



See, Think, Wonder: Symbols and Persuasive Messages Framed by Native Healers to Attract Customers in Chipata District, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Medicines, instead of fading away into oblivion due to the dominance of Western Medicines, is still alive and in recent years gaining popularity in developing countries such as Zambia. Practitioners of indigenous medicines themselves, are fanning the fire of popularity through a variety of modern methods of information dissemination such as the use of radio, television, Whatsapp, as well as print media- newspapers, magazines, posters and flyers. This study was conducted during the month of December, 2023 in Chipata District, Zambia. A total of 8 Traditional Healers participated in the study. Data was collected through interviews. This study found that both rural and urban Traditional Healers used posters to advertise their trade. The posters were usually of a white cloth with black, blue or red colour of drawings and letters stuck on trees, between two poles, or on a building or a wall fence along busy streets. This study recommends that City or Municipal councils should regulate on how poster adverts are positioned to prevent messing buildings and trees along streets especially in urban areas. The study also recommends that Traditional Health Practitioners' Association of Zambia to educate Traditional Healers on the importance of objectivity in crafting advert messages.

Key Words: Traditional Healers, Posters, Advertising, Indigenous, Media, Plant

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine is defined as “the sum total of the knowledge, skill and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.” (World Health Organization 2013: 5). The World Health Organization (2013) recognizes a serious deficit of trained Health Care Workers in some ‘developing countries where native healers remain the sole or main health providers for millions of people living in rural areas (World Health Organization’ (2013: 2). Traditional Healers have filled both the rural and the urban geographical landscape in most African countries. Indigenous Healers frame their practices as being competitive and even superior to Western medicines. They work, market and reposition themselves emphasising the similarities between their own traditional medicines and biomedical pharmaceuticals (Marsland, 2007: 751). ‘Today this need is epitomised by the myriad advertisements on traditional/alternative healing services, mainly in the form of flyers and posters’ (Kadenge & Ndlovu 2012:461). The choice and use of modern media dissemination methods instead of the traditional channels which only reaches a limited number of people, modern media methods helps them to reach out to larger audiences thus raising awareness on the place of herbal therapy in modern health care delivery system (Adegoju, 2008).

In Zambia, the use of Traditional Medicine is prominent as the number of Traditional Healers estimated at 40,000 is more in comparison to 1,500 medical doctors (Odhiambo in Hajj et al., 2020:1). “A Traditional Healer is person recognised by the community where he or she lives as someone competent to provide health care by using plant, animal and mineral substances and other methods based on social, cultural and religious practices” (WHO, 2000a:11). Aware that the demand for traditional medicines is on the rise, there has been an explosive growth in the number of Indigenous Healers in Zambia. In densely populated residential areas, it is not uncommon to see presence of Indigenous Healers at every 20 metre-distance – as the demand for the services of ‘Traditional Healers is increasing’ (Haque et al. 2018:1). To reach their audience, Traditional Healers also known as *ng’a nga or sing’anga* in the local language, advertise their practice.

Urban Traditional Health Practitioners use the media- Television or radio sensitization while others use print media. The lesser privileged cling only to display of posters, hand out flyers or both. This study sought to qualitatively analyse the compelling symbols and persuasive messages displayed on advert posters for Traditional Healers as a modern innovation to attract customers in Chipata District, Zambia.

II. Materials and Methods

Study Design: The study used explorative research design and qualitative research approach

Study Location: The study was conducted in Chipata District, Zambia.

Study Duration: It was conducted in December, 2023

Sample size : 8 Traditional Healers participated in the study

Inclusion criteria

1. Only Traditional Healers available and willing to participate in the study

Exclusion criteria

1. Traditional Healers unwilling to participate or not available

Procedure Methodology

The study was conducted in Chipata District, Zambia. Eight (8) Traditional Healers, 5 males and 3 females. Data was collected during the month of December, 2023. Permission was sought from section chairpersons. Data collection was conducted through a semi-structured interview guide. Prior to engaging participants, explanation about the study objective was offered. Informed consent was obtained. A smart phone was used to capture information and to store information. After analysis, the stored files were successfully deleted.

Theory

This study was guided by the Social Influence Theory developed by Herbert Kelman (1958). According to Kelman (1958), human beings undergo induction when an individual or a group of people influences them. The result is that attitudes, beliefs or behaviour change through compliance, identification and internalization (Kelman 1958:128). In relation to this study, Traditional Healers are socially influential individuals in their communities. They have a strong social standing. The community respects them, honour and revere them. As social referent persons, their advert posters have the ability to persuade individuals to change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours about Traditional Healers.'

III. Results

The sample consisted of 8 participants. Their ages ranged between 48 and 68 years. As stated elsewhere in this paper, gender distribution of participants in this study were 3 females and 5 males. The service of Folk Medicine Practitioners ranged between 8 to 27 years. All the 8 Traditional Healers used posters to advertise their trade. All of them used symbols and strategic messages to attract customers. The following were the common symbols and meanings attached.

