

OPERATIONALIZING CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS THROUGH THE DECONSTRUCTION OF UNION BANK NIGERIA PLC'S CLASSIC CORPORATE ADVERTISING TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Academic work on social constructionism and phenomenology is dominated by a variety of critical hermeneutic approaches. While many of these have been operationalized, Ricoeur's tripartite method of text analysis is yet to be operationalized at corporate marketing level. This exercise is accomplished by deconstructing Union Bank Nigeria Plc's classic corporate advertising text through the pursuit of Ricoeur's tripartite method. Essentially, the major finding emerging from this study is the process insight generated through the deconstruction of Union Bank Nigeria Plc's classic corporate advertising text. Importantly, his exercise gives insight into how academic and managers can deconstruct messages that are often hidden in business texts.

KEYWORDS: Social Constructionism, Ricoeur's Tripartite Method, Hermeneutic Approaches

INTRODUCTION

Work on social constructionism and phenomenology is dominated by a variety of critical hermeneutic approaches (Roberge, 2011; Heidegger, 1959; Anonymous, 1975). While many of these have been operationalized, Ricoeur's (1971, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c) influential tripartite methodical approach, composed of (1) moment of social-historical analysis, (2) moment of formal analysis and (3) moment of interpretation-reinterpretation, is yet to be brought to life in corporate marketing studies. Given the limited volume of literature in this regard, this paper adds to existing knowledge by providing a detailed analysis of how Union Bank's corporate advertising text can be deconstructed through Ricoeur's tripartite method of text analysis. The importance of pursuing this exercise via Ricoeur's tripartite approach is that academics and practitioners are given further insights into the levels of analysis through which meanings evolve. This paper has been divided into four parts and this constitutes the first. The second examines the meaning of critical hermeneutics and its criticisms. The third part discusses how meanings are generated through the deconstruction of Union Bank Plc's corporate advertising text using Ricoeur's tripartite method of analysis. The paper ends with a review of issues discussed.

CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

The word hermeneutics was derived from the Greek word hermeneutikos, described by Bauman (2010) as being related to explaining, rendering the obscure plain and making an unclear phenomenon clear. Originally, the pursuit of critical hermeneutics commenced as religious and theological phenomenon governing the interpretation of laws and Holy Scriptures. Later, it developed into a field of study. Contribution to towards this development was made by Schleiermacher (1985); Dilthey (1976); Heidegger (1949, 1959, 1962); Gadamer (1975); Ricoeur (1974); and Derrida (1979, 1978).

Hermeneutics proved to be much bigger than theology or legal theory. Hermeneutics is conceived as requirement

for understanding codes in texts. Hermeneutics is not restricted to religious studies. It has been used in business research (see for instance Aredal, 1986; Boland, 1989; Francis, 1994; Gabriel, 1991; Hirschman, 1990; Lee, 1994; Meredith et al, 1989; Parker and Roffey, 1997; Phillips and Brown, 1993; Standing and Standing, 1999; Thompson, 1993; Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1990; Wolf, 1996).

The Development of Critical Hermeneutics

Exegesis, the determination of divine meaning in sacred texts through closed meaning gave impetus in the development of hermeneutics. Consequently, it developed as a methodology used in the interpretation of religious texts. It is summarised as a reformatory account of biblical hermeneutics in which the interpreter is instructed to analyse a passage's grammar and to consider the passage in broader contexts of the complete text and the felt experience of Christian life. The significance of the use of hermeneutics in the interpretation of religious texts has been the recognition that individual textual components of a text have to be dealt with as a part of a larger whole, (Arnold and Fischer, 1994).

From the use of hermeneutics as purely an instrument of interpreting religious texts, a new wave of thinking developed in hermeneutics. According to Arnold and Fischer (1994) "it was thought that if an interpreter followed prescribed procedures, it was possible in principle to determine an objective immutable meaning either as intended by the author or as contained in the text". This form of hermeneutics is now known today as hermeneutical theory and has been championed by Betti (1990, 1962, 1980), greatly influenced by the likes of Schleiermacher (1985); Dilthey (1976) and Humboldt (1903-36).

