

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF COFFEE BRANDS

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A brand should be considered a multidisciplinary subject due to its social and cultural influence, complex structure, and integrative communicative essence. Brands derive their utility from their instrumentality in meaning negotiation in the world of signs and signifiers. Brands are embedded with symbolism. This way brands become instruments of psychosocial negotiations. Brands plug into the socio-cultural meaning reservoir for this purpose. This requires understanding how a product or service fits culturally in a social system [5, p. 157].

Current semiotic research moved towards marketing to consider the role and relevance of signifier and signified in the marketing context. Therefore, we can draw a definition of a brand from a semiotic perspective. Thus, a brand is a set of meanings and associations about a sign created at an individual level due to some definite communication situations that use meaningful semiotic resources to generate cognitive, affective and behavioral changes on the target audience [4, p. 116].

Brand's creation requires interpretation of the brand idea, which is presented by various signs and symbols. These symbols are used to convey a brand's core idea through the communicational process. A brand is a participant (sender) in this process. The means by which it transmits the information to the recipients is brand language. Brand language refers to the words, terms, signs and other expressive means used to communicate the brand.

Just as language use pervades social life, the elements of social life constitute an intrinsic part of the way language is used. Linguists regard language as an abstract structure that exists independently of specific instances of usage, but any communicative exchange is situated in a social context that constrains the linguistic forms used by the participants [2, p. 2]. Thus, the language coffee brands use to communicate with the target audience is to a great extent presupposed by the brands' social significance and by the coffee's social role in particular.

Coffee, being the second most-traded commodity in the world, takes an important stake in the economy of countries either growing or producing it. Up to 25 million people depend on coffee. It has become gourmet, an accessory to city chic, signaling individuality and confidence, bravado and relaxation. Thus, the language the coffee brands use is extremely important to be successful and competitive. Coffee brands like *Costa Coffee*, *Jacobs*, *Maxell House*, *Tchibo*, *Tim Hortons*, *Starbucks* etc. are the material of the study. Today's international coffee culture transcends the globe, transforming an ancient commodity into a phenomenon of the consumer age. Coffee brands are becoming global icons [1, p. 4]. Under the conditions of dynamic economic development, it is relevant to study the sociolinguistic and communicative nature of the coffee brands.

Coffee is celebratory, its consumption is uncommon and its uncommonness imbues it with a unique mystique associated with a wealthy, refined and intellectually evolved class. Coffee is not a potion for sustenance. Coffee is predominantly an outside drink; it derives its utility from the social, aesthetic and emotional role. The phrase '*let's have coffee*' implies '*let's get together*'. An invitation for a coffee is not an invitation for nourishment or making someone better physiologically. Rather, coffee is an alibi for opening a conversation and starting a business or intimate relationship [5, p. 164].

Having been ignored for a long time, linguistic tools are a very important part of brand communication. Coffee brands tried to distinguish themselves by using specific words and phrases, pictures and catchy sounds throughout the

long coffee history. An example can be “*Will’s Best Coffee powder for sale at Mainwaring’s Coffeeshouse.*” Even in the golden age of coffeeshouses (the 1700s), merchants tried to attract customers to their brand of coffee [3, p. 37]. In 1917, “*Good to the last drop*” was introduced as the first slogan for Maxwell House Coffee based in 1907 [3, p.26].

The brand language contains verbal as well as non-verbal elements. Verbal language is important for consumers to perceive, remember and connect words with brands. The language of coffee brands is a vivid example. The elements of coffee brand verbal language like name (e.g. *Costa Coffee*), tagline (*Proud to serve. What’s that smell?*), slogan (*For coffee lovers*), tone of voice (*We spill the beans about the secrets of our success*), descriptors (*true Italian coffee-mocha italia, best quality, unique taste, freshly grounded beans, perfect espresso, brown colored logo-touches of black, white and green – symbolize perfect and fresh coffee flavor*), and storytelling (*On a grey day in London in 1971, an incredible thing happened: a cup of Costa coffee was poured for the very first time. Its creators. The brothers Sergio and Bruno Costa first sold their coffee to a handful of local caterers. Then to some delicatessens. A few years later, they opened their first coffee shop*) are valuable resources for the linguistic analysis.

The non-verbal brand language contains visual elements like logos, symbols, colors, typefaces, and brand audial identity (jingle and sound logo) that emotionally influence the brand perception and produce a long-lasting reminiscing effect. Colors are powerful weapons of branding and they are rich with meanings. For example, *Starbucks* makes good use of green, which symbolizes ideas of refreshment and Nature and is connected to the ideas of healthiness. Brown is wholesome and connected with the Earth, often associated with natural materials like wood. *Costa Coffee* brand develops these meanings.

Odor, taste, and texture of coffee are more commonly used in product design, so they are considered accessory in brand communication and are

verbalized, if necessary, to increase the persuasive effect. A good example of such verbalization may be the coffee taste and flavor descriptors.

Therefore, coffee brands aesthetically appeal words and phrases, spaces, lighting, aroma and sounds designed to arouse emotions. This way coffee generates a repertoire of memorable moments, which provides happiness when recalled. This is the ways in which coffee brands are created and their language is developed within the society they exist.

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