

A critical evaluation of persuasive communication discourses inspired by celebrity endorsement in the telecommunication sector in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Players in the telecommunication sector are embroiled in mobile wars which have spilled over onto the broadcast platform. Intermittent power struggles that have rocked the mobile industry ad infinitum have largely been moved by competitors, Econet and NetOne who have been perceived to be waging a 'political' contest on a different platform. This paper investigates persuasive communication strategies employed by the gladiators where interestingly on the same radio station, albeit at different times of same time slots and both inspired by celebrity endorsement, the competitors fight for subscribers. Messenger and message vehicles design the stylistic variations evident in the projected persuasive communication strategies. Celebrity endorsement phenomenon which has apparently been embraced by players in competitive sectors including the mobile industry has been conceptualised within the framework of Aristotelian Rhetorical Tradition. Language skill exhibition which largely informs the persuasive strategy revolves around code switching, slang, hyperbole and humour. Key tenets from Rank's (1976) model of persuasion, with minor adjustments alongside Appel and Mysken's (1997) functionalist model, offer a consolidated framework for a critical appreciation of the discourses. There are a number of questions emerging from the study which could not be answered but trigger-off potential research areas. In this vein, a comparative study on communication strategies between local and say 'Hollywood' celebrities as well use of indigenous languages in persuasive communication marshalled by celebrities can be investigated.

Introduction

The mobile industry in Zimbabwe has three players, namely Econet, NetOne and Telecel. In the highly competitive telecommunications industry, the three dominant players have resorted to various persuasive communication strategies in a bid to boost their subscriber bases. Of particular interest to this study, is the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement where celebrities are enlisted to project a favourable image of respective wireless network providers through road shows, promotional outreach programmes and sponsored electronic and print media programmes.

As this study will reveal, real competitive contest has pitted Econet, the biggest network by subscriber base against the state-run Netone with the privately owned Telecel playing a peripheral or fringe player status. Insightfully, positions that have caused waves, anxiety

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and tensions have been moved by Econet and NetOne with Telecel providing some balance in the intermittent power struggles that have ad infinitum rocked the mobile industry. This is the objective condition justifying focus on the identified contenders and marginalisation of the other player.

Econet and NetOne clashes are well documented with the epic sponsorship saga of local football serving arguably as the most open, glaring and sustained battle. The local premier soccer league of 16 clubs secured sponsorship from Econet, through its prepaid brand, Buddie. The mobile operator offered to sponsor the Charity Shield and Buddie Challenge tournaments. Ostensibly not to be outdone, NetOne through its prepaid brand, entered into sponsorship deals with CAPS United, one of the football clubs in the league. The football pitch was transformed into a battle ground for contestation between the rival mobile service providers. Econet subsequently terminated its sponsorship of the premier soccer league with NetOne interestingly following suit, withdrawing from football deals with their adopted team.

There were also other areas of contention between the competitors such as the well documented saga around interconnection fees which spilled over into the courts of law. In 2004 Econet and NetOne entered into an interconnection agreement in terms of which the later provided the former telecommunication services including voice traffic and leased circuits for a fee. Accumulation of a staggering debt (to the tune of US 20 million dollars) resulted in termination of interconnection agreement by the privately owned operator, Econet. The conflict around interconnection fees highlights intense competition and bad blood between the two players. It is not only NetOne that Econet has picked a fight with in this highly competitive sector but there was also an uncharacteristic standoff with Telecel. The later ostensibly to boost its subscriber base offered attractive promotional programmes in the form of the Sim Card Reactivation and Mega Bann Reloaded promotion which offered 100% bonus to users for calls across all local networks and landlines. Claiming that Telecel had not been granted a new registration licence, Econet disconnected the rival mobile service provider on the grounds that continued association with it was unlawful. Surprisingly, even after the licence was swiftly renewed, the disconnection subsisted. Reacting to Mandizha's (2013, p. 4) article on the disconnection story, one Taris remarked: "Econet, MDC and Daily News, they relish seeing the suffering of us Zimbabweans ... Econet believes people are and will always be on its side, the same ideology applied by mdc." The comment brings to the fore the perception that there is an invisible political hand at play in the telecommunication sector. In this connection, owing to protracted legal and political struggles experienced by Econet against the ZANU PF government before being granted initial registration licence, the network provider has conveniently been aligned to the opposition MDC political party. As a state run entity, NetOne has been associated with ZANU PF. This perception is according to Ncube (2013, p. 2) confirmed and buttressed by, for example utterances from former central bank governor, Gideon Gono who allegedly claimed that Ecocash, Econet's mobile money transfer service, almost suffered a stillbirth when some politicians (aligned to ZANU PF) raised concern that the service was a political instrument designed to boost financial coffers and operations of opposition parties, thus: "A lot was said. It was said the product is a political product that will be used by Econet to determine voting patterns against a certain party, ... It was said this was a conspiracy by Econet to send out money to voters and bribe them when the time comes and the governor is part of this conspiracy. Various economic formulas were developed not only to fire the governor, but also to shut down Econet and Ecocash."