Betti (1990) identified "meaning-full forms" in which the mind of the other objectivated itself. The task of the reader or the listener is to re-experience, recognise and re-think what the other originality felt or thought (Bleicher, 1980). Betti (1962) put together a set of "hermeneutical canons" of this process of interpretation, arguing that when the meaning complex or "objective" knowledge is acquired through interpretation, understanding occurs at intellectual, emotional and moral levels. Misunderstanding occurs with increases in space and time between the author and reader.

Philosophical hermeneutics developed between the mid and the late twentieth century resulting from Martin Heidegger's (1949) *Sein und Zeit*, translated as 'Being and Time'. Philosophical hermeneutics developed from Gadamer's (1975) 'Truth and Method'. Unlike hermeneutical theory, this form of hermeneutics took the position that interpretations are not decidable, that is, understanding is not the objective recognition of an author's intended meaning. Instead, understanding is a practical task in which the interpreter is changed by becoming aware of new possibilities of what it is to be a human being. In the course of the development of philosophical hermeneutics, another form, different from hermeneutical theory, emerged. A legacy of Cartesian subject is dualism. It manifested as a movement away from epistemology of subject interpreting object. Under this hermeneutical approach, attentions shifted to ontology of the interpreter in a continuous act of coming into understanding (Arnold and Fischer, 1994).

In response to the notion of philosophical hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics emerged. Although closely related to critical theory, critical hermeneutics differed from philosophical hermeneutics because of its recognition of system distortion of pre-understanding (i.e. false consciousness) and its use of analytical procedures (e.g. psychoanalysis, neo Marxian analysis) to remove the distortion. Proponents of critical hermeneutics (see Habermas, 1980; and Apel, 1984) contend that philosophical hermeneutics is plagued by pre-understanding, arguing that uncritical acceptance of pre-understanding could perpetuate the exclusion of past interests. These proponents also contend that the recognition of the

linguisticity of understanding by philosophical hermeneutics does not acknowledge that language is also a medium of domination. For this reason, critical thinkers put forward theories and techniques addressing power interests and systemic distortions of understanding (Arnold and Fischer, 1994).

The most recent version of hermeneutics to emerge is phenomenological, designed to bridge hermeneutical theory, philosophical hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics. Based on the work of Paul Ricoeur, this form of hermeneutics mediates between a recapture of an objective sense of text and an existential appropriation of its meaning into understanding. The objective of this approach to hermeneutics is to show how text works. In addition, it has been developed to address what a text says to give insights into the interpreter's own situation.

Critical hermeneutics is endowed with the ability of analyzing a wide range of texts including corporate advertising. Critical hermeneutics is capable of analyzing transformative messages that attempt to weave organizational messages and symbols together in ways that contribute to the creation and maintenance of enduring patterns of social relations (Cary, 1989; Leiss et al, 1986) between organizations and stakeholders. In the past, this instrument has been used to generate research data and information from speeches, stories, ceremonies, architecture, press releases and most importantly corporate advertisements. Critical hermeneutics enhances the generation of data from texts. This helps in creating an understanding between organizations and stakeholders. Additionally, critical hermeneutics enhances the exhibition of relationships between a network of statements and organizational symbols. This creates avenues through which stakeholders can better understand the business activities of an organization and the business environment.

Critical hermeneutics provides a structured method for examining the role of symbolic phenomena in organizations. Consequently, organizations are viewed and perceived as being symbolic (Pfeffer, 1981). The role of organizations as platforms for sharing socially construed systems has been discussed in many texts. For instance, in his text, Barley (1983) argued that organizations are "speech communities sharing socially constructed systems of meaning that allow members to make sense of their immediate, and perhaps not so immediate, environment". Philips and Brown (1993) submitted that this socially constructed system of meaning exists as a set of texts that allows organizational members and stakeholders to interpret organizational activities more effectively and that it also enhances social interaction within organizations. Critical hermeneutics asks how certain texts contribute to the maintenance or evolution of this system of meaning and hence to the patterns of social relations in particular situations. Critical hermeneutics enhances the way particular texts condition the understandings of organizational and extra-organizational actors, and how this conditioning affects their behaviour.

