours de linguistic generale.* (Translated 1960) Hague: Mouton.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power.* London; Longman.
- Frith, K. (1998). *Basic analysis of layers of meaning in ads.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). *Language and social semiotics.* London: Edward Arnold.
- Haliday, M.A.K. (1985). *An Introduction to functional grammar.* London: Edward Arnold.
- Harris, R.J. (1999). *From a semiotic perspective: Inference formation and the critical comprehension of television advertising.* Reading Online Vol. 6:9.
- Hutchison, J. Thomas, N. A. Elias, L. (2011). *Laterality.* Toronto: University of Sasktatchewan.
- Jones, R. H. (1998). Two faces of AIDS in Hong Kong: Culture and the construction of the Aids celebrity. In *Discourses and Society.* Vol. 9(3): 309-338.

- Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London: Routledge.
- Kobayashi, N. Itoh, K. Suzuki, K. Kwee, I. and Nakada, T. (2007). *Natural preference in luminosity for frame composition*. London: Psychology Press.
- Kodak, O.B. (Forthcoming) *Multimodal reading of Kenyan television advertisements*, Unpublished PhD Thesis: Maseno University.
- Lukas, A.S. (1998). *How to read ads*. London: Routledge.
- Marsland, A.S. (2006). *Color therapy* in [www.biopulse.org](http://www.biopulse.org) (last accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).
- Marube, W. (2006). *A critical discourse analysis of gender identities in "Parents" and "Eve" magazines in Kenya*. Saarbrücken: Lambert.
- McGregor, G. and White, R. S. (1990). *Reception and response*. London; Routledge.
- Osho Times* 6<sup>th</sup> May (2001) in [www.oshotimes.de](http://www.oshotimes.de) (last accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).
- Pateman, T. (1983) *How is understanding an advertisement possible?* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Roberts, T.E. (1987) *Mass communication, advertising and popular culture*. Nairobi: ACCE.
- Shrank, J. (1990). The Language of ad claims, In Dieterich, D. (Ed.). (1976). *Teaching about Doublespeak*. Urbana IL: National Council of Teachers of English.