There is a perception that there is political gamesmanship in the mobile sector. In other words, the political contest between the dominant parties has spilled over into the telecommunication sector. This study, focuses though on persuasive communication

strategies employed by Econet Wireless and NetOne in the electronic media specifically, sponsored Power FM adverts anchored by celebrities. The two protagonists in the mobile industry have employed the use of the celebrity endorsement inspired persuasive communication strategy to have mileage in terms boosting their subscriber bases.

Persuasive communication has been defined variously. This study adopts De Wet's (1991, p. 3) submission that it is "... a process of communication in which a communicator succeeds in voluntarily forming, sustaining or changing the attitudes or behaviour of one recipient or a group of recipients in accordance with what the communicator intends by his or her message". From this definition, there is observably the critical element of source that is in this case, a celebrity who packages information and transmits to the receivers (listeners) through various verbal linguistic strategies. As the persuader, the celebrity manipulates language skills in a bid to sell a product or service.

The underlying question for this study can be easily located in language for a specific purpose realm: What is the nature of the persuasive language used by celebrities selling products and services in the highly competitive mobile industry? This article looks at the discourses used by celebrities to persuade the market to rally behind a specific operator. The telecommunication sector and even more specifically, celebrity endorsement is an area that has not received sufficient attention notwithstanding widespread universal use of mobile phones.

Celebrity endorsement involves use of celebrities drawn from various facets of life to persuasively communicate on behalf of brands, products or services. Celebrities are well-known and well-liked personalities within society who presumably evoke their likeness and image toward the sale of a product or service. As Bryne and Breen (2003, p. 289) note: "Celebrities can build, refresh and add new dimensions. What celebrities stand for enhances brands and they save valuable time in terms of creating the credibility a company has created in order to build its brands by transferring their values to the brand. When consumers see a credible celebrity endorsing a product, they think the company must be OK."

In the context of this study, potential or prospective clients will certainly not be seeing the celebrity instead they will be listening to persuasive language. It is also worth noting that celebrity status has nothing to do with merit per se but it is simply the result of media attention given to an act or person. A celebrity's name, face and voice are spontaneously recognised by a proportion of the general public who consequently associate it with a set of values. Classic examples of celebrities include actors, models, sport personalities, real-life heroes and artists. Communication featuring celebrities is not a new phenomenon but has instead become widespread and a common practice in many organisations. Celebrity endorsements are a way of avoiding anonymity and standing out from the competition in saturated markets. The mobile industry in Zimbabwe can be understood better in terms of this context. The competition for subscribers among the players is intense as evidenced by persistent launch of new products and promotions which as alluded to earlier have generated antagonism, animosity and disharmony. Ideally, there should be collaboration and coordination between the players. It would appear the stand-off between the operators has been taken to a new level where celebrities are engaged to make a strong impression on potential clients. The thinking seems to be that brands can no longer achieve recognition merely due to the intrinsic quality of their products but breathing of life into them gives them the competitive edge. The linguistic ability and credibility of the persuasive communicator are therefore critical in this study.

Persuasive communication marshalled by celebrities has been exploited by many brands

so Econet and NetOne are by no means traversing in uncharted waters. Erdogan (1999) for instance relates to Pepsi which at various stages featured stars Michael Jackson, Madonna and the Spice Girls to leverage appeal. Coca-Cola a rival brand contracted the athlete Michael Jordan for a similar function. At some stage when there was so much negative publicity around the highly documented pesticide issues in both Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola brands, celebrities Aamir Khan and Sachin Tendulkar respectively were contracted to do high-profile damage control and persuasively communicate messages of product safety and purity to the restive market. Elsewhere there are many examples of celebrity endorsements such as French footballer Zinedine Zidane's role in Dior perfume, Tiger Woods endorsement of American Express, Rolex and Nike and David Beckham's endorsement of Adidas. Nike and Adidas for instance are global brands locked up in intense competition as evidenced in contests to kit national football teams dotted around the globe.

Celebrity power operates on the philosophy that humans are by nature social creatures. As such, even at tender ages, they take cues on how to behave by both observing (even listening to) actions of and striving to please those whose opinions they value. Results of celebrity endorsement are however variable as they are dependent on many factors, which include choice of celebrity, media programmes and credibility gaps.