Philips and Brown (1993) argued that this instrument provides a structured method for examining the sources of texts. Organizations recognize the role of corporate advertising texts in maintaining or changing their cultural fabric and their socio-business relations with internal and external stakeholders. Through its first step of analysis, which exposed the identity of the producer of the corporate advertising text as well as why the text had been produced, Philips and Brown (1993) argued that critical hermeneutics weaves together the ideas of organizational culture and ideas of power in a more satisfactory fashion than other methods. Furthermore, Philips and Brown (1993) argued that critical hermeneutics provides a framework for an integration with other notable text analytical research instruments such as structural semiotics, discourse analysis, psychoanalytic criticism and in depth interview within an interpretive frame. By so doing, critical hermeneutics provides an opportunity to confirm and ensure completeness of data analysed, (see Barley, 1983; Fiol, 1989; Gephart, 1979).

THE APPLICATION OF CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

For Phillips and Brown's (1993) critical hermeneutics is composed of three moments. These include the moment of social-historical analysis, moment of formal analysis and moment of interpretation-reinterpretation, all developed based on Ricoeur (1971, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c). These moments are discussed fully in a step by step process in the paragraphs below.

The First Step - the Social-Historical Moment

For Ricoeur (1971, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c), the social-historical moment is composed of intentional, referent and contextual aspects of a text. The intentional aspect reveals 'who' the firm (i.e. the firm that produced the text) is. It helps those seeking meanings in texts to articulate the audience of the text. The identification of the source of the text and its audience gave insight into the factors that led authors of the text to the production of texts, as well as the factors that led authors to place the text in specific media. The referent aspect of texts reveals competitors of the organization, their performance, financial strength and imposing architecture etc. The deliberate scrutiny of the intention and inferential aspects of the text was prompted by the desire to investigate the factors that led to their production.

The contextual aspect focuses mainly on social, historical and institutional relationships that subsist between the organization that produced the text and stakeholders. The contextual aspect refers to parts of the advertisements preceding and following specific words or sentences that may fix, or help to fix the true meaning of the text. From a structural-symbolic perspective, the meaning of a text is inseparable from the social and historical context of its production and presentation.

Thus, how texts are created, whom they are created by and the media through which they are passed are all important aspects of their contexts. Importantly, the review of the contextual aspect of the advertisements was divided into two dimensions. Under the first dimension of the analysis, it is conceived that text are published or placed at specific times as well as in specified media. Under the second dimension of analysis, messages in texts are conceived to be communicated with the vast economic, cultural and symbolic resources (Bourdieu, 1977) of firms who pursue their activities on the basis of policies. The availability of such resources has effects on the ability to create symbolism among audiences. Similarly, the resources available to recipients affect how the messages are received and interpreted. In order to understand this pedagogy, Union Bank's corporate advertising text is placed in the context of the social historical moment composed of intentional, referent and contextual aspects.

Intentional Aspect

with reference to Union Bank's corporate advertisement titled 'You can depend on Union Bank', which appears on page ten of Thursday, July 20, 1989 edition of Punch newspaper, the intentional aspects are the headline, the first sentence of the second paragraph and the first sentence in the third paragraph of the details of the advertisement. The headline: 'You can depend on Union Bank' is a curiosity headline developed to draw the reader to read the supporting text. The headline signifies that Union Bank is a dependable, trustworthy, loyal, faithful, responsible and steadfast financial institution on which customers can rely.

The first sentence of the second paragraph of the details of the body copy which reads: 'Growing bigger, we now have over eleven thousand experienced and dutiful staff in over two hundred branches spread around the urban and rural

areas of the nation', equally implies something. It means that the size of the bank is developing and increasing consistently and has employed a total of eleven thousand people. This large staff strength distinguishes Union Bank as large financial institution and a vast employer of labour in the Nigerian financial services sector. No other bank has eleven thousand employees. The third intentional aspect is the first sentence in the third paragraph of the details of the advertisement and it states: 'Growing stronger, we continue to set the pace with our unique Business Advisory Service – the first by any Nigerian Bank'. Union Bank has developed and increased steadily in strength. It provides Business Advisory Service under an initiative developed to examine business and financial activities of businesses and offer advice freely to customers when solicited. This initiative distinguishes Union Bank from other financial institutions. This is the first of its nature in Nigeria and it once again differentiates, distinguishes and sets Union Bank of Nigeria Limited apart from other financial institutions in the country.