ADVERT SYMBOLS

The following section discusses symbols used for advertising Folk Medical Practitioners' trade. From the interviews, illustrations of snake, a coffin, male lion, clay pot, mermaid, tortoise, crocodile, hyena, owl, animal horn and a fly-whisk

The Snake

'As you can see on my advert, there is a drawing of a snake. I used a black mamba for illustration. Others use a cobra. Both snakes kill human beings. When customers come, before I do anything, I tell my customers the snake symbol that my medicines are as lethal as a black mamba's venom' (Male Traditional Healer).

The coffin

'My advert poster has a drawing of a coffin. My medicine has potential to shut a trouble-causing witch in a coffin forever' (Male Traditional Health Healer).

The lion symbol

'I am a woman but on my advert, there is a drawing of a male lion. It means that my medicines are as powerful as a lion' (Woman Traditional Health Healer).

The clay pot

'I use a smoking clay pot on my advert to symbolize power' (Women Traditional Healer).

The mermaid

'You know a mermaid is a rarest creature. My medicines have the potential to turn a socially deviant individual into a mermaid' (Male Traditional Healer).

The tortoise

'I have an illustration of a tortoise on my poster. I may look vulnerable but the moment I have an opportunity to stick out my practice like a tortoise sticks out its head, I do wonders' (Female Traditional Healer).

The crocodile

'I instructed the artist to draw a crocodile on my poster. A crocodile is violent and when it grabs its prey, nothing escapes its giant jaws. When someone evil lands in my hands, they never escape the wrath of my medicines' (Male Traditional Healer).

The hyenas

'Hyenas persevere to catch their prey. I also persevere in my practice until my customers get healed or satisfied' (Male Traditional Healer).

The owl

'Among the symbols you see on that poster is an owl. This nocturnal bird is able to see its prey from a distance at night. I too has the ability to see the cause of my customers' problems with the precision of an owl' (Female Traditional Healer).

The horn

For an animal horn, one male Traditional Healer reported that:

'An animal are enduring. It withstands all kinds of adverse climatic conditions. My practice will endure all kinds of adversity' (Male Traditional Healers).

The fly-whisk

Over an African fly-whisk it was reported that:

'In our tradition, the fly-whisk is used to drive out evil forces and bring blessings to people' (Male Traditional Healers).

Table 1. Summary of Symbols and meanings

SYMBOL	MEANING
1. Snake	Symbolises availability of potent and lethal medicines
2. Coffin	Signifies power to shut the erring individual in the coffin
3. Male Lion	Represents unequalled power
4. Smoking Clay pot	Stands for enduring power
5. Mermaid	Symbolises ability to solve mysteries
6. Tortoise	Represents ingenuity
7. Crocodile	Stands for great strength
8. Hyena	Represents perseverance
9. Owl	Symbolises sharpness in detecting customer problems
10. Animal Horn	Stands for endurance
11. A fly-whisk	Represents ability to replace bad with good luck

MARKETING MESSAGES

This Study found that Traditional Healers used the following messages to attract their customers: able to bring back lost lover, win court cases, promotion at work, manhood enlargement, and cure for Hypertension and Diabetes Mellitus, cure for infertility, marriage for singles, leadership change and bring good luck.

Bring back lost lover

Under the theme of bring back of the lost lover, Traditional Healers reported that they had power not only to bring back a lost lover but even the dead loved one to life, bring back lost animal, money or any other item as described in the following excerpts:

'My medicines are powerful to neutralize charms that binds a man to a girlfriend to the extent that he completely forgets about his wife. Using *bwezera* the lost lover is restored' (Male Traditional Healer).

Another male Traditional Healer elucidated:

'My advert has the message, 'able to restore a dead or lost loved one, money or animal. I have medicines that can restore all these things. First of all I supply medicines which my customers should soak in water and wash their faces to enable them see what is behind the curtains' (Female Traditional Healer).

Win court cases

Under this theme, it was reported that charms generically called *mtelela* was used to help the accused win the case or get acquitted in the courts of law as reported:

'I have charms to help the accused get away with before the judge. Others get arrested yet innocent merely because they fail to express themselves due to fear. My charms give confidence to enable them speak convincingly. Finally the judge rules in their favour or acquits them' (Male Traditional Healer).

Promotion at work/offer of a job

This study found that Traditional healers believed that some workers failed to receive a promotion because of dark forces unleashed by their enemies. They claimed that their posters carried messages of breaking the curse and making the unfortunate workers receive a promotion and leap for joy.

'Most innocent workers feel help less because their enemies put a veil against them so that they cannot be seen. When such see my advert, hope springs in their hearts' (Female Traditional Healer).

'There are so many youths without employment. When they come to me I give them medicine *ya mwai*- luck medicine

Manhood enlargement/partner sexual satisfaction

'Men with small manhood suffer from low self-esteem. These are the ones who sneak in our homes for help. When you ask how they learnt about it they tell me I saw the advert outside' (Female Traditional Healer).

A male Traditional Healer explained that, he had herbs that enabled a man to achieve a full erection and satisfy a woman.