Theoretical Framework

The area being investigated is relatively new with very little literature available making it imperative to rely not on a single theoretical framework. Also, given the two-fold dimension of the current study, which is focus on celebrity principle *per se* and manipulation of language for persuasive communication purposes, a multidisciplinary approach is justified. Put differently, the researcher critiques both the celebrity (messenger) and language (message) thus making it imperative to invoke a multifaceted, interdisciplinary and multidimensional conceptual framework.

Key tenets of the Rhetorical theory steeped in Aristotelian tradition provide framework on celebrity endorsement. This is so in terms of the tripartite concept of proof, consisting of ethos (ethical proof), pathos (credible proof) and logos (logical proof). In terms of ethos celebrities operate within the confines of honesty, truthfulness and integrity. As persuaders, they ideally do not go overboard and pronounce qualities beyond the scope of brands promoted. In manipulating the persuasive language, they presumably do not mislead by disseminating falsehoods. As for pathos, the celebrities as persuaders stir emotions of the listeners by making reference to audience values using vivid language and emotion laden words. In the words of De Wet (1991, p. 30), the essence of emotional appeal lies in that, "... it is apparently remarkably easy to persuade people and sell an idea by concentrating on this need". Finally, in terms of logos the expectation is that submissions, claims and observations articulated cohere as they are premised on reason or logic.

Also, persuasive communication in action particularly in terms of how celebrity persuaders intensify or highlight positive features of the product being sold can be easily conceived within the framework of Rank's (1976) model of persuasion. The model is essentially an intensify/downplay matrix. In the context of the current study, think of how positive attributes are bolstered through repetition, association and composition as part of the intensification strategy. Conversely, visualise downplay strategy employed through omission, diversion and confusion, convenient negation of weak points of products and services offered.

In a bilingual context persuasive language, presumably in a bid to reach out and capture the wider audience, characteristically exhibits code switching behaviour. The functionalist perspective conceived by Appel and Mysken (1997), explains motivation for code switching

along a range of functions namely referential, directive, expressive, metalinguistic, poetic and phatic domains. The present study is replete with features of code switching whose understanding significantly draws on the functionalist plane.

Key tenets from the Rhetorical tradition theory, Rank (1976) model and the Functionalist perspective provide parameters for data analysis and interpretation. The researcher maintains and amply demonstrates in the foregoing that it is a total persuasive communication package comprising the messenger (celebrity endorsement) and message (linguistic display) that is subject to interrogation. Also aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) particularly the aspect of manipulation enunciated by Van Dijk (2006) which unravels connections between language, power and ideology hidden from people, will be related to. Observably, the two pronged study warrants an elaborate analytical framework.

Data Collection

Data gathering covered the period from August to November, 2013 where active listening skills and tape recording FM radio broadcasts were done. Recording was followed by transcription, interpretation, and subsequent qualitative analysis of the data.

Econet and NetOne have traditionally resorted to the use of celebrities when launching brands and, promotions at their anniversary celebrations. For example, Dave Emberton, a ZTV news reader has featured occasionally as Econet celebrity endorser. NetOne on the occasion of its 10th anniversary celebration was endorsed by 'super star' musician Oliver Mutukudzi. Crucially, FM radio station which uses English predominantly as the medium of communication provides the platform to both operators to showcase their brands. On the station Econet endorsed by radio and television personalities Mike Madoda and Barry Manandi, occupies the first five minute slot which runs between 7:15am and 7:20am from Monday to Friday. Interestingly, on the same station between 7:30am and 7:35am Monday to Friday, NetOne anchored by radio personalities Mdhara Zobha and Tendayi Chakanyuka showcases. This study focuses specifically on persuasive communication obtaining on the two five minute slots utilised by the two contestants. The choice is informed by the realisation that it is a platform marked by an even ground in terms of station, time allocation and the number of celebrity endorsers thus making it a balanced contest.

Findings and Discussion

Celebrity Endorsement Phenomenon: Messenger Critique.

The Econet brand as explained is endorsed by celebrities Mike and Barry who incidentally are both employed by a communication based organisation. The two 'buddies' feature in other local radio and television programmes, Sport line and Game Plan correspondingly. On the two programmes, focus is primarily on local and international sport. What is intriguing about the two anchors is that they have a mutual affection for Liverpool, a football team in the English premiership league. In the local premiership league, Mike supports Highlanders and Barry is a Dynamos fan. In terms of support base, Dynamos is the biggest football brand followed by Highlanders in the league of sixteen football teams. This background is essential for it gives an indication of what the leading personalities represent in their engagement as persuasive communicators for a brand.