10 - THE PUNCH, THURSDAY JULY 20, 1989

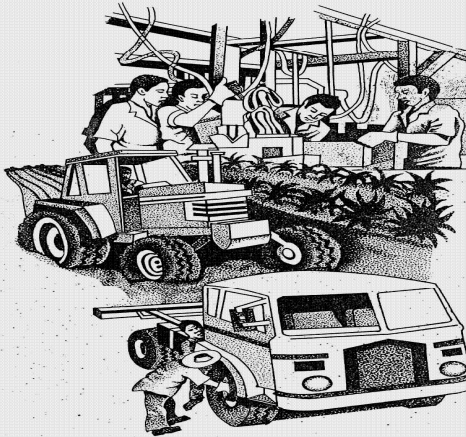
You can depend on Union Bank

At UNION BANK OF NIGERIA LIMITED, we have put in over 70 years of service to the people of our great nation. Our co-operation with government over the years for the development of agriculture, commerce and industry has established us as willing and able partners in progress.

Growing bigger, we now have over 11,000 experienced and dutiful staff in over 200 branches spread around the urban and rural areas of the nation. And, assisted by our network of international connections and our full-fledged branch in London, UNION BANK handles a fairly large chunk of foreign exchange transactions in Nigeria.

Growing stronger, we continue to set the pace with our unique Business Advisory Service – the first by any Nigerian Bank. UNION BANK is undoubtedly one of Nigeria's most profitable financial institutions and was indeed the first Nigerian Bank to achieve the ₦1 billion mark in its savings account balances.

This is clear proof that more and more people are banking with us – making us bigger, stronger, for more dependable service. That's why we say you can depend on UNION BANK.



UNION BANK ... Big, Strong, Reliable
Head Office: 40 Marina, Lagos. Telephone: 666439, 666441 Telex: 21222 Fax: 963822




Figure 1: Union Bank Nigeria Ltd. Corporate Advertisement

Source: The Punch, Thursday July 20, 1989, p. 10

Referential Aspect

There are six referential aspects in this campaign. The first referential aspect is in the first paragraph of the copy. It states: "we have put in over 70 years of service to the people of our great nation". The second aspect in this copy is also in the first paragraph of this copy. It reads: "our co-operation with government over the years for the development of agriculture, commerce and industry has established us as willing and able partners in progress". The third states: "Growing bigger, we now have over eleven thousand experienced and dutiful staff in over 200 branches spread around the urban and rural areas of the nation".

The fourth makes a follow up on the third and it states: "and, assisted by our network of international connections and our full fledged branch in London, UNION BANK handles a fairly large chunk of foreign exchange transactions in

Nigeria'. The fifth is "Growing stronger, we continue to set the pace with our unique Business Advisory Service – the first by any Nigerian Bank". The sixth is "Union Bank is undoubtedly one of Nigeria's most profitable financial institutions" and the seventh is "the first Nigerian bank to achieve the ₦ 1 Billion mark in its savings account balances".

But what do six referential aspects located in this corporate advertising text mean? 'At UNION BANK OF NIGERIA LIMITED' we have put in over seventy years of service to the people of our great nation' means it has gained and amassed massive, unique, extensive skills and technical knowhow in commercial banking and having spent as much as seventy years in the industry, it has practiced commercial banking successfully in Nigeria. This statement also draws attention to Union Bank's distinct history. It demonstrates that unlike many other financial institutions established over this period, it has stood the test of time and has practiced successful commercial banking in Nigeria over this period. By making emphasis on its history and experience, Union Bank Nigeria Plc indirectly draws attention to its goodwill and corporate reputation in commercial banking services to arouse audience interest or curiosity to read the copy further.

The second aspect which is 'Our co-operation with government over the years for the development of agriculture, commerce and industry has established us as willing and able partners in progress' means that Union Bank has successfully collaborated and supported the implementation of all monetary policies initiated by successive governments in Nigeria. Union Bank has assisted the implementation of government development policies on agriculture, commerce and industry by giving preferential credits to small, medium and large scale businesses in these sectors at lower rates. The preferential credit support given to these sectors by Union Bank is driven by Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) directives to banks to give preferential credit services to businesses operating in these sectors (Browbridge, 2005). This sentence ends with a declaration that Union Bank has successfully amassed a core competence in the implementation of various monetary policies initiated by successive governments in Nigeria.