'If a man has challenges of not satisfying a woman sexually, let him come to me the problem will end immediately' (Male Traditional Healer).

Cure for Hypertension and Diabetes Mellitus

'Western medicines fail to cure BP and sugar disease. Patients with these conditions can only be assisted using herbs' (Male Traditional Herbs).

Cure for infertility

It was reported that Traditional Healers use *geza* to cleanse a woman's body.

'There are plenty of women who fail to conceive. Doctors have tried and failed. When such women comes to Traditional Healers they are given *geza* to strengthen her eggs and remove all impurities in her womb making it ready for a baby's implantation' (Female Traditional Healer).

Marriage for single females

Conversation with Traditional Healers revealed that, some females fail to get married because they are invisible. Traditional Health Practitioners explained that they had medicines that had the ability to remove the shadowing veil and make them visible to men of their choice.

'Other females go about their business totally obscure. Men cannot see them because their enemies put a *chimfinzi* around them so that quality men fail to see them. When these come to me I give them herbs which they soak in water. They have to wash their faces morning and evening so that the *chimfinzi* can disappear' (Female Traditional Healer).

Leadership change

Over leadership change, it was reported that some leaders use charms to hang on to power. As long as medicines to neutralize these charms, an organization even a country risks having outdated leadership that fails to deliver.

'If you don't use charms to change leadership, the village, organization even country will be stagnant' (Male Traditional Healer).

VII. DISCUSSION

Traditional healing practices have been in use for hundreds of generations. Transmission of knowledge in folk medicine is almost always through oral literature. Today, Traditional Healers and other Practitioners of ancient medicine strive to be relevant under severe competition from the Western Health system. In order to stay around, win customers and make a living, Practitioners of Indigenous Medicine use modern methods to advertise their occupation and business. The objective of this study was to identify common symbols used in posters and meanings attached to the symbols, and also to distil common marketing messages used in adverts. This study found that both rural and urban Traditional Healers used posters to advertise their trade. The posters were usually of a white cloth with black to blue colour of drawings and letters stuck on trees, between two poles, or on a building or a wall fence along busy streets. Kadenge and Ndlovu (2012) also observed a plethora of flyers and posters stuck on trees, buildings and walls as one outstanding

feature of the streets of Johannesburg. The flyers and posters were the glaring advert of the services of traditional/alternative healing (Kadenge & Ndlovu, 2012). Adegaju (2008) too found similar results in Nigeria, and in the author's words, he saw 'advertisement of herbal medicine were everywhere especially in strategic locations such as roadsides, markets and motor parks in major towns and cities where the attention of passers-by could easily be attracted (Adegaju 2008:3).

This study found that Traditional Healers cleverly used nature to appeal to customers. They drew symbols of dangerous crawling creatures, fierce animals to illustrate how powerful they were or how potent and lethal their medicines were. In this study, Folk Medicine Practitioners used the black mamba, cobra, the lion, crocodile and other less harmful creatures such as the tortoise and an owl to illustrate their ingenuity they possessed in diagnosing their customers' ailments and problems. This study also found that posters marketed a range of services offered by Indigenous Doctors. The services among others include, treatment of Hypertension, Diabetes, infertility, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, mental problems, epilepsy anaemia and many others. Similar findings have been highlighted in the study by Kadenge and Ndlovu (2008) in Johannesburg-South Africa where Traditional Healers provide a guaranteed cure of certain conditions such as infertility, lack of strength, long menstrual bleeding, persistent vomiting, obesity, bad luck/jinxes, alcoholism, cigarette and drug addiction, as well as mental illness (Kadenge & Ndlovu 2012: 469). This study also found that critical social services were marketed such as bringing back a lost lover, winning lottery, winning a court case and securing a job or marriage. Kadenge and Ndlovu (2012) also found that Traditional Healers advertised that they had herbs or spiritual powers that guaranteed successful relationships, assisted to bring back a lost lover; secure a marriage partner of one's choice; eliminate intra-family fighting; ensure that one is liked by friends, colleagues and in-laws; get one's partner to stop cheating' (Kadenge & Ndlovu 2012:469).

VIII. Conclusion

Traditional Medicines, instead of fading away into oblivion due to the dominance of Western Medicines, is still alive and in recent years gaining popularity in developing nations such as Zambia. Practitioners of indigenous medicines themselves are fanning the fire of popularity through a variety of modern methods of information dissemination such as the use of radio, television, Whatsapp, as well as print media- newspapers, magazines, posters and flyers. This study found that majority of Traditional Healers in rural and peri-urban

IX. Recommendations

Traditional Medicines are rapidly re-appearing on the horizon, now with a larger following in spite of the domineering presence of Western Medicine system. This study recommends that City or Municipal councils should regulate on how poster adverts are positioned to prevent messing buildings and trees along streets especially in urban areas. The study also recommends that Traditional Health Practitioners' Association of Zambia to educate Traditional Healers on the importance of objectivity in crafting advert messages.

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