In the context of rhetorical tradition theory, the two pass the credibility test. However, broadening source credibility to encompass expertness and trustworthiness creates challenges. The audience's (listener's) acceptance increases with the expertness and trust of the persuader. The two anchors constitute a formidable partnership which inspires their constituencies and beyond. Due to their affiliation to different football giants in the domestic league, Mike and Barry in the ears of listener's constitute an 'unholy alliance'.

According to Grace Chingoma (2013), Dembare (Dynamos) and Bosso (Highlander) archrivals' high profile league match ended with a last gasp equaliser by the former. The match report says that an emotionally charged Mike, a Bosso fan adorning his team regalia rushed on to the playfield and protested to match officials over lack of impartiality and for incompetence. The match officials had allegedly exceeded the anticipated optional playing time incidentally culminating in the equaliser. The match report berated the celebrity, a privileged member of the journalism fraternity for stooping so low and base. This portrayal has implications for celebrity endorsement in that certain undesirable meanings are passed on to the brand. Additionally, rivals of the one's football team are likely to be influenced negatively by otherwise attractive packages on offer. The reputation of the celebrity may derogate after they have endorsed a product Pepsi Cola for example suffered with tarnished celebrities, Mike Tyson, Madonna and Michael Jackson. Behaviour of celebrities reflects on the brand and an extreme view is that celebrity endorsers may at times become liabilities to the brands they endorse. Celebrities should be used judiciously so that they are effective persuasive communicators. As they endorse the Econet brand Mike and Barry have to perform a delicate balancing act. Overplaying the Liverpool mantra, can unwittingly draw brickbats from those aligned to other highly competitive brands such as Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal. Locally, they have to find space for other football teams in their discourses to have wider appeal and more celebrity power.

NetOne brand is endorsed by Mdara Zobha and Tendayi who are both radio personalities. Tendayi featured prominently as an actress in the popular local drama Studio 263. Her role in the controversial drama series Small House Saga ended prematurely over a character role she deemed unpalatable. Mdara Zobha is also an artiste in his own right. Both celebrities are employed as deejays at Power FM radio station. They are fully fledged professionals who can speak authoritatively on issues thus fulfilling the pathos principle.

There are challenges associated with NetOne's celebrity endorsement. It is on the same radio station they do voice-over for commercials then revert to normal deejay role. On this aspect, Mudzivo (2013, p. 1) quotes Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, Professor Jonathan Moyo complaining, "... why should deejays provide voice-overs for commercials ... Imagine during a show, you hear a deejay doing a commercial for this company and the next minute you hear the same deejay marketing a different company...you cannot have the same deejay being a zillion people at the same time."

The minister's observations apply to NetOne brand endorsers generally and more specifically to the celebrity Mdara Zobha. On the same station, FM radio on November 14, 2013 'deejayed' alongside Rumbidzai (aka Lady of Distinction) until 6.20am after which he did a five minute voice-over commercials for Lotto, then Irvine's Chicken and then proceeded to the Econet commercial alongside Tendayi. After this he remained in the studio for normal deejay duty alongside Rumbidzai until end of schedule at 9: 00 am. This is the context in which the minister's concern is to be understood. As they say, familiarity breeds contempt. Multi-brand endorsements by the same celebrity lead to overexposure. The novelty of a celebrity endorsement gets diluted if he/she does too many commercials. As Tripp-Jensen and Carlson (1994) note, this practice amounts to commoditisation of celebrities who are willing to endorse anything for big bucks. If the stampede by brands to be endorsed by Mdara Zobha is motivated by exceeding high popularity level this creates other challenges. For example, if the celebrity is too famous or too popular, then the celebrity will overshadow the product. At some stage Pepsi Cola used Britney Spears at the height of her career in 2001 and viewers reportedly remembered her forgetting unfortunately all about the brand. While it is beyond the scope of this study to unravel cost and benefit analysis of celebrities in persuasive communication, brands should however select celebrities judiciously and discreetly.

Econet and NetOne brands are seemingly locked up in a cut throat competition for subscribers. As players in the mobile phone industry they are offering almost similar services, just like Pepsi Cola and Coca-Cola in the soft drink industry, so they use celebrity endorsement to differentiate among these products. Investment in the ‘messenger’ becomes a critical step toward effective persuasive communication manifest in the ‘message’. The following section proceeds to evaluate the various persuasive strategies employed by the identified celebrities. Areas of convergence and divergence in the linguistic strategies will be clearly marked.