The third referential aspect which is: "Growing bigger, we now have over 11,000 experienced and dutiful staff in over two hundred branches spread around the urban and rural areas of the nation" means Union Bank is developing in size and expanding in all its activities and has over the years witnessed a substantial rise in all its business activities. As a good corporate citizen and gesture of its good corporate responsiveness, it is currently employing over 11,000 well-behaved, obedient, submissive, loyal, devoted and respectful employees in more than 200 branches throughout the country. These employees are purposefully employed and trained to provide speedy, efficient and responsive banking services to customers in any part of the country. The size of Union Bank's staff strength is unique. No other bank is likely to have eleven thousand employees. It serves as another distinguishing characteristic for Union Bank Nigeria Limited.

The fourth aspect is: "And, assisted by our network of international connections and our full-fledged branch in London, UNION BANK handles a fairly large chunk of foreign exchange transactions in Nigeria". This means that Union Bank belongs to a group of international financial institutions located all over the world, which collaborate with one another in the pursuit and delivery of international financial transactions to customers, wherever they may be. In addition, Union Bank has a fully developed branch to act and carry out various business and financial transactions on behalf of its customers in Nigeria, England and on behalf of its parent bank in Nigeria. Union Bank manages a huge amount of foreign exchange transactions on behalf of its customers in Nigeria planning to visit foreign countries or proposing to pursue various import and export business transactions with other businesses in other parts of the world.

The fifth aspect is: "Growing stronger, we continue to set the pace with our unique Business Advisory Service – the first by any Nigerian bank" and it is indicative that besides its development in size, Union Bank has continued to

expand in power and strength. This is exemplified by the establishment of its Business Advisory Service, the first to be established by any Nigerian bank. The advisory service has been designed to review the business and financial activities of businesses and offer advice to customers when solicited. This again differentiates, distinguishes and sets Union Bank apart from other financial institutions in Nigeria.

The sixth aspect is: "Union Bank is undoubtedly one of Nigeria's most profitable financial institutions" and this means that Union Bank is a profit-making, viable, marketable and money-spinning institution, which has consistently maximized the investment of its shareholders. It has protected its investments and has continuously made good return on shareholder investment.

The seventh aspect reads: "the first Nigerian bank to achieve the ₦ 1 Billion mark in its savings account balances". This implies that Union Bank financial services have successfully attracted a large customer base. It has a thriving and burgeoning customer base and used its successful financial services to achieve the ₦ 1 Billion mark (about \$US200 million) savings account, a feat never achieved by any banking or financial institution in Nigeria. This achievement sets Union Bank before from competitors and distinguishes it in the Nigerian banking industry.

Contextual Aspect

The context aspect focus on the social, historical and institutional relations between Union Bank and its stakeholders, particularly the customers and international network of financial institutions. With regards to historical relations, Union Bank has, since inception, created strategic business relations with customers round the country. It has developed business relationships with small, medium and large scale organizations in the commerce, industry and agricultural sectors offering financial and credit support services to these organizations.

Second Step - the Formal Moment

The second moment of the critical hermeneutic method involves a formal analysis of the structural (i.e. order of arrangement of pictures, body copy and corporate logo) and conventional aspects (i.e. rules or conventions) in the text via psychoanalytic criticism following Sigmund Freud's famous tripartite model: the id, superego and ego, (see Neu, 1994; Rieff, 1979; Bateman and Holmes, 1995). This analysis was made in the three parts namely, corporate identity, corporate super-ego and corporate ego. Corporate identity is the unconscious and repressed aspects of the psyche of the organization as revealed in the text, driven by the desire to achieve a good corporate image among stakeholders. It is the unconscious aspects of the organizational psyche are the reservoirs of positive emotional response (happiness) to the fulfillment of a desire, (i.e. good corporate image). Corporate super-ego are symbolic internal policies (revealed in the text) that have become institutional, which the organization is not willing to compromise.

