

**LOST IN INTERPRETATION? CREATING MEANING FROM
LOVELIFE'S *HIV: FACE IT* BILLBOARDS**

BY

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE (BY COURSE WORK) IN CULTURE,
COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU
NATAL, DURBAN

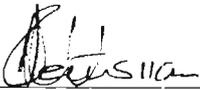
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JULY 2007

Declaration

I, Rosalia Ngueve Martins-Hausiku, do hereby declare that this is my own work and where work of others has been used, it has been fully acknowledged. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfillment of a degree in Master of Arts (by coursework) in Culture, Communication and Media Studies, in the Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban.

I further declare that this paper has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University

Signature:  _____

Date: 2008/01/25 _____

Rosalia N. Martins-Hausiku

Durban, July 2007

Acknowledgements

A lot of people have contributed to the accomplishment of this study, but above all, let me give glory to God almighty for making it all happen.

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, for the guidance, constructive critique and for standing by me through to completion. I am indebted to the expertise of John Lengwe Kunda for the guidance, especially immense contributions during the formulation of my research proposal.

Special thanks go to Abdi Ali, for the encouragement and support during the difficult times.

And lastly from CCMS, Irene Pule, none of this would have been possible if it wasn't for your support, materially and emotionally. Thanks for the friendship and for living through one more masters' programme for my sake.

I would not have made through this year without the love and support of my family, the Martins family. My world will end the day you stop believing in me. Thanks for letting me shine once more.

My husband, Justus Hausiku, thank you for the encouragement, support and for the shoulder to lean on when things got tough. Thank you for enduring yet another distance relationship even though you vowed never to do it again. You are the wind beneath my wing. I love you.

My mentor and friend, Jerry Muadinohamba, we did it! You deserve a special mention. Thanks for believing in me. I am especially grateful to you, for investing time and interest in my research, for the encouragement, even though when I felt de-motivated at times. "I am, because you are".

I am especially grateful to the participating schools. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and for allowing me to publish your ideas and comments for the South African public.

Lastly, it would not have been possible for me to pursue my masters' degree without the scholarship awarded to me by my employer, the MVA Fund. Thank you.

Dedication

This work is a dedication to my family, the Martins family. My Mom and Dad, for teaching me that nothing is too big or too small for me to handle if I put my heart and mind to it. I will never get the chance to return the wisdom that you have instilled in me, but I want you to know that God gave me the best parents under creation. To my brothers and sisters, Angelina, Edmund, Tereza and Brown, the love and support you have demonstrated throughout the years, no matter how different I have tried to be from all of you, is what kept me going, wanting to achieve more. Thank you for believing in me all the way.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACCESS	Alliance for Children’s Entitlement to Social Security
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CADRE	Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation
DramAIDE	Drama AIDS Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HST	Health Systems Trust
MTC	Media Training Centre
PPASA	Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa
RHRU	Reproductive Health Research Unit
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
TB	Tuberculosis
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Culture – “... a contest and conflictual set of practices of representation bound up with the process of formation and reformation of cultural groups” (Storey, 1996:2).

Language – is a medium through which we make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged (Hall, 1997:1).

Meaning - is what gives us a sense of our own identity, or who we are and with whom we ‘belong’- so it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups (Hall, 1997:3).

Codes - a code is a system of meaning common to the members of a culture or subculture (Fiske, 1990).

Semiotics - a study of how meaning is constructed through language, pictures, performance and other forms of expression.

Representation – the production of meaning through language (Hall, 2002).

Billboards - are advertisements, placed upon structures along major transport routes and at places where people converge (Pauwels, 2005).

loveLife – a brand driven, comprehensive national programme targeting 12 – 17 year olds focused on reducing the negative consequences of premature and adolescent sex by promoting sexual health and healthy lifestyles for young people (loveLife, 2000).

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a reception analysis of loveLife's '*HIV: face it*' billboards by youth aged 12 – 17 years old, loveLife's target audience for the campaign under scrutiny. The study sought to find out whether the intended audience derived the same meanings from the billboards as they were initially intended by loveLife; whether the target youth regard themselves as audience of the communicated campaign; and to assess whether loveLife billboard producers have succeeded in communicating the intended message to the readers of the billboards. To achieve this, the study adopted a qualitative method of data collection by conducting two focus group discussions. One focus group was selected from a rural school in KwaZulu Natal and another one from an urban school of the same province. Participants were all youth between the ages 12 – 17 years old. The circuit of culture was used as the theoretical framework. The circuit of culture is a composition of certain moments in the communication process namely: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation [see diagram.1]. For the purpose of this research only one moment of the circuit, namely representation was adopted. Representation is an essential part of the process through which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves the use of language, signs and images that stand for or represent things. Findings from the study show that respondents assigned different meanings to loveLife billboards. loveLife's messages are not being decoded by the target audience in the initially intended manner. A majority of the respondents negotiated meaning in an attempt to understand what loveLife is trying to communicate because the billboards' objectives are not straightforward. The study also found that urban dwellers identified more closely as audiences for the loveLife billboards than rural dwellers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Designing health promotion materials should be an active dialogic process which incorporates the target audience as part of the process, from production to the stage of consumption of such promotional materials. This will ensure that health promotion materials such as billboards, whether visually or verbally, are audience specific. When we say that health promotional materials must “talk the language of the receivers”, this language, does not necessarily have to be our local languages, English or French, but we refer to cultural or pictorial terms (Pauwels, 2005:338). It is important that the encoder of the message bear in mind or share the same cultural codes such as those of the decoder of the message, otherwise this may lead to confusion or misunderstanding of the message. Visual and verbal elements of the media messages must be straightforward, easy to read and understand. Small things matter: for instance, the wrong colour combinations may be found offensive by the receiver of the message due to colour connotations of different cultures.

Some researchers, in particular Luc Pauwels, states further that pictures and other visual representations often are regarded as a universal language and therefore are widely regarded as the ideal means of communication in multicultural and diverse environments similar to those found in South Africa and less literate environments. “It is however, important to note that although pictures are often perceived as cultural boundaries in developmental communication and education, often they are very culturally coded and their uses can be highly culturally specific”(Pauwels, 2005:338). One such representational system is the billboards used by loveLife campaign to communicate HIV/AIDS messages to young South Africans.

loveLife is a campaign that was launched in September 1999 with the aim to reduce “the incidence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) among 15 – 20 year-olds by 50 % over the next three to five years” (loveLife, 2002:2; Parker 2003:1). loveLife planned to

achieve their objectives by investing in “a multidimensional national programme” that intended to instill a culture of condom use in the youth. In addition loveLife planned to establish adolescent-friendly reproductive health services as an integral part of public health services, education, and community outreach as well as institutional support (loveLife, 2000:2; Parker, 2003:1).

In order to achieve their objectives, loveLife adopted a multimedia approach which includes television and radio programming, publications and outdoor media such as billboards, aimed at encouraging open discussion about HIV/AIDS, sexual responsibility and healthy living. After engaging in these media, the youth are supposed to connect to comprehensive HIV prevention services such as the “Y-Centres”, youth centres providing HIV education and health services in a recreational environment, adolescent-friendly public health clinics, and a national toll-free line called ‘thethajunction’.

loveLife made its debut under the auspices of the South African first lady, Mrs. Zanele Mbeki, and is implemented by a consortium of leading South African non-governmental organizations: the Reproductive Health Research Unit (RHRU), the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa, Advocacy Initiatives and the Health Systems Trust (loveLife, 2001a).

loveLife has provoked much debate and controversy in the approach of their various billboard campaigns. Many feel that their billboards are “unclear and are open to incorrect interpretation” and that “interpretations of the billboards could contradict key concepts and messages necessary for HIV prevention” (CADRE et. al., 2006). This research seeks to find out whether the intended audiences derive the same meanings from the billboards as they were intended by loveLife, whether they regard themselves as audiences of this campaign and to assess the success of the producers of the billboard message in communicating the message to its destined audience.

1.2 Problem Statement

loveLife's strategy is to move beyond the failed "do or die" messages of the 1990s. The Organization felt that in order to achieve this objective, they had to take a non-complicated, straightforward strategy to address the grassroots causes of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the ever increasing problem of teenage pregnancies. One of their strategies was to redress society's reluctance to address issues around youth and sexuality, other issues such as peer pressure, sexual coercion and factors that may prevent the youth from visiting public health clinics (loveLife, 2006a). Whether the above mentioned strategy has been successful or not is debatable. As a result, criticism from communication experts, academics and the general public has emerged on the language and strategies they apply in their campaigns.

The objectives of this study were to investigate the meanings that the target audience (youth aged 12 – 17 years) assign to the messages on the *HIV: face it* billboards. This includes the whole construct of the billboard by looking at the 'pay-off line'; the use of 'graphics' and the 'colours'. The study further examines whether the target audience, after decoding the message that was initially encoded by loveLife, understand the message as it was intended by the encoder. This includes, whether the billboards command or prompt any health decisions or actions from the interpreters. The study further explored whether the youth from both urban and rural areas identify themselves to be target audiences of the loveLife billboard campaigns.

1.3 Research Questions

- a. What meanings do the target audience assign to the loveLife billboards?
 - Do the participants understand the message?
 - What do the slogans mean to them?
 - What do the graphics mean to them?

b. Have the billboards succeeded in communicating the message as initially intended by loveLife?

- Have the billboards prompted loveLife's desired conversations?
- What effects do the messages on the billboards have on the youth?

c. Do the youth from urban/rural areas identify themselves as target audience for the loveLife billboard messages?

- Do they consider themselves as the target audience for the billboard messages?
- Do they identify with the billboard messages?
- What are the youth's reactions towards the billboard messages?