Language skills exhibition: Message Critique

Code-switching is one common and profound persuasive communication strategy characterising messages of appeal to listeners. A code is a language or a variety of a language. Technically, code-switching is defined as: “... the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded language (or languages) in utterances of a matrix language during the same conversation. The matrix language (ML) is the main language in code switched utterances in a number of ways, while the embedded language (EL) has the lesser role.” (Myers-Scotton, 1993, p. 1)

In the context of Spot FM generally and Econet / Netone broadcasts in particular, the ML is English while the EL is Shona. Code-switching significantly marks interface between Econet and NetOne endorsement messages as illustrated in the examples below:

1. Chitima cherusunguko, chitima cheChristmas (Independence train, Christmas train). Great value you can experience. Amazing free extras. Econet Wireless, exceptional call clarity, minimal disruptions.
2. Tisu tine yese (We have it all). NetOne full of surprises, convenient and secure, send receive cash on one wallet.

The examples provide for what Gumperz (1982) characterises as juxtaposition where within the same speech there are passages of speech belonging to different subsystems. English and Shona are different subsystems that have been juxtaposed within the same speech passage. Code-switching is then used creatively as a linguistic enrichment strategy designed to reach out to the wider audience in the English and Shona discourse communities. The use of code-switching in terms of the metalinguistic function whereby the need to impress potential subscribers through a show of linguistic skills typifies lucidly examples 3 and 4 below:

3. Free data, walking, talking and breathing Econet dongle. Iyi yanetsa patawindi (This is a revelation in town).
4. One wallet from NetOne. Ndadzoka zvakare (I have come back again).

The metalinguistic function is evidently the most highly pronounced motivation for code switching in both situations. Appel and Mysken (1997) highlight the view that the function is a typical feature in public domain among performers, circus directors and market sales people. Since sellers market their goods and services in public, they may want to impress potential buyers (subscribers) through astute linguistic skills.

Both persuasive communication strategies exhibit the metaphorical or phatic function of code switching. This is evident in the switching that signals certain relationships between interactants. Use of slang illustrates this function. According to Mawadza (2000, p. 93) slang refers to, “non-standard terms or non-standard usage of standard terms”. Flexner and Wentworth (1975) weigh in with the view that slang is vivid, forceful and more expressive than standard usage. This explains why sellers of the competing products and services package messages replete with slang. The point of departure would be the title **Mdhara** as in Mdhara Zobha which literally means old but is metaphorically used to refer

to men who are not necessarily old. The traditional notion is that **mdhara** is a towering figure who works and fends for his family. Zobha whose identity remains a mystery as his public appearances are under the cover of a mask is certainly not an old man but projects the image of a brusque, patronising and wise endorser. The strategy here is that here is a typical **mdhara** who cannot lead you astray. It is also interesting to note that Zobha does not refer to anyone else as **mdhara**. The title is jealously guarded, monopolised and something akin to a protected species, very sacred and sacrosanct to be shared with other mortals. Geertz (1972) elaborates that a number of words carry in addition to their normal linguistic meaning, a status meaning. Thus use of **mdhara** in this context shows that its use has more to do with status than what it normally refers to.

Interestingly, it is NetOne endorser, Zobha who frequently resorts to use of slang as part of the persuasive communication strategy. The following examples illustrate this claim:

5. Yauno lava kuita (What you love to do).
6. Five dhombi chete (Five dollars only).
7. Manga mune six waya muwallet (There was six hundred dollars in the wallet).
8. Send chibhanzi in one wallet (Send money in one wallet).
9. True yauri kusasa, ndikutipire (True what you say, let me advise you).
10. Airtime jahwi (Airtime is plenty).