This is opposed to corporate identity (i.e. the unconscious aspects of the organizational psyche), which aims at the accomplishment of a good corporate image. It is the conscience of the organization, which maintains corporate ethics and sense of responsibility. Corporate ego refers to the relationship between the corporate identity (including visual identity and pictures in advertisement) and the super ego as revealed in the corporate advertisement. It aims to strike a balance between the factors that drive the unconscious desire to achieve a good corporate image and the institutional policies, which the organization will not compromise. It concerns the expression of specific facets of the unconscious aspects of the organizational psyche, which aims at the accomplishment of a good corporate image. In order to understand this pedagogy, Union Bank's corporate advertising text is once again placed in the context of the formal moment composed of corporate

identity, corporate super-ego and corporate ego.

Corporate Identity

Unconscious and repressed aspects of Union Bank's psyche: the first unconscious and repressed aspect in this corporate advertisement is "we have put in over seventy years of service to the people of our great nation". Unconsciously, this sentence positions this bank as a highly experienced financial institution with goodwill. It also gives Union Bank an image of good corporate citizenship contributing actively to the development of the country. The second unconscious aspect in this advertisement is "our co-operation with government over the years for the development of agriculture, commerce and industry has established us as willing and able partners in progress". Union Bank has contributed to the development of Nigeria by offering credit support services to businesses in the real sector including agriculture, commerce and industry. These give Union Bank a good citizenship image.

The third states: "Growing bigger, we now have over eleven thousand experienced and dutiful staff in over two hundred branches spread around urban and rural areas of the nation". This distinguishes the bank as one of the largest employers of labour in the financial services industry. The fourth states: "and, assisted by our network of international connections and our full fledged branch in London, UNION BANK handles a fairly large chunk of foreign exchange transactions in Nigeria". Unknown to her, this defines it as an international bank with global connections. The fifth is: "Growing stronger, we continue to set the pace with our unique Business Advisory Service – the first by any Nigerian Bank". The sixth is: "Union Bank is undoubtedly one of Nigeria's most profitable financial institutions" and the seventh is "the first Nigerian bank to achieve the ₦ 1 Billion mark in its savings account balances". The fifth and sixth unconscious aspects of the advertisement positions Union Bank as a financially strong and liquid bank

Corporate Super-Ego

Union Bank has consistently supported the development of industry, commerce and agriculture sectors by providing preferential credits to small, medium and large scale businesses operating in these sectors. This is one of Union Bank's core responsibilities to firms. It is Union Bank's super-ego, and a responsibility it is not willing to compromise.

Corporate Ego

The copy sentence: "our co-operation with government over the years for the development of agriculture, commerce and industry has established us as willing and able partners in progress" creates an impact on the three cartoons in the picture. The three cartoons express Union Bank's focus and support for real sectors of the economy.

Third Step: Moment of Interpretation and Re-Interpretation

The moment of interpretation and re-interpretation is achieved through the interpretation of the result of the social historical moment and interpretation of the result of the formal moment. This is supported by power and social relations, which is the core aspect of critical hermeneutic method. The idea of integrating the interpretation of the result of the social historical moment and interpretation of the result of the formal moment grew from the sociology of advertisement (Goldman, 1992) which advocates the integration of informative and interpretive frames in advertising copies within which the sponsor of the advertisement wishes the information to be interpreted (Phillips and Brown, 1993).

With reference to the Union Bank's corporate advertising text, one major issue excluded from this corporate advertisement and, indeed, from all advertisements syndicated in the press by Union Bank between 1986 and 2012 relates

to its support for government policies. Union Bank claims in its advertising copy that it has supported the government over the years for the development of agriculture, commerce and industry. However, Union Bank Limited failed to substantiate how it had supported governments in the development of these sectors.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper argues that very limited academic work has been done to operationalize Ricoeur's tripartite method of text analysis, composed of (1) moment of social-historical analysis, (2) moment of formal analysis and (3) moment of interpretation-reinterpretation. As such the author attempted to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of how Union Bank's corporate advertising text can be deconstructed through Ricoeur's tripartite method of text analysis. This provides a useful insight into how Ricoeur's critical hermeneutic methodical approach to text analysis can be operated. Importantly, this exercise contributes to limited literature at corporate marketing level.

Unlike other works in the humanities, the point of difference here is the insight given into the analysis of how business organizations construct meanings about themselves. This paper is useful in cases where brand managers need to uncover meanings that are constructed through signs, pictures, words, gestures, objects, and in some cases through sounds.

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