1.4 Value of the study

The present study offers great value in the field of health communication. HIV/AIDS is a matter of national concern, in particular if it involves the youth who are the future of South Africa. It is thus important that when health messages are developed for the youth, these messages address the socio-economic and environmental factors in which these audiences are positioned. Failure to do so may result in wastage of resources, confusing the audience and even taking previous cemented efforts in the field of HIV communication decades backwards. Most authors or critics of loveLife billboards have emphasized the issue of cultural diversity, and issues of multi-lingual amongst South African youth. The present research builds on prior research in the field but offering an important critique in terms of rural/urban divides. The study hopes to contribute towards previous recommendations which will inform loveLife producers on how to better tailor their billboard campaigns to suit the age group 12 – 17 years. Similarly, the study hopes to influence other billboard producers in the area of communication in general and HIV/AIDS in particular.

1.5 Outline of Chapters

Chapter One contains the introduction and the outline of the study. Chapter Two examines relevant literature by presenting an overview of the loveLife campaign and provides an in-depth explanation of the circuit of culture as the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Chapter Three is a description of the research design and methodology; it gives descriptions of the sample under study, the methods of data collection and data analysis. In Chapter Four the research findings from focus group discussions are presented in contrast with studies by Richard Delate, Danie Jordaan and comments on loveLife 2006 billboards by CADRE et. al. and a few others. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the results collected in the field; from these discussions conclusions are made.

1.6 Summary of chapter

This section was an introductory chapter into the research under study. It outlines the aims and objectives of the study by first offering an introduction of the research context. Then it presents the problem formulation and looks at the research questions upon which the study was based on. The next chapter is an essay on the literature review and the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter outlines the circuit of culture model (du Gay, Hall et al. 1997) as the theoretical framework upon which the research is based. One of the moments of the circuit, representation is used to explain the discrepancies and contradictions between the semiotic evaluations of messages as depicted by the loveLife billboards and the interpretations generated from the focus group discussions. The last part of the chapter reviews the literature on the loveLife campaign. It discusses briefly the history of the campaign from its inception to date. The study further explores loveLife's communication strategies and then presents the debates that have been sparked by the campaign around South Africa and beyond.

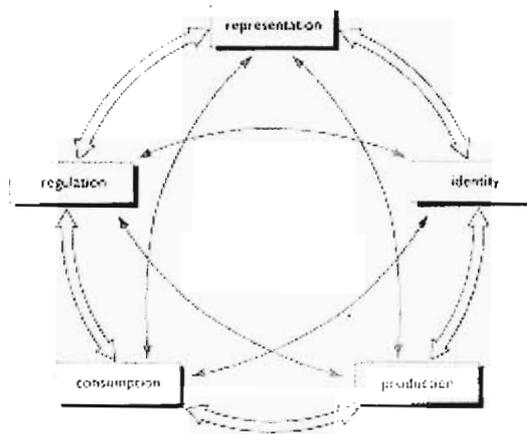
2.2 Theoretical Framework

Stuart Hall defines culture as a set of shared meanings between a group of people, which enables them to understand and communicate with each other. Hall further states that these meanings are shared between people who share the same language. In this case language operates as a representational system to sustain the dialogue between members of the same culture, in order for these members to have the same interpretations of how the world operates. Language is the medium through which these members communicate, whether in the form of written and spoken signs and symbols or in the form of images such as photography, musical notes, or ideas and feelings (Hall, 1997:1).

To belong to a culture is to belong to roughly the same conceptual and linguistic universe, to know how concepts and ideas translate into different languages and how language can be interpreted to refer to or reference the world. To share these things is to see the world from within the same conceptual map and to make sense of it through the same language systems (Hall, 1997:22).

Hall sees meaning as being produced and exchanged in various ways: through group identity and group differences; through personal and social interaction; through the use of mass media and global communications; through everyday rituals and practices of daily life; through narratives; stories; fantasies; rules; norms and conventions. According to Hall, “Things don’t mean: we construct meaning using representational systems – concepts and signs” (Hall, 1997:25).

There are a number of processes involved when the reader creates meaning during the reading process. As much as the text and reader contribute to the meaning-making process, other factors are at play too, and these are the ‘moments’ of the circuit of culture suggested by du Gay, Hall et al. (1997).



The circuit of culture

Diagram.1: The Circuit of Culture

Source: Stuart Hall, 1997: p. 1

Through the circuit of culture, du Gay, Hall et al. argue that culture gathers meaning at five different ‘moments’- representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation (Marginalized, 2006:1). Through the Sony Walkman case study, du Gay, Hall et al. show how each of the five ‘moments’ interact to bring about a variety of meanings. They argue that through the combination and articulation of these processes meaning is constructed (du Gay, Hall et al.1997:3).

“Meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part. It is also produced in a variety of different media; especially, these days, in the modern mass media, the means of global communication, by complex technologies, which circulate meanings between different cultures on a scale and with a speed hitherto unknown in history” (Hall, 1997:3).

The circuit, as the diagram suggests, is a non-linear process, which means that the creation of meaning can start anywhere between the five ‘moments’. The five processes are only separated for analytical purposes although each one affects the others (Grey, 1998:3).

The next few sections will present explanations of the different ‘moments’ of the circuit of culture, with examples used by theorists.

Representation

Representation is the process, channel or medium through which meaning is produced and exchanged between individuals. Things are assigned meaning by the way we represent them (Vukceovich, 2002:2). As stated above, one main system of representation in culture is language, not only in the literary terms of written or spoken language, but it stretches to other signs and symbols. By using language to represent things we create a classification system. This is the very moment where we categorize what is good or bad or what is ethical and unethical. In the real sense what is good or bad or ethical and unethical come into existence only because these things were represented as such (Grey, 1998:4). Representation is secondary to the process as it only comes into being once meaning has been created (Hall, 1997:6).

In the case of loveLife, the billboards are the representational system, through which loveLife’s message is being communicated. If we look at the critique on loveLife billboards [see pgs. 29 – 34], it gives us an idea of how these billboards have been represented in the past and this may also impact the way these billboards are being

interpreted by the target audience. loveLife billboards already have an interpretative framework through which they are being read and understood.

Identity

Identity gives us a sense of place in the world and links us to our respective societies and cultures in which we cohabit. The common expressions: ‘we are what we eat’, ‘we are what we wear’ and ‘we are what we read’, are represented through language. These common definitions we use are also socially constructed meanings. It is society that classifies and defines what is deemed appropriate or not (Grey, 1998:5). When we consume products, we come to bear the identities that have been associated with those products. Therefore the production of meanings through representation affects the identities that are associated with an object or text.

In the case of loveLife, the target audience, in identifying with the message on the loveLife billboards, will depend to a great extent on how the billboards are being represented. They will look at the associations being made with the loveLife billboards as these will highly influence whether the youth identify themselves as targets or not.

Production

This is the ‘moment’ of the circuit where production of meaning takes place, whether in the material, symbolic or textual form. In literature, the producer of the text is the author and traditionally literary criticism put more emphasis on the author’s intentions (Grey, 1998:6). In the case of loveLife, it is important that during the production/encoding of the billboard message, they should take the cultural orientation or the demographics of their target audience into consideration, to ensure that the initial meanings they encode are filtered through to the target audience (being the decoders) when they translate these billboards. This is supported by the statement by Phillip Grey, that the link between the encoder of the text and their consideration of the target audience highlights the process of production and consumption in the circuit of culture (Grey, 1998:7).

Consumption

Consumption is the appropriation of a given product by the consumer. This could refer to cultural products, media products or consumer goods (Vukceвич, 2002). Stuart Hall (1980), in his encoding/decoding model sees the reader/receiver as an active reader who can produce a variety of meanings which are influenced by their various interactions (Grey, 1998). When loveLife billboards are appropriated by the target youth, they are assigned a variety of meaning by youth from different cultural affiliations. If through the encoding process, the cultural background is not taken into consideration, misunderstanding may occur; therefore the target audience will fail to interpret the message as intended by loveLife. Grey (1998), points out that how people assign meaning may also depend to a large extent, on what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use.

Regulation

Regulation refers to something as specific as government policies and regulations. This is the reproduction of a particular pattern and order of signifying practices so that things appear to be normal or natural. It entails cultural policy as well as cultural politics, involving struggles over meanings, values and forms of subjectivity and identity (Vukceвич, 2002:2). In the case of loveLife, we have to look at the criticism offered on the messaging of the billboards, whether through the media, academics or policy makers. How these influential media perceive these billboards will have an impact on how the decoders may interpret the messages. In this case regulation will affect the identities associated with the billboards and in turn affect the interpretant.

Now that we have defined each ‘moment’ it is important to note that since the ‘moments’ of the circuit are different from each other, miscommunication or misunderstandings may arise. These distortions or misunderstandings arise as a result of lack of congruence between the encoder (the party with the intent to communicate) and the decoder (the recipient of the message). These misunderstandings would result because the ‘cultural

codes' used in the encoding of a message may not be the 'cultural codes' that are used by the decoder of the message (Hall, 1996:43). loveLife (in this case the encoder) could therefore be facing this problem with their billboard campaign, in the sense that messages communicated to the audience (message decoder) are not encrypted with the same 'cultural codes' as those governing the target audience.

For the purposes of this study, only one moment of the circuit will be applied namely: representation, this is simply because the study is inclined to find out how billboards as a representational system carries meaning that is produced by loveLife to its intended audience.

2.3 The use of Billboards as a medium for campaigns

Billboards are advertisements, usually placed upon structures along major transport routes, taxi ranks and other places where people normally converge. Billboards usually convey only a limited amount of information, therefore their use should be restricted to advertising a single strong message and referring to other health media or more general health programmes (Pauwels, 2005). They are reliant on colour, pictures and only a few words to convey a message. After delivering the message in its desired form or size, the medium is no way responsible for securing reading or attention to the message which is the responsibility of the advertiser (Agnew, 1985; Delate, 2005).

Billboards can be an effective medium for health promotion, especially if they are used in conjunction with supporting and more in-depth methods of communication such as personal counseling, brochures and flyers. They are advantageous because they attract audience from almost all walks of life and their exposure to the audience is 24 hours especially more effective if erected at a strategic location (Pauwels, 2005:347). Now that we have a fair understanding about the use of billboards as a medium for campaigns, the next section will explore the loveLife campaign phenomena and the use of billboards as one of the drivers of their campaign.