Examples 5 to 9 are associated with Zobha's NetOne messages while 10 is from Econet messages. The motivation for the use of slang is to appeal to the young generation which is a discourse community normally associated with this non-standard language. The communication strategy at play here is to reach out to this discourse community and entice them so that they subscribe to the network. Part of the strategy by NetOne celebrity endorsers involves the use of Shona as matrix language by Zobha while the partner, Tendai uses English as the matrix language. According to Myers-Scotton (1993:1) the "matrix language is the main language in code switched utterances in a number of ways, while the embedded language has the lesser role". Zobha and Tendai constitute a somewhat formidable partnership with capacity to draw on communities/listenership that accesses both languages. They are employing a double edged sword as part of an elaborate persuasive communication strategy. On the other hand Barry and Mike Econet messages exploit primarily English as matrix language. Code switching is not marked significantly in the discourses, it is occasional, an exception rather than the norm. However, the endorsers employ a persuasive strategy directed in the first instance to all who can access the matrix language generally, then direct messages to specific audiences through what they call coverage updates. For example in the coverage updates they pronounce 'daily doses of inspiration' to 'buddies' in Mpumalanga, Bulawayo (14-11-13), Tuli, Matabeleland South (20-11-13) Chigavakava, Manicaland (22-11-13), Mwanazana, Masvingo (25-11-13), Chimhanda, Mashonaland Central (26-11-13) and Landas, Mashonaland East (29-11-13). This is a shrewd strategy which does a helicopter view of specific areas in all provinces in the country designed to lend credibility to the operator's claim that using the network facilitates communication with "whomever, wherever, whatever, anytime and, **anywhere**". The exaggerated claim is buttressed by the endorsers in their repetitive use of the terms, 'absolutely' and 'unlimited' in almost all their messages relating to convenience and access of services. In their messages they mention other celebrities as well and occasionally refer in passing to Dynamos, Highlanders and CAPS United, incidentally the largest football teams in the country' premier league. The intention is to rally all stakeholders around the dominant teams under the Econet banner. Given that football is a highly emotive sport, stakeholders of the thirteen teams negated, can feel alienated thus resist the messages. It is a strategy that has to be used sparingly for it has potential to backfire thereby defeating the objective of attracting wide subscriber base. The anchors are not oblivious to the intense competition in the telecommunications sector as Mike repeatedly says: "Behind every

successful network is competition". Interestingly, the competitor(s) is not mentioned by name as it were. This is testament to tact and diplomacy. Thus on the broadcast platform one witnesses shadow boxing as enunciated by implicit messages.

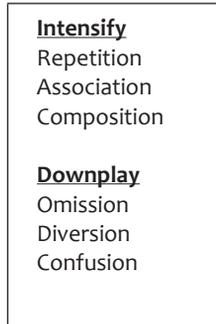
Proliferation of the use of slang by predominantly NetOne celebrities and to a lesser extent Econet messages provides for code switching of the metaphorical or phatic nature which signals certain relationships between interactants. Slang evidently, appeals more to the younger generation than the older one. Switching to slang in the process of negotiating and bargaining indicates that the people involved are either close acquaintances or have something in common. Slang use in examples 5 to 10, is a persuasive communication strategy, targeted toward a discourse community of young prospective subscribers. Put crudely, it is a trap meant to ensnare a certain niche of the market.

In both endorsement messages, positive features, benefits and promotions associated with products are highlighted and reinforced through code switching. The following examples from Econet and NetOne respectively, illustrate the claim:

11. Econet, chitima cherusununguko, chitima cheChristmas has amazing free extras ... five free megabytes of data ... (Econet, freedom train, Christmas train ...).
12. Tablets, data bundles, play, save and learn, ndokuti NetOne ndokuti sharing, tisu tine yese ... (... that is NetOne, that is sharing, we have got it all).

In the Econet message, there is a link between the product and freedom which takes the listeners down the memory lane of the country's liberation struggle. It was a protracted struggle which culminated in the attainment of political independence. Reference to freedom stirs the nationalistic consciousness and in terms of persuasive appeal those with a patriotic disposition and more specifically former freedom fighters are attracted and the same applies to those subscribing to the Christian faith. The messages at a general level are addressed to a wide audience but they can be easily classified as targeted, in this case to nationalists and Christians. Targeting persuasive communication messages is a recurrent strategy employed by Barry and Mike with ruthless efficiency. This can be linked to how they characteristically end their messages with 'shout out' to buddies in specific areas of given provinces as illustrated above. In NetOne example, Mdhara Zobha in particular cannot resist the temptation to use slang manifest in the term, 'ndokuti' and the expression, 'tisu tine yese' which are strictly not formal or standard Shona but part of slang popular among the young generation. The motivation for the use of this language is clearly to appeal to this group of listeners. Slang is vivid, forceful, and more expressive than standard usage (Flexener & Wentworth, 1975). More significantly, as an ever changing set of colloquial words and phrases used by speakers, slang establishes group identity and solidarity (Eble, 1996). Therefore, the message is not random but targeted to this discourse community. The phatic or metaphorical function of code switching which is associated with the signalling of certain relationships between interactants has been employed dexterously. Econet and NetOne messages betray cut-throat competition in terms of reaching out to targeted audience. However, it is important to note that in all the messages the 'competition' is not besmirched in any way through overt reference to the competitor's brand and attendant promotions or services *per se*.

Examples 11 and 12 foreground code switching which has the effect of highlighting positive features of the product being sold, which incidentally, is an important aspect of Rank's (1976) model of persuasion. The basic principle of this model is that persuaders use two opposing forces in persuasive communication which are the intensify/downplay matrix as illustrated below.



As can be seen in the diagram above, intensification revolves around three tactics namely, repetition, association and composition. Basically, repetition entails repeating of a product's good points, while association relates to linkages with something acceptable and intensification of good points through contrast falls within the realm of composition. On the downplay side, omission entails negation of a product's weak points, while shifting of focus from weak points is diversion and, confusion is characterised by generation of negative information. The use of 'chitima' and 'ndokuti' which illustrate code switching in examples 11 and 12 respectively, incidentally highlights repetition enunciated in the Rank (1976) model. Elsewhere, celebrities use the terms 'free', 'absolutely', 'win' and the expressions 'daily dose of inspiration', 'widest data and voice coverage' and 'world in one' repeatedly to emphasise the benefits and positive features associated with their products. Also, without fail as in all the other radio and even television programmes, Barry signs-off Econet messages with the trade mark, "This is my story, I stick to it". In the context of persuasive communication, the celebrity is unwittingly creating some distance between himself and the listener through the use of the first person pronouns 'I' and 'my'. Persuadees are abandoned as it were as Barry inadvertently elevates himself to a higher position negating the principle espoused by Shea (1998) of bonding with the audience through the use of collective pronouns. However, it can be interpreted to mean an expression of conviction in what one says, so the authority figure calls upon the listenership to rally behind his submission. Also, the parting shot is a characteristic feature of the presenter's style, so taking it to mean a disclaimer on the efficacy or otherwise of propounded messages may be rather farfetched. It is stylistic and, the discourse is triggered-off unconsciously.

Allusions to freedom train and Christmas train in example 11, mark association. These are values with a magnetic effect, cherished and associating them with a product makes it attractive. Association is also provided for in the following examples:

13. Varsity students like data bundles ... husiku hwese vachi researcher (university students like data bundles for all night research).

In example 13, Tendayi associates data bundles with an elite class in society, university students, presumably a source of inspiration to many in society. University students are perceived torch bearers of knowledge. Therefore the celebrity adroitly exploits association to persuade. The given example successfully marks code switching and can

be used to illustrate application of Rank's (1976) persuasive model thereby demonstrating the inextricable interlinking of both frameworks in conceptualisation of persuasive communication.

Both sets of celebrities downplay/negate weak points associated with their respective products and services. Such weaknesses include power outages and network connection challenges as well as prohibitive costs of making calls in an economy not using local currency; instead there is ominous silence with typical discourses conspicuous by their absence. It is certainly not all geographical areas that are networked or connected by Econet and NetOne. This deficiency is omitted; instead outrageous exaggerations are projected as illustrated in the claims below:

14. Buddie zone, available **anytime, anywhere** in Zimbabwe.
15. Inspired talk with **whomever, wherever** and **whenever**.
16. Keeping you covered **everywhere**.
17. **Tonnes** and **tonnes** of airtime are on offer.
18. Can send money **anywhere** using one wallet.
19. Reach out to **anyone** underneath the Zimbabwe sun.

Examples 14, 15, 16 and 17 relate to Econet with 18 and 19 drawn from NetOne messages disseminated by celebrities. As illustrated in the examples, exaggeration is a common feature in the discourses. Given this dimension, broadening Rank's (1976) persuasive model to include exaggeration at the upper end of the intensify scheme, provides a critical step in the elaboration and development of the framework for application in persuasive communication situations.

Persuaders refrain from besmirching those they are in competition with in an overt manner. However, there is evidence in the data collected that they are not oblivious of the competition. As explained elsewhere Mike attests to this with observation that behind successful networks is competition. Tendayi from the NetOne stable remarks:

20. Nobody beats a dollar a day promotion.

Treated in isolation, it is an innocent observation but in context it is uttered after both Mdhara Zobha and Tendayi had suggested that theirs was an authentic promotion compared to other players. On this note, they claimed some players had promotions where if the dollar is not used on a particular day, it is forfeited as opposed to NetOne's where unused dollars are not forfeited but are instead credited. The veiled attack was in apparent reference to their competitor, Econet whose data bundles promotion expires on appointed days. It is a 'cold war' in which persuaders are subtle in their fight and more significantly mobilise by exposing a competitor's perceived weaknesses albeit in a diplomatic way. Contrary to Rank's model, it is not downplaying of one's weaknesses per se but exposition of the other part's limitations, ostensibly to have mileage. Though subtle the celebrity appeals to the emotion of fear which is designed to frighten persuadees of potential negative consequences if they do not heed advice (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987).