2.4 loveLife as a brand

A brand is often described as a mental or emotional association in the customer's mind with a certain service or product, which differentiates it from other services or products (Bates, 2006:1). These signs or symbols are initiated by the images that organizations use in their advertising, substantiated by the words they use to describe their products or services. Once an impression is made on the customer or the reader of the advertisements, the customer or reader remembers these associations and establishes a brand (Brand Identity Guru Inc.2007:1).

What makes brands visually distinct from one another is a combination of any of the following: name, letters, numbers, a symbol, a signature, a shape, a slogan, a colour, a particular typeface, but none of these are as important as the name of the brand as it gives it a universal reference (Blackett, 2004:3).

However, notwithstanding the distinctiveness of a brand, the symbols, slogan and colours and other elements that construct it will bear different meaning to different people. We have to take into cognizance, the individual attitude, social relations, emotions and the social position of both the communicator and the recipient. The recipient interprets a message, code or sign against the background of his or her own cognition of the subject of the message (Fourie, 1996:18). Cognition is the process upon which people make meaning of things through assimilation, because of what they know about life or the world or about something. Thus, the meaning that people create, and the interpretations they make are products of social and cultural orientations (Fourie, 1996:18-19). Likewise, by accepting or identifying with the loveLife brand, the target audience gives meaning to the symbols or icons based on their social and cultural orientation.

loveLife introduced itself to the South African community in 1999, as an aspiration brand for young people. Their target was to apply the techniques of branding to change the sexual behaviours of young people in South Africa. Angela Stewart-Buchana, Media

Director of loveLife, said that branding is a big part of loveLife's strategy for success. She further added that the concept of using commercial branding techniques to support public health education was a result of extensive research among young South Africans, results of which proved to be significant in brand awareness (Irwin, 2003:1) Stewart-Buchana said the following about the idea of making loveLife a brand:

The idea is to make loveLife a brand. In South Africa you have incredible brand loyalty and recognition. We want to compete with Levi's, Diesel, Coca-Cola...loveLife positions itself as a healthy lifestyle, which is cool and hip. Like it or not, young people here have bought into American youth culture, and to reach them we need to be there (loveLife, 2003).

To achieve their objective of becoming a lead brand that young people would associate with and choose a healthier sexual lifestyle, loveLife used various branding techniques to position loveLife as a lifestyle brand with the slogan "talk about it". This involved initial teaser campaigns in outdoor media and the promotion of healthy lifestyle values in later campaigns which were aimed at influencing the target youth to opt for a healthy lifestyle and perceive safe sex as 'cool' and 'hip'. The marketing initiative also consisted of a media campaign and various community outreach initiatives. Once they achieved their objective with reasonably good brand recognition of the loveLife brand, they started displaying messages on billboards, taxis and water tanks to initiate behaviour change amongst the target audience (loveLife, 2000c). By 2003, Stewart-Buchanan claimed that according to loveLife's research, the brand had attained a whopping 80 percent brand recognition in the youth market, since its inception in 1999. These claims are contrary to findings by Richard Delate who conducted a semiotic analysis of the 'his & hers' loveLife billboard campaign in 2001 and that of Danie Jordaan which he conducted in 2003 [see pgs. 27 – 30].

2.5 The loveLife campaign "Our Story"

This section presents a brief history of the loveLife campaign. It gives a background discussion on loveLife's inception, how it is funded, the rationale behind the campaign and its overall communication strategy.

As mentioned above, loveLife is a brand driven, comprehensive national programme targeting 12 – 17 year olds focused on reducing the negative consequences of premature and adolescent sex by promoting sexual health and healthy lifestyles for young people (loveLife, 2000; 2002). loveLife was motivated by the “crisis” that already more than five million South Africans, are HIV positive. According to loveLife, at the inception of the campaign, was that conservative estimates are that over 10 million South Africans could be infected with HIV in the next five to 10 years (loveLife, 2000c). They further estimated that at the current rate of infection, half of all 15 year olds and younger South Africans could be killed by HIV/AIDS. In addition to HIV/AIDS loveLife also planned to expand the campaign to cover teenage pregnancies, as according to their statistics one in three women in South Africa would have given birth by the time she turned 18 years old. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), violence and coercion among adolescent sexual behaviour were some of the problems they aimed to tackle as well (loveLife, 2000c).

loveLife was motivated to come into existence because its producers realized that the HIV education programmes at the time had limited impact on sexual behaviour. This was evident from surveys which showed that although about 98 % of South Africans are aware of HIV/AIDS and how it is spread; condom use among South African males has remained almost unchanged at about 10 % over the past five years (loveLife, 2000c). However, Warren Parker highlights that although loveLife has painted a dismal picture of HIV in many of its publications and publicity materials since its inception, most of these findings, which construct “a sense of urgency” and imply that little has been achieved in any previous HIV/AIDS interventions, are unreferenced (Parker, 2003:3).

The generally agreed strategy of loveLife was to promote prevention efforts amongst the highest risk groups; provide target audience with education on the broader context of sexual behaviour and promote condom use as part of a normal youth culture. This was to be achieved through the combination of traditional marketing techniques with the best principles of public health education to create a lifestyle brand which will attract the

youth to buy-in and wanting to associate with a healthy positive lifestyle. To create this level of association among loveLife's 12 – 17 year target group, the loveLife brand is positioned as part of popular youth culture. This was achieved “by changing pervasive values and attitudes among adolescents to sex, sexuality and gender relations to get young South Africans to “talk about it” (loveLife, 2001:2).

“loveLife’s for us”

Between October and November 2001, loveLife conducted a national survey of South African youth aged 12 – 17. According to loveLife, the survey was designed to “shed light on how South African youth view their lives today and what they think about their futures, with a particular focus on HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour”. The survey also included data on young South African’s awareness, attitudes and experiences with the loveLife campaign (loveLife, 2001:5).

In the summary of key findings, loveLife reported that 62 % of all young South Africans knew about loveLife and 65 % of these delayed or abstained from sex, an impact made by loveLife. loveLife took these results as a clear indication that young people are responding positively towards the campaign, even though in its earliest stages (loveLife, 2001:7). The report further stated that among the sexually experienced teenagers who have heard about loveLife, reported using condoms as a result of loveLife. About 69 % said that they reduced the number of their sexual partners, and 63 % said that the campaign had caused them to be more assertive in insisting their partners to use a condom (loveLife, 2001:7).

These results were well received and endorsed by the Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation who were of the opinion that the early evaluation results are incredibly encouraging. In a briefing to US secretary of State, Colin Powell, The CEO of the Foundation, Drew Altman, was quoted as saying:

The loveLife program in South Africa, which is the world’s largest HIV prevention programme for young people, and in a nutshell, it is a powerful

combination of media messages nationwide and a broad range of services nationwide. All of them underscoring an upbeat message about positive lifestyles and responsible decision making, which is already starting to show results in terms of significant numbers of kids abstaining from sex, delaying having sex, reducing numbers of partners, practicing safer sex, and just moving their lives in a more positive direction... (Parker, 2003:16).

However these reports were not free from criticism either. Critics felt that loveLife failed to address or consider the wide range of exposure to other campaigns that may have been active during the same time or other forms of contextual experiences and influences. For example many questioned how loveLife caused 78 percent of those who had heard about its programme to use condoms; 69 percent to reduce their number of sexual partners; and 63 percent to be more assertive about condom use (Diko, 2005). No explanation was provided as to how loveLife might have caused respondents to behave in a particular way. Condom use, for example, is a procedure that involves a few steps before it is actually used; these steps include the procurement of the condom, and the negotiation process as well. Critics ask how complex behaviours can be reduced to causality based on the pretext of 'having heard of loveLife' (Parker, 2003).

Early funding of the campaign

Amongst the early funders of loveLife were the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Old Mutual with other core partners such as the South African Department of Health, the National Youth Commission, UNICEF, the Sowetan and South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Implementing non-governmental organization partners were the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPASA), the Reproductive Health Research Unit (RHRU), Advocacy initiatives, Media Training Centre (MTC) and the Health Systems Trust (loveLife, 2000a; Parker, 2003).

By 2003 this consortium was reduced to only three organizations – PPASA, RHRU and HST operating under the auspices of a board of directors chaired by Professor Loyiso Nongxa of the University of Witwatersrand and operating “in partnership with the Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation” (loveLife, 2003a:4; Parker, 2005:2). To date the funders

include the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the South African government (with a commitment of R75 million over three years in 2001). Other support in kind include the SABC, Independent Newspapers and Times Media, with additional corporate support being provided by Avis, Comutanet, Mondi Paper, South African Airways, Spoornet, Ster-Kinekor, UUNet and Vodacom (Parker, 2005).

The fact that most of the founding partners withdrew from the campaign is worrying. If the campaign was doing as well as claimed in the report of activities presented in the previous section, one would expect the campaign to attract more investors without losing the existing partners.

On December 19, 2005, the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria who contributed about 30 % of loveLife's annual budget, announced that they were withdrawing from the NGO (PlusNEWS, 2005). Global Fund's Jon Liden said it had become difficult to measure how the prevention campaign was contributing to the reduction of HIV/AIDS among young people. "This is a Fund with limited resources...loveLife is extremely costly – there are programmes that have been very effective, which cost a fraction of what loveLife costs. It would be irresponsible of the Global Fund to spend almost \$40 million without seeing results", said Liden (Plus NEWS, 2005:1). This in a nutshell, is an indication that loveLife has failed to account to its sponsors as far as results are concerned. This is a contradiction to loveLife's claims made in the "loveLife's for us" publication [see pg.18].

2.6 loveLife 2006 campaign – 'HIV face it'

For their 2006 campaign, four billboard themes carried under the campaign's overall theme 'HIV face it', distributed over 1,200 billboards countrywide, at a cost of R 8 million with the objective of being a 'stark call to confront the epidemic' based on a 'state of the nation assessment' are being flanked all over South Africa (CADRE et.al, 2006:1). LoveLife's strategy is to reinforce the 'Born Free Identity' by getting young

people to a) confront HIV, b) Understand the main drivers of HIV, c) Talk about it and take action (loveLife, 2006).