Persuasive communication driven by the celebrities exploits humour extensively. Attention of persuadees or listeners is aroused and sustained for they are, "... less resistant to persuasion when humour is used" (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987, p. 157). As a matter of fact, Net One's Mdara Zobha style is out rightly humorous whether in deejay role or voice over commercials. He has his way of approaching grievous matters in a light hearted style, under the cover of the infamous mask. With reference to using the One Wallet product he claims:

21. Hazvina kuoma sekuzadza kombi masakati (It is not as difficult as loading a commuter omnibus in the afternoon off-peak hours).

Mid-afternoons are generally characterised by low human traffic, making it cumbersome to fill up commuter omnibuses. It is humour which revolves around intensification of positive features of the one-wallet product by contrasting them with trepidation in a different environment thus falling within the framework of Rank model's composition variable. Incidentally, transport and telecommunication sectors are highly competitive domains which demand effective persuasive communication strategies. In a bid to outdo each other in their fight for passengers kombi crews attack competitors by generally downplaying their negative aspects. However, intense competition in the 'mobile wars' is managed in more civil and diplomatic terms.

Elsewhere Mdhara talks about a tenant evicted by his landlord for performing the Zora-Butter dance routine associated with Dynamos football club. The landlord was not amused by this celebration presumably for his allegiance to a rival football team. This is plain humour which is better appreciated in context where the celebrity laughed hilariously alongside his partner. Humour can also be understood in terms of an emotional appeal enunciated more lucidly in the context of the rhetorical tradition which in Aristotelian terms stirs emotions using vivid descriptions and emotion laden words.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has demonstrated that telecommunication players, Econet and NetOne, are locked up in a 'mobile war' manifest in the persuasive communication strategies employed to mobilise potential subscribers. It is a contest done on the same platform (radio station) albeit at different times, with same time allocation and both employing the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement.

The persuasive communication messages are driven by two variables of 'messenger' and 'message'. The messenger dynamic has been conceptualised within the framework of celebrity endorsement where issues inclusive of credibility and commoditisation have been highlighted. On credibility test, overt pronouncement of allegiance to certain football teams incidentally in competition with others on either the local or global stage creates credibility challenges on the persuader. Commoditisation of celebrities is a potential challenge toward effective persuasion in that drawing the line to mark professional deejay role and voice-over commercial work is blurred. The perception that the network operators per se root for political parties finds no expression in celebrity endorsement. The celebrities at least in the context of this study have no professed allegiance to political consciousness and the messages projected are not apparently ideologically inclined in any way. On the basis of this research, claims of partisan maneuvering and grandstanding cannot be substantiated.

The message put forward has been explained within the realm of language skill exhibition where stylistic variations have been noted. The telecommunication sector is highly competitive in that the players offer similar products and services. To be competitive, the messages betray creativity marked by code switching. It is a pattern used consistently across all messages but more profoundly in the NetOne content. The motivation for the back and forth movements across languages is clearly understood within the functionalist model which is a taxonomy of hierarchically structured functions comprising referential, directive, expressive, metalinguistic and poetic domains. Alongside code switching, slang is also a characteristic feature of the discourses. The motive is reaching out to a discourse community which is distinct thereby making the persuasive communication strategy targeted; a strategy counterbalanced by Econet's targeted messages under coverage updates in specific locations of provinces.

Manipulation of language for persuasion has been conceived within Rank's model which has been broadened to capture hyperbole which is a stylistic pattern prevalent in both discourses. Humorous episodes designed to make an emotional appeal to the listeners has

been exploited extensively. Beyond the mere desire to create and maintain social relations among interactants, linguistic tools deployed by the celebrities form a complex network of persuasive negotiation and bargaining as revealed in the discussion above. Competition in the telecommunication sector which parades language ability is a fertile ground for research on language for specific purposes. The language's central focus is persuasion.

As a pilot study, the current research has broken new ground making it imperative for more research in the highly competitive mobile industry with specific reference to language use. In fact, this study has generated many more potential areas of investigation around the fascinating area of celebrity endorsement in other competitive sectors such as fast food chains, funeral services and medical aid societies which have taken the Zimbabwean market by storm. These are areas that have significantly resorted to the use of the celebrity phenomenon as part of persuasive communication strategy. Certainly, these areas call for intense study. Comparative research can be undertaken in a bid to unravel similarities and differences between domestic celebrities and those in arguably high profile contexts such as 'Hollywood' and 'Nollywood'.

More questions have emerged in the course of this investigation specifically in relation to the use of indigenous languages *per se* and exploitation of non-verbal communication in persuasive communication inspired by celebrity endorsement. All these are potential areas for investigation which could not be accorded due attention as they fell beyond the scope of this study. Exploration of the suggested areas will certainly broaden the intriguing area of persuasive communication.

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