LoveLife's plan for 2006 is to get back to basics by reintroducing to the corporate world the corporate logo and payoff line "talk about it - loveLife". loveLife claims that the more you talk, debate and participate in loveLife programmes the lower the HIV prevalence, hence the need to spark discussion and debate and central to those discussions is confronting the reality of HIV head on.

2.6.1 The 'Born Free Generation'

loveLife's reinforcement of the 'born free generation' is in the context that the 'born free generation' are in no rush to have sexual intercourse and when they choose to engage in this practice they plan to use a condom for every sexual encounter. loveLife further states that the 'born free generation' are constantly kept at bay about their HIV status because they go for HIV tests; they are able to control their feelings in the heat of passion because they talk openly and honestly about their feelings on how to protect themselves against HIV; they have clear objectives on what they want to achieve in life and therefore embrace life (loveLife, 2006). This section is brought into the study because while loveLife's objectives are clear on paper, the billboards carry none of these messages to the targeted readers. One of the billboards depicts a young man embracing an old lady (probably the young man's grandmother), and next to the graphics stands the writing "Born Free – Embrace life". There is no mention of condom use, or getting tested for HIV. Another billboard features a young woman, raising a flag that is in flames and next to the graphics stands the words "Born free – take back the future". Again, one wonders how this billboard would prompt one to abstain or practice safe sex as intended by loveLife. However the Chairperson of the loveLife Board, Cheryl Carollus explains the logic behind the reinforcement of the 'born free generation' as follows:

The logic of loveLife, is that the 'born free generation' of South Africans must do group thinking and acting differently if we are to combat the HIV epidemic. It requires a social movement that goes beyond the mantra of 'abstain, be faithful,

use a condom’ to address the attitudes, values and traditions that shape sexual dynamics in South Africa...You can’t do that without challenging the social norms that drive HIV infection and that’s often controversial says loveLife board chair Cheryl Carolus (loveLife, 2006:1).

The Chairperson further stated that it remains a fact that young South Africans have a 50-50 chance of getting HIV in their lifetime – which is one of the highest risk ratios in the world. She noted that HIV campaigns have traditionally proven to produce limited results hence the need for innovative ways to campaign against the disease, and loveLife thus combines a bold media campaign with countrywide services on an unprecedented scale (loveLife, 2006).

The ‘born free generation’ campaign was supported by the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, who said that loveLife are promising signs that the largest of South Africa’s HIV prevention efforts is paying off. In an article reported by *The Times*, on September 27, 2005 Mandela expressed his satisfaction with the prospects made by the campaign thus far and was quoted as saying:

loveLife is a uniquely South African campaign of unprecedented scale, that harnesses the hope and optimism of the first generation born free of the shackles of apartheid, while engaging them in face-to-face services in government clinics, schools and community based programmes nationwide. loveLife has struck a real chord with our young people. More than 85 per cent of South Africa’s youth report that they are aware of loveLife, and one third have participated in at least one loveLife programme, stated Mandela (Mandela, 2005:1)

He further stated that according to a new, large-scale study published in the past month, young people who participate in loveLife programmes were “significantly less likely to be HIV infected” (Mandela, 2005:1). The picture painted by loveLife’s reports is that this innovative campaign is effective and is single handedly managing to curb out the HIV/AIDS pandemic amongst the South African youth. Yet most of their statistics fail to acknowledge efforts made by other organizations in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In the next section we unpack the billboards to better understand loveLife’s communication strategy via billboards.

2.6.2 ‘Talk about it’

‘Talk about it’ is loveLife’s pay off line, and this is always placed on the right hand side of the billboard. According to an interview by Richard Delate, with loveLife in 2001, the ideas behind ‘Talk about it’ were conceived as international research had shown a correlation between open and frank discussion with young people around issues pertaining to sex and a delayed onset of sexual activity. loveLife aims to encourage ‘Talk about it’ throughout all players of all social networks, be it amongst children, parents, young people, religious organizations, leadership which are all regarded as interconnected networks (Delate, 2001:11).

In terms of loveLife’s campaign, ‘Talk about it’ presents a broad area where discussions on health, positive approaches to sex, sexuality and sexual health can take place. It advocates that the youth, parents children should communicate more openly about sexual expression. ‘Talk about it’ further encourages the youth to create alternatives to sexual intercourse and choices regarding sexual pleasure; it encourages the youth to talk about sexual rights and exercising those rights; to talk about safer sex options and contraceptive choice and the concept of a positive lifestyle (loveLife, 2001; Delate, 2001). Like all previous campaigns by loveLife, the above mentioned objectives are not mentioned anywhere on the billboards, leaving the reader to do the guess work of what is to be talked about, therefore, resulting in distorted interpretation. In the current study the participants were also tested on their understanding of ‘Talk about it’ to assess whether they interpret the pay off line in the same sense as intended by loveLife. The next section looks at ‘thethajunction’, one of the words that always appears on the left hand side of the billboard.

2.6.3 ‘Thethajunction’

‘Thethajunction’ is a combination of a Nguni word meaning “talk” and junction is an English word for “coming together”, and this is aimed to reinforce the notion of ‘Talk

about it'. This sub brand of loveLife normally appears on the far left hand side of the billboard. Thethajunction is the name given to a loveLife helpline where young people can phone in and obtain advice on sexual health issues (Delate, 2001:11). This combination of an English word and one of the vernaculars could be seen as problematic especially for youth who are not fluent in the vernacular, they end up confused or avoiding the word completely. It is difficult to appropriate meaning to such a word, and understand that what loveLife is trying to tell the readers is that this is a 'talk – junction'. The other problem that may arise is that it is not obvious on the billboard that 'thethajunction' is loveLife's helpline operated with a toll-free number just next to the wording. The study also took 'thethajunction' to the population under study to test their interpretation of the word and these results are presented in chapter four of this essay. Now that we have deconstructed certain elements of the billboard, the next section presents loveLife's 2006 campaign called 'HIV: Face it'. The billboards are presented with the rationale as intended by loveLife for the target audience.

2.6.4 Semiotic analysis of billboards

The present study is limited to the 2006 'HIV: face it' billboards. loveLife's 2006 communications campaign is built around the tagline 'HIV: Face it'. This tagline is said to reflect an evolution of the loveLife campaign in line with the changes in the HIV epidemic. One such basic change is that prevalence rates among 15 – 24 year olds seem to have peaked at levels lower than originally projected. Dr David Harrison, CEO of loveLife called upon the nation to face the realities of HIV/AIDS and tackle it head on.

We have to FACE IT...basic awareness is not enough to change young people's behaviour. Although young people tend to take risks, that is not enough of an explanation. We have to better understand the gender, behavioural and sexual dynamics during risk-taking behaviour among young people and tackle these issues head-on – that's what the FACE IT campaign aims to do, said Dr David Harrison, loveLife CEO (loveLife, 2006:2).

Four themes under the 'HIV: Face it' tagline drives the 2006 billboards and loveLife explains the rationale for each billboard to be as follows:

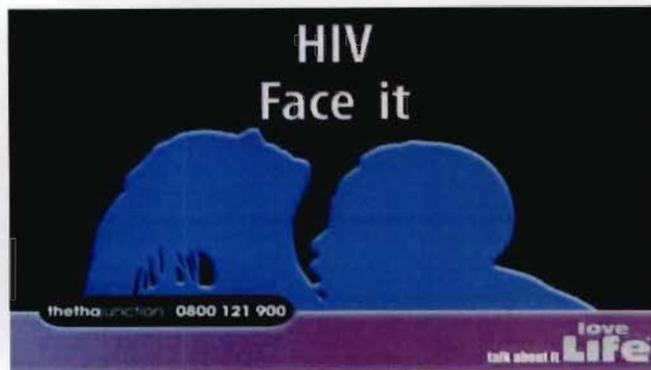


Figure.1: HIV Face it billboard

Source: loveLife, 2006

The *HIV face it* billboard depicts blue graphics on a black background that look like a male and female making love, while the words *'HIV face it'* appear just on top of the graphics. On the left hand corner, the words 'thethajunction' followed by the hotline number appear on the bottom right corner, the words "talk about it loveLife" are written. For the *'HIV face it'* billboard, the rationale is that many South Africans fail to confront the reality of HIV and invest in understanding how they may personally be at risk of contracting the disease. loveLife further states that although many people claim to abstain and practice safer sexual behaviour, many who are in fact already infected do not think they are at risk. It is individuals and society's disregard for the reality and impact of HIV/AIDS that needs to be challenged and confronted. The *'HIV face it'* billboard was created to prompt and invite discussion among youth aged 15 - 24 about being tested for HIV and knowing one's status (loveLife, 2006:3).



Figure.2: HIV loves skin on skin billboard

Source: loveLife, 2006

The '*HIV loves skin on skin*' billboard is a depiction of yellow graphics that resembles a naked body and just above the body are the words '*HIV loves skin on skin*'. On the bottom right of the billboard are the words 'thethajunction' followed by the hotline number. On the bottom right of the billboard are the words "talk about it loveLife". '*HIV loves skin on skin*' billboard was created with the rationale that there has been a steady increase in self-reported condom use over the past five years 'the possible cause for low rates of new infection among young men' (loveLife, 2006). loveLife felt that they needed to capitalize on this positive response and ensure even higher levels of consistent condom use for every sexual encounter and that both males and females are empowered to insist their partners to use a condom even for those in long term relationships.



Figure.3: HIV loves sleeping around billboard

Source: loveLife, 2006

The '*HIV loves sleeping around*' billboard depicts six footprints in red and orange on a black background, two facing upwards and the other four facing downwards. Just between the black background and the purple bar the words 'thethajunction' appear followed by the hotline number, just like on the other billboards above. On the bottom right appear the words "talk about it loveLife". The third billboard, '*HIV loves sleeping around*' was designed with the aim to warn young people that they may not be aware of their partner's sexual behaviour which may in turn increase their risk of contracting HIV. According to loveLife, this theme was prompted because although condom usage has

increased, there is still little evidence that younger men stick to only one sexual partner (loveLife, 2006).



Figure. 4: HIV loves pelegi go supa bosadi

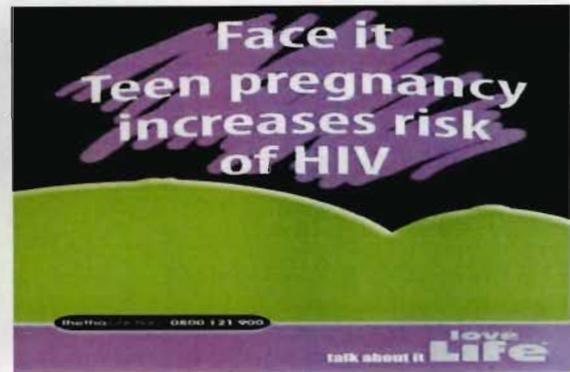


Figure. 5: Face it: Teen pregnancy increases risk of HIV

Source: loveLife, 2006

Lastly the billboard, '*HIV loves pelegi go supa bosadi*' is a depiction of a green bodied pregnant woman, whilst the words '*HIV loves pelegi go supa bosadi*' are written just above the graphic. On the purple bar, to the right "talk about it loveLife" is written and on the left 'thethajunction' appears with the hotline number just next to it. '*HIV loves pelegi go supa bosadi*' meaning "HIV loves the expectation that child-bearing proves womanhood" was prompted due to an increase in HIV rates amongst 15 – 19 year old women who fell pregnant as opposed to their peers who have not been pregnant (loveLife 2006:2). loveLife's objective with this billboard is to instill a degree of self confidence amongst young women by developing a sense of identity and self that helps them to define themselves more broadly than just as mothers, including encouraging personal aspiration and ambition. Secondly, the billboard is also intended to encourage young women to have relationships with partners who are more or less their age rather than dating older men for support and security and to acknowledge that dating older men and having children increases their vulnerability to contract HIV (loveLife, 2006).

This billboard was among the billboards for the 2006 '*HIV: Face it*' campaign, but due to insurmountable pressure and controversy [see pg. 32 for critique] the billboard was removed and replaced with another one that reads: '*Face it teenage pregnancy increases*

risk of HIV'. At the announcement of the billboard replacement, the CEO of loveLife, Dr. David Harrison was quoted saying: "we cannot back away from focusing on the critical drivers of HIV infection in our society...but loveLife does not want to offend any sector of South African society and it seems this particular billboard has hit a number of raw nerves" (loveLife, 2006c:1).

This innovative campaign has had a fair share of negative comments against it. Most of which is attributed to the communication strategy adopted by loveLife, which most of the times leaves the audience with too much room to contest meaning. This section on the rationale was incorporated to create a platform of comparison, on what the encoder, in this case loveLife meant when they created the billboards and what the decoder derived from them. The following section is a presentation of selected criticism on the existence of the loveLife campaign and how they become relevant in the present study.

2.7 Criticisms to loveLife campaign

Since the inception of the loveLife campaign, it has received numerous criticisms, objections and concerns from the public and organizations on the content of the billboard, messages and their portrayal. This section outlines summaries of some of the comments and studies in view of loveLife billboard campaigns from 2001 to date.

2.7.1 Delate's study – “The struggle for meaning: A semiotic analysis of interpretations of the loveLife his & hers billboard campaign”.

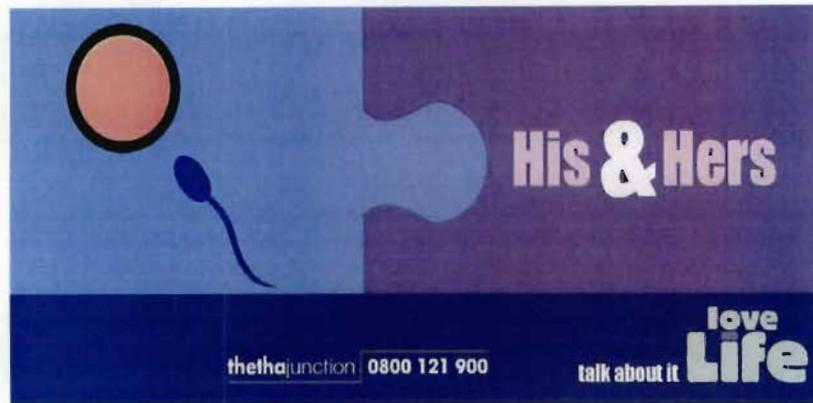


Figure. 6: His & Hers billboard

Source: Delate, 2001:4

Richard Delate, undertook a semiotic analysis on the ‘his & hers’ billboard campaign in 2001. His study aimed to investigate the relationship between the loveLife brand, and interpretation of messaging on loveLife branded billboards. Delate conducted four focus group discussions at four schools, three in Gauteng and one in Mpumalanga. In his findings, he concluded that it was clear that there was a limited understanding of the loveLife brand and this inhibited the way meanings were decoded from the loveLife billboards. He found that the interpretation that the participants generated in their minds of what the brand icon symbolized varied from the actual intended objectives of loveLife as an HIV/AIDS programme, teaching about love and safe sex, whilst some participants did not have a clue of loveLife’s objectives. Delate further stated that although the participants were able to recall some billboards it cannot be concluded that they understand the brand which is supposed to be processed in the mind by the brand icon. Readers of the billboards could not read beyond the iconic representation and be able to create meaning. He further stated that there were discrepancies between the meanings assigned to the images and that interpretations were a constant battlefield. ‘Thethajunction’ as a sub-brand was confusing to the participants, as they were unable to appropriate meaning to the word due to language limitations and the youth did not recognize it immediately that the billboards were promoting a helpline (Delate, 2001:23).

Participants often confused ‘thethajunction’ as the advertising agency. This, Delate said was because loveLife used two brand icons (‘thethajunction’ and ‘loveLife’) at the same time. We normally use the brand icon to allow readers to interpret the message and understand the action that the advertiser is prompting from its readers.

In conclusion, Delate recommended that when planning for future campaigns, loveLife should ensure that the meanings are clear to the target audience. Interpretations and actions that loveLife wanted from the readers needs to be fore grounded (Delate, 2001:23). The participants also suggested that loveLife should keep the messages simple and involve young people in testing messages whether they are appropriate and create advertisement that has a youth appeal. Richard Delate’s findings are very relevant and valuable to this study. His findings were based on the ‘his & hers’ campaign, today after five years since his study, criticism over loveLife’s campaign still continue. The current study takes elements of Delate’s study and applies them using the ‘HIV: face it’ campaign, to see whether this campaign has a different impact on the targeted audience.

2.7.2 Jordaan’s study – “A critical perspective on the reception of three loveLife billboards in rural Transkei”

Danie Jordaan conducted a research to analyze the reception of three loveLife billboards in rural Transkei. This study builds on Jordaan’s previous research into loveLife’s media campaigns carried out in 2003. In the 2003 study, Jordaan criticized loveLife’s campaign on the basis of its branding and media effects as constructing an unrealistic “virtual” society that believes in a South African society free of racism, sexual relations based on gender equalities, poverty has no role to play in one’s behaviour and that individuals are able to resist peer pressure by simply saying ‘no’ (Jordaan, 2006:110).

In this study Jordaan states that behaviour change is only prompted when the intended audience understands the message and is able to decode meaning out of it, this meaning should at least be in line with the intended message. This means that the medium used to transmit the message must take into account the cultural and identity variations of the

target audience, especially those that may pose as possible barriers to communication. However, the author further reminds us that individuals only change behaviour if they see the change as beneficiary, if they possess the required skills to succeed with the change and whether the required change already has a social 'buy-in' (Jordaan, 2006:111). In conclusion of the 2003 study, Jordaan stated that the loveLife 2003 poster campaign would be unsuccessful because they used branding as the instrument that would trigger behaviour change without taking into cognizance the diversities in culture, religion and belief systems such as those present in South Africa. These differences, require that posters and billboards are audience, language, community and geographical location specific, as generic ones may pose as communication barriers to some of the targeted audience.

Given the background on the 2003 study, the follow up study was a reception analysis of three loveLife billboards that were displayed in rural Transkei during 2004 under the pay-off line '*Love to be there 2010*'. The study comprised of a sample of 218 teachers across the Eastern Cape. What Jordaan found in his study was that the respondents are aware that HIV/AIDS impacts negatively on life expectancy and quality of life and there is an association of their awareness with the loveLife posters but the knowledge could not be attributed to the knowledge of the campaign because part of the Advanced Certificate of Education covers sexuality education and HIV/AIDS as part of the participants' curriculum. Jordaan also found that a notable number of participants were able to identify elements of the poster but could not integrate the verbal, iconic, indexical and symbolic signs in order to create meaning that corresponds with the intended rationale (Jordaan, 2006:119).

In concluding his paper, Danie Jordaan, stated that the study supports previous findings that the loveLife campaign carries both contradictory and vague messages. He further stated that the visual messages very often bear no connection to the services provided by the campaign. Although most of the participants recognized the loveLife logo, the messages derived from the 2004 campaign posters were often conflicting because it is not

designed to cater for variations in language and culture amongst the South African community. He also highlighted loveLife's branding as highly problematic. He said:

While branding in recent years has moved to promoting certain "lifestyles" rather than a product, the product remains a key part of promotion, in that it promises access to the particular lifestyle, however far-fetched the claim may be. loveLife, on the other hand, has no readily identifiable concrete "product" or service, except condoms, as expressed by a member of the Flagstaff group (Jordaan, 2006:121).

He recommended that loveLife poster campaigns should differentiate between the different strata of the audience. The posters should be culture and language specific and the visual media to be used should not bear any possibility of conflict in interpretation of the message. He further recommended that there be a direct link between the poster campaign and the services provided through its clinics and Y-centres.

2.7.3 The Halperin and Williams study – "This is no way to fight AIDS in Africa"

Daniel Halperin, and Brian Williams wrote an article for the *Washington Post* entitled "This is no way to fight AIDS in Africa" in which they aired their opinions of the then newly established loveLife campaign in 2001. What emerged from Halperin and Williams' observations and interpretations of the campaign is that the billboards leave it up to the interpreters to appropriate meaning. Halperin and Williams say that instead of adopting Uganda's story of success of mobilizing civic religious groups and other community members with a committed political leadership with a strategy shift that is concerned to changing fundamental patterns of sexual behaviour, the billboards "focuses resources on a Madison Avenue-style HIV prevention" (Halperin & Williams, 2001:1). The study further states that very few young people throughout the country were really interested in the high profile billboards but were however concerned with the issue it redresses. The youth feel that the messages displayed on the billboards are vague and confusing and that loveLife is misappropriating funds which could otherwise be useful in projects that would contribute to the uplifting of community organizations struggling for survival. Whilst loveLife's goals include prevention of HIV by promoting condom use, the media campaigns fail to explicitly mention it (Halperin & Williams, 2001:1).

The Halperin and Williams study is relevant to this study because the later seeks to find out whether the 'HIV: face it' campaign is still experienced to be confusing and vague by the targeted audience. The Halperin and Williams study also further motivates one of the present study's focal questions, to find out whether the targeted youth regard themselves as target audience since the Halperin and Williams study reported that very few young people showed interest in this 'high profile' initiative.

2.7.4 Mail and Guardian “is loveLife making them love life?”

The *Mail and Guardian* covered loveLife critiques and debates extensively over the years since the emergence of the debate. In August 24, 2005, the *Mail and Guardian* covered an article by Rena Singer, where she gave an analysis of loveLife's goal to cut infection rates amongst South African teenagers in half by 2004. In her analysis, she stated that there is evidence that shows that loveLife had helped South Africans to talk more openly about sex and proved to provide many school children with knowledge on HIV/AIDS, but there were few signs to suggest that this new knowledge prompted the youth to delay sexual intercourse or reduce the number of sexual partners. In fact she asserted that some of loveLife's promotional materials seem to encourage the youth to experiment sexual intercourse (Singer, 2005:2).

She further argued that the current billboards instead of creating awareness about the disease have compounded the problem instead, by glamorizing sex as it makes use of ambiguous messages. Making reference to a 2003 study commissioned by loveLife to analyze one of its billboard campaigns, the study confirmed that poor, rural and black students were finding it difficult to grasp the message presented on the billboards. Singer's analysis also questioned the impact of the loveLife programme and it called for more research to be carried out in order to understand the impact of the programme and suggested that the concerns raised about loveLife should be part of a healthy debate or dialogue to arrive at a conclusion on the best way to tackle the epidemic (Singer, 2005:3).

From Singer's analysis we can deduce that whilst loveLife claimed to have attained remarkable achievements with the campaign, other studies seem to present contradicting results. It also reaffirms claims made earlier by other critics that getting young people simply talking about HIV/AIDS does not mean that young people delay sexual intercourse, or use a condom for every sexual encounter [see pg.19].

2.7.5 Luc Pauwels – Posters, billboards and grassroots media relating to TB and AIDS in the Free State and Lesotho

Luc Pauwels, a professor in the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Antwerp, wrote an article on posters and billboards in communicating health matters such as Tuberculosis (TB) and AIDS. In his Analysis and critique of billboards he picked out a billboard about loveLife entitled '*Love yourself enough?*' that was located in Bloemfontein. This is what he commented:

The loveLife billboard, located in an impoverished part of Bloemfontein, seems to testify to the gap that often exists between the culture of the campaign designers and that of the target audience, or at least major sectors of it. Even more seasoned and sophisticated mass culture consumers will struggle to work out what exactly ought to be "talked about": or what precisely the question "*Love yourself enough?*" refers to (Pauwels, 2005:349).

Luc Pauwels' observation is yet another confirmation that there seems to be a gap between the cultural orientation of the producers of loveLife billboards and that of the targeted audiences. This observation serves as a motivation for this study to try and find out whether the target audiences identify themselves with the billboards under study or whether loveLife should consider revising the target audience for the campaign.

2.7.6 CADRE et al. collaboration – "An open letter to loveLife"

A group of organizations and individuals wrote an open letter to loveLife on 22 February 2006, where they raised objections to the content of the 2006 billboard messages. The group comprises of organizations such as, the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS), AIDS Law Project, AIDS Consortium, CADRE, Childline South Africa, Children's Rights Centre, DramAidE, Gender Links, Society for Family Health, Soul City and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). In summary, their objections and concerns state that the billboards are unclear and are open to incorrect interpretation; that interpretation of the billboards could contradict key concepts and messages necessary for HIV prevention; that the messages are stigmatizing and hurtful to people with HIV/AIDS; and that the messages are harmful to overall prevention efforts in South Africa.

CADRE and other organizations laid out all the billboards for the 2006 campaign and raised their reservations for each billboard. For the '*HIV loves skin on skin*' billboard, the group felt that the term 'skin on skin' is a slang term that is often used to describe the concept of unprotected sex in urban townships. They raised concern that this billboard could be problematic, as it is a slogan that is not comprehended by all people especially in a country that is as diverse as South Africa and may result in wrong interpretations that HIV is transmitted by touch. They also felt that the juxtaposition of the slogan which carries bright yellow graphics does not clarify meaning let alone contribute to the understanding of the slogan. It does not motivate readers to use condoms consistently as this is one of the key areas that require focus by campaigns as identified by a recent national study. They further critiqued the billboard on the basis that the billboard does not immediately lead readers to the concept of consistent condom use (CADRE et.al. 2006:2).

For the '*HIV loves pelegi go supa bosadi*' billboard, the group raised concerns that the combination of English and other languages may confuse readers and that readers may find it difficult to interpret the slogan as translations of it could mean "HIV loves giving birth to show womanhood" and "HIV loves childbirth to show womanhood". They further commented that the green graphic does not support interpretation automatically,

as a letter to City Press noted that the graphic appeared to depict ‘two lemons’ (CADRE et.al. 2006:2). The slogan seems to create the impression that pregnant women are the carriers of the HIV virus, this according to CADRE et. al., may increase stigmatization of pregnant women and contribute to violence against women.

The last billboard that the group critiqued is the ‘*HIV loves sleeping around*’ billboard. CADRE and the group felt that the graphic on the billboard may be offensive because it is a “crude representation of the sexual act” (CADRE et. al., 2006:2). They further stated that the slogan suggests that those who have HIV have been sleeping around as it fails to address other means of transmission, this they termed as a contribution to stigmatization of people with HIV. They were further concerned that these billboards are exposed to young children because of its wide distribution therefore the billboards do not offer an appropriate portrayal of sex to young children.

Other general concerns of this group include: loveLife’s failure to pre-test the billboards amongst the targeted audience and loveLife’s failure to consider the impact that its message may have on the target audience. Hence the group’s plea to loveLife to recognize that “HIV/AIDS prevention occurs in the context of other interventions” and a significantly high number of South Africans are plagued by the disease (CADRE et. al. 2006:3).

On the basis of the concerns mentioned above, the group of organizations and individuals called on loveLife to urgently reconsider the implementation of the 2006 campaign and that loveLife should withdraw these billboards immediately (CADRE et. al. 2006). In response to this outcry loveLife retracted the billboard ‘*HIV loves pelegi go supa bosadi*’, and replaced it with one that read: ‘*Face it: teen pregnancy increases risk of HIV*’.

The relevance of this critique in the study is that the 2006 campaign is not different from the other loveLife campaigns that sparked debate around the country. As soon as loveLife announced their new campaign rollout, objections were already expressed. This therefore further motivates the need for the current study to establish whether the targeted

audience share the same sentiments as expressed by CADRE et. al. and others who have objected to the new campaign by loveLife.

2.7.6 Thembisile Makgalemele – ‘Poster makes blacks look promiscuous’



Figure. 7: Everyone he's slept with, is sleeping with you

Source: Makgalemele, 2003:1

In an article dated April 18, 2003, Thembisile Makgalemele wrote about some of the sentiments of various people who felt that one of loveLife's billboards entitled, '*everyone he's slept with, is sleeping with you*', showing a black body embraced by a number of hands "has been accused of perpetuating stereotypes that black people are promiscuous"(Makgalamele, 2003:1). In the article, the Director of the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Nkululeko Nxesi said that the billboard advances the myth that black people are responsible for spreading AIDS while another billboard which portrays a young white boy and an Indian girl with the payoff line "no pressure" seemed to suggest that other races are more responsible.

Advocacy Officer for the AIDS Consortium of the Treatment Action Campaign, Sharon Ekambaram, said that "loveLife messages are so vague and open to any kind of interpretation". She said that it does not surprise her at all that the billboards are viewed to promote racism. Ekambaram further commented that the billboard messages are very Eurocentric and she thinks that young people from the townships fail to understand them. However, CEO of loveLife, David Harrison commented that even if loveLife had used a white body on the multiple-hand advert, the organization would still be subjected to criticism (Makgalemele, 2003:1).

Clearly, HIV affects everybody – black and white – and these boards are meant to be talking points. Our target market is young people between the age of 12 and 17 years and they look beyond black and white. We conducted our research in Nongoma, GaRankuwa and Hammersdale and not even once did the issue of race come up, said Harrison (Makgalemele, 2003:1).

The critique presented above, is amongst a few where readers of the billboards felt that loveLife is perpetuating that black people are promiscuous. For the 2006 billboards, loveLife tried to move away from using real people, but instead, adopted a new approach that depicts animated graphics with various colours that are totally disassociated with black and white. The 2006 billboards portray unusual graphics in very bright colours such as purple, yellow, green, red and blue. The current study intends to conduct an enquiry with the respondents to assess their interpretations of the new graphics and colours used on the billboards under study.

2.8 Summary of chapter

This chapter outlined the literature review that provides the basis for this study. It explored the circuit of culture as the theoretical framework that guided and informed the objectives of this study. In the circuit of culture, Stuart Hall pointed out that there are five ‘moments’ in which meaning is created namely identity, representation, production, consumption and regulation and that although each ‘moment’ is necessary for meaning to take place, no one ‘moment’ guarantees the next. He further stated that if people do not share the same cultural codes misunderstandings or confusion may arise between the encoder of the message and the interpreter.

In particular, the chapter discussed representation, the one ‘moment’ of the circuit upon which the research was based. It incorporated loveLife billboards as the system of representation of loveLife messages and how meaning is appropriated by the youth during the consumption thereof. It further reviewed the coming into being of loveLife and the process of its inception and how such a campaign turned into a worldwide debatable concept that has sparked extensive criticism worldwide since 2001 to date.

The chapter ends with various criticisms against the loveLife billboards since the inception of the campaign. These were mainly brought into the study as they motivated the objectives and reasons as to why this study was conducted. These criticisms also posed questions which were addressed during the current study. These critiques put the effectiveness of loveLife billboard campaign into question and also stated reasons as to why they felt the campaign failed in many instances.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three discusses the research methodology and procedures that guided this study. First the chapter discusses semiotics, since it is one of the levels of analysis adopted in the study. Then the study takes a qualitative approach by conducting two focus group discussions. All discussions were audio taped and later transcribed before analysis was done.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology

Research design is a structure that holds together the research and enables the researcher to address the research questions comprehensively as well as efficiently. This is the part of the essay where researchers attempt to answer questions, and sometimes probe further questions for further research. The structure of the design acts as support or as a motivation of the purpose of the research (Hart, 2005). Research design is like other forms of design; it is the stage where what has been defined is made possible in detailed specification.

In order to answer the questions raised in chapter one, the study has adopted a qualitative research methodology. The next section gives a brief explanation of the method and design but first it discusses semiotics in detail.

3.2.1 Semiotics

The study first undertook a semiotic analysis of the text as produced by loveLife. Semiotics is a study of how meaning is constructed through the use of language, pictures, performance and other forms of expression. It does not only incorporate how things create meaning, but meaning is created between individuals, groups and classes and their

respective cosmologies and conditions of existence (Tomaselli, 1996:29). Semiotics has three areas of study; these are the sign, the codes and the culture within which these codes and signs become operational (Fiske, 1990). For this study we see how audiences construct meaning through loveLife billboards and how different individuals interpret this meaning.

“A sign is something physical, perceivable by our senses, it refers to something other than itself, and it depends upon recognition by its users that it is a sign” (Fiske, 1990:41). Signs are what constitute communication. They represent things or ideas to which they refer. Signs consist of the study of a variety of signs and how these signs convey meaning and how they relate to the people who make use of them. Signs are invented by humans; as a result they are only understood in relation to the uses humans assign to them (Tomaselli, 1996:30). Codes on the other hand are systems whereby signs are organized. It involves how these codes are developed to meet specific societal or cultural needs. It also exploits the availability of a communication medium that allows the transmission of these codes. “The culture within which these codes and signs operate is dependent upon the use of these codes and signs for its own existence and form” (Fiske, 1990:40).

Semiotics sees communication as the generation of meaning from messages rather than just a process of transferring a message from a sender to a receiver. Communication only takes place after the message has been created through the usage of signs. It entails the study of three components, these are; meaning, signs, codes and the reader. Codes are formed by the stringing together of signs to make meaning which develop through social usage (Fiske 1990).

In the case of loveLife, if a message (through billboards) is constructed by loveLife to the target audience (youth aged 12 – 17 years), the likelihood is that the codes used by loveLife are different from those of the target audience of the message. This could arise from the fact that loveLife might not be aware of certain codes which identify with that

particular audience. The youth for instance, have particular codes which differ from those of their parents. This difference in the codes used by loveLife in comparison to those used by the targeted youth could cause the possible barrier of communication from producers of loveLife messages to the youth (the encoders).

The process of creating meaning or messages is known as encoding. However, the process of interpreting these messages, be it in writing, through speech, through film expression, or via radio or television is known as decoding (Tomaselli, 1996:32). The idea that is produced through the process of decoding is called the text or the interpretant.

The text or interpretant is the meaning generated in the mind of the person/viewer/listener/reader who decodes the sign or message ... the text in this semiotic sense is the mental reconstruction of the idea, the thought, and the association, the image mentally generated, by the act of reading, decoding or interpreting (Tomaselli 1996:32).

It is implied therefore, that when a message is sent from one person (the sender) to another person (the receiver), the receiver will try to create meaning from the message meaning which was intended by the communicator. The meaning that will be given to a sign will depend entirely on the context in which the interpreter of the sign exists. However, for the right interpretation to occur, the sender and the receiver need to share the same codes and use the same sign systems. It should however, be understood that sometimes the encoding intended by the author may not necessarily result into the meaning understood by the decoder (Tomaselli, 1996:35). This is because the receivers of the communicated message's social, cultural and psychological orientation influence the way they decode an intended message (Fiske, 1990).

It is implied therefore, that when HIV/AIDS information campaigns are disseminated through billboards such as those of loveLife intended for youth aged 12 – 17 years old, it is possible that they will produce different meanings than those intended by LoveLife

(the encoder) because of the social and psychological difference that may exist between the encoder and the decoder.

The produced text itself is a battleground where meaning is constantly contested between message producers and the decoders of the text as well as between the groups and individual readers (Tomaselli, 1994). In semiotics emphasis is mostly placed on the text where the receiver or reader of the message is an active participant who is greatly involved in the production of meaning. The reader attains meaning from the text by incorporating to it his or her own experience, attitudes and emotions. "The reader helps to create the meaning of the text by bringing to it his experience, attitudes and emotions" (Fiske 1990:40).

For Charles Sanders Peirce the relationship is triangular. Each is closely related to the other two and can only be understood in terms of the others. To him "the sign stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Fiske, 1990:41). When a sign is received by the addressee, it either creates the same sign or a more developed sign, which is referred to as the interpretant of that sign. The sign could be standing in the place of its object.

Therefore, in the case of loveLife, when a message is encoded on billboards, it is meant for particular individuals and in that process creates an interpretant. The interpretant of the word AIDS or condom on billboards would be the result of an experience of how the decoder has experienced that word and what mental concept exists in relation to that specific word.

However, Ferdinand de Saussure placed more attention on the sign. For him, the sign is a physical object with a meaning and it consists of the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the image of the sign as we perceive it and the signified is the mental concept to which it refers to. The relationship between the two depends on what society agrees

upon. For de Saussure, there is no natural connection between the two. He further states that signs only have meaning in relation to other signs; this is also the case for both signifiers and signifieds. For example, signifiers are defined by their differences: 'cat' is not a 'rat' or 'bat'. Signifieds are defined by their conceptual differences from other signifieds: 'a tree' is different from 'shrub' the two only differ in size (Culler, 1976). These signs, according to de Saussure are defined by what they are not, and all signifiers are therefore marked by traces of other signifiers and signifieds from which they have a relation of difference (Culler, 1976).

What semiotics does is that it sees communication as a process that generates meaning. The encoder and the decoder play an active role in this process. Meaning is a result of dynamic interaction between the sign, interpretant and object; it is historically located and changes constantly with time (Fiske, 1990). Semiotics helps us understand how and why misunderstandings may take place between producers of loveLife and the targeted audience which are South African youth aged 12 – 17. It also forms as a basis upon which the messages produced by loveLife can be evaluated upon.

3.2.2 Qualitative research design

The research uses qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is a non-numerical method used by social scientists, designed to document adequately the richness and diversity of meanings people assign to phenomena. "This method allows us to document the ways in which meanings are constructed, negotiated within particular social contexts and become regarded as taken for granted" (Holdaway, 2000:166).

"Qualitative research allows us to suspend belief in the givenness of phenomena, to perceive the frailty of the social world and to appreciate the ways in which that frailty is created into what is taken for granted and has integrity for the people we are studying" (Holdaway, 2000:166). Qualitative research is concerned mostly with the quality rather

than the quantity of data. This study adopted focus group discussions as a method upon which data was collected. This is further discussed under data collection methods.

3.2.3 Data collection methods

The researcher selected focus group discussions (FGDs) as an appropriate method to collect data for this study. Focus group discussion is a platform that allows for natural conversations to take place. It also allows the participants to speak naturally and express their opinions about a given phenomena without intimidation. Focus groups are defined as group discussions organized with the aim to explore a specific set of issues such as people's views and experiences of a certain social problem. It is called a focused group because it involves some kind of collective activity such as viewing a film, or examining a health education message in the case of this study, examining loveLife billboards (Oates, 2000:186).

Focus groups provide qualitative data by identifying a range of opinions which is not normally found in structured interviews. They also create an atmosphere for natural discussions to take place, and participants' ideas and thoughts are influenced by others as they would in a real-life setting (Krueger, 1998). The distinction between broader category of group interview and focus groups is that the latter makes explicit use of group interaction to generate data (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999:4).

Although focus groups sometimes can be used to produce quantitative data when they are systematically coded, they are almost always used to collect qualitative data. This is one of the strengths of focus groups – their ability to produce rich data in the participants' own words (Oates, 2000:187). Focus groups enable the researcher to obtain data from a large number of participants in a short time span during data collection. Additionally, it enables the researcher to observe interaction between group members including body language and facial expressions (Bernard, 2000:175).

Two focus group discussions, each comprising of 8 – 12 participants were conducted with youth from high schools in KwaZulu Natal. One was from an urban high school in Tongaat and one from a rural high school located in the KwaZulu Natal Midlands of Maphephetheni. The students are between the ages 14 – 17 years old and in grades 8 – 12. A summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in the table below. The intention of the researcher was to conduct three focus groups to include a representation of the semi-urban dwellers. However only two FGDs were conducted, due to some limitations as indicated under limitations of the study.

Area	Province	Place	Age range	Grades	Females	Males
Rural Area	KwaZulu Natal	Maphephetheni	15 – 18 years	8 - 12	3	9
Urban Area	KwaZulu Natal	Tongaat	14 – 17 years	10 - 12	4	5

Table. 1 Demographics of respondents

3.2.4 Sampling

A sample is when a selection is done of some of the elements with the intention of finding out something about the population from which they are taken. In this case it is hoped that what the findings reveal about the sample can be assumed to be representative of the population as a whole (Hart, 2005:338; Judd et.al, 1991:131).

The sample for this survey was based on ‘purposive sampling’. According to this sampling method, subjects are purposefully selected because they possess some characteristics which are necessary for the researcher to achieve his/her research objectives (Patton, 1990). In purposive sampling the researcher chooses the sample

subjectively as he/she looks for a sample that appears to be representative of the population. This normally includes a range from one extreme to the other (Galloway, 1997).

Participants for the research were selected by the counsellor and principal of the school and the researcher had no influence as to who would participate in the discussions. Participants were between the ages of 14 – 17 years old as these fall within the range of the target audience of loveLife. Consent was requested from the school principal and the participating students [see appendix for informed consent forms].

3.3 Permission to conduct the study

For the rural school, permission to conduct the study was granted by the school principal and for the urban school, permission was requested from the principal but the researcher was referred to the student counsellor who deals with research issues who in turn granted the researcher permission to go ahead with the research.

Before the collection of data, participating students and the principal were asked to complete and sign consent forms which they did willingly without the expectation of any reward. Both schools were willing and very excited to have been part of the study and were inviting similar initiatives for the schools.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Analysis is undertaken to identify patterns and meanings. The focus group discussions were audio taped with additional notes taken. The recorded data was transcribed and the analysis process commenced.

This study had two levels of analysis. As previously mentioned, the first approach used semiotics as a method according to which the messages developed by the encoders was evaluated in terms of the interpretations and meanings of the target audience to the messages (Tomaselli, 1996; Parker, 1994; Delate, 2001). In the second level of analysis, one moment of the ‘circuit of culture’ model as developed by Stuart Hall namely; representation was adopted. Representation was used to explain the discrepancies and contradictions between the semiotic evaluation of the messages as depicted by the loveLife billboards and the results from the focus group discussions.

3.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter dealt with the research methodology that informed the research. The chapter discussed semiotics as a basis upon which loveLife’s intended message was evaluated. The study adopted a qualitative research method and data was collected in the field by the use of focus group discussions. Two groups from urban and rural schools in KwaZulu Natal participated in the discussion. Discussions comprised of about 8 – 12 participants each. The study had a few limitations, one of which was the unavailability of the third participating school, due to learners who were busy writing exams. All discussions were audio taped, transcribed and analyzed. Results of the study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four presents the results obtained during the focus group discussions. The results are presented under headings which were designed to guide the focus group discussions which are in line with the research objectives. These headings were designed to facilitate our understanding of the meaning that the target audiences derive from loveLife billboards; whether the negotiated meaning is in line with loveLife's intended messages; and finally, whether the target audiences consider themselves as the target audience for these billboards. These findings were compared to earlier studies by Richard Delate, Danie Jordaan and comments from CADRE et. al. and others who have contributed to the loveLife debate to compare the extent to which the current findings confirm or reject the earlier critiques of loveLife billboards.

4.2 Knowledge and awareness of the loveLife brand

Before commencing with the discussion, participants were asked about their awareness and knowledge of billboards in order to establish whether they had previously seen the billboards prior to the research, and whether the participants had any background knowledge about the loveLife campaign in its entirety. Most participants from the rural school and urban school have seen loveLife billboards because they recognized that the billboards were part of the loveLife campaign.

The facilitator further engaged the participants in a conversation to try and establish the participants' awareness and understanding of the loveLife brand and campaign orientation without showing them the billboards. The following questions were asked to establish the participants' understanding of the whole loveLife phenomena:

- What is loveLife all about?
- Have you seen any communication material about loveLife?

- What messages do these materials convey to you?
- What does ‘thethajunction’ mean?
- What does loveLife mean by ‘talk about it’?

The facilitator felt it was important to establish participants’ knowledge and awareness of the brand and the campaign as it would set the tone for the discussion in order to achieve the desired objectives of the research. All urban respondents knew or had a fair idea of what the loveLife campaign is all about. The brand had established itself among this focus group; however, only a few amongst the rural focus group knew what the loveLife campaign entails:

Verbatim responses:

loveLife is a campaign that educates young people on how to have safe sexual relations, it teaches them about the risks of having unprotected sex and encourages them to use a condom – Female urban participant.

Isn’t loveLife about HIV/AIDS? It teaches people about issues like teenage pregnancies and condoms. – Male urban participant.

I can say that loveLife is a campaign that deals with teenage behaviour, it tells us how to behave, you know there is HIV/AIDS, it is here to make us aware of all these diseases – Male rural participant.

It is about life, and how you carry your life. We see the billboard that tells us to have safe sex, how to protect yourself against HIV/AIDS, and you have to have one partner, and use a condom – Female rural participant.

I think loveLife is all about our lives as teenagers, how we behave ourselves as teenagers, it tells us about problems such as abuse, HIV/AIDS and the things which touch us as teenagers – Female rural participant.

From the above responses it can be established that participants from both groups are aware and fairly knowledgeable what the loveLife campaign is all about. When asked whether they had seen any communication material about loveLife, again most urban participants mentioned that they had been exposed to one or more media with the loveLife campaign; however, this was not the case for the rural participants, only a few had been exposed to loveLife communication materials through pamphlets, school drama or loveLife people educating the public at clinics or conducting home visits:

Verbatim responses:

Yes, I see them all the time, the advertisements on SABC TV, and there are a lot of billboards posted around – Male urban participant.

Oh yes, they are all over the place, not really in the areas where we stay, but on the way to the airport you see these billboards – Female urban participant.

I have seen the poster in the newspaper – Male urban participant.

Yes I have heard a speech at our local clinic, they advised patients about HIV/AIDS, and they go into the community – Female rural participant.

I have seen them in my school doing some stories; drama and they also give us pamphlets – Female rural participant.

When prompted on what messages the materials convey to them, the level of division between the urban participants as opposed to their rural counterparts was notable. Most of the urban participants stated that loveLife materials do not tell them anything new about what they know about HIV/AIDS or sex education, if the materials are trying to say something, it is not explicitly written on the billboards. The rural participants claimed to identify with the billboards because according to the majority, the loveLife materials serve as information tools about self protection and condom use during sexual

intercourse. They also showed a sense of unhappiness about the campaign – there are indications that the campaign is not clear enough as it does state explicitly what is meant.

Verbatim responses:

I get the message that we youth, especially teenagers, should communicate with adults to get more knowledge about how to handle the problems of sex and being HIV positive, if you are pregnant the parents can advise you what you can do if you want to have sex -- Female rural participant.

The message I got, they say that the teenager should not be pushed by any person if you want to say no, and live positively if you are positive – Female rural participant.

The message is not clear, they could spell it out, like use a condom when you are having sex, or if you are having unprotected sex, you run a risk of getting HIV/AIDS, they just simply don't say it – Male urban participant.

The messages fail to deal with the root of the problem, they do not address HIV/AIDS as such, they try to be creative and in return they hide the message and leave us to do the guesswork – Female urban participant.

We want straightforwardness, real people, real situations, for example my mom works at the clinic and when I go there, I see real people dealing with the disease, immediately it hits home – Female urban participant.

Further interpretation of the loveLife brand showed disparities amongst the rural – urban divides. Participants were asked about whether they were aware of the word ‘thethajunction’ at the bottom left of the billboards and what this word meant. From the urban focus group only three people knew or attempted to guess what ‘thethajunction’ means. Most participants failed to note that ‘thethajunction’ is the name of the loveLife helpline and that a toll free number is displayed next to the word. A significant number of

participants from the rural group were keen to deconstruct and brainstorm on what they thought the meaning of 'thethajunction' was.

Verbatim responses:

'Thetha' means talk in Xhosa, I guess they mean "talk junction", whatever they mean by that – Female urban participant.

Maybe for us being here and talking about loveLife, this is what they probably mean by 'thethajunction', talk! – Female urban participant.

We have no idea what that is all about – majority of urban participants, mainly whites.

I think it means, talk about sex, I think it is about a parent must love their children enough to talk about sex, I think it means to speak, "theta" is Xhosa word that means speak – Male rural participants

Feel free about it; if you have started doing it feel free to talk to people that you have started doing sex so that they can advice you – Female rural participant

It also tells the adult people to talk to us young ones about sex, if they do not talk, we will not know the importance of sex – Female rural participant

I can say that as our leader in our country is from Xhosa, when they say they cannot say 'kulumajunction' because our leader is a Xhosa, so 'thetajunction', they want to make us to avoid feeling guilty because once you have sex without a condom you end up feeling guilty cause maybe you are infected, so 'thethajunction' is all about that – Male rural participant.

Also, in a relationship you have to tell your partner to be faithful, you talk to each other to overcome problems so that is a 'thethajunction' as well – Male rural participant.

According to loveLife, 'thethajunction' which is the name given to the helpline operated by loveLife, is a combination of a Nguni word for 'talk' and junction is an English word for 'coming together', this word is intended to "reinforce the notion of talk about it"(loveLife, 2001:18). From the verbatim responses above, it is clear that the majority of the respondents' understanding of 'thethajunction' was very far fetched from what loveLife actually meant.

In the final probe to establish the participants' knowledge and awareness about the loveLife brand, participants were asked to discuss what their understanding was of 'talk about it' on the loveLife billboards. Some participants from the rural focus group expressed signs of confusion as others tried to explain. Most of the participants were keen to interpret the meaning between the words.

Verbatim responses:

This is exactly what loveLife wanted to achieve; they wanted to get you – us to talk about it – loveLife – Female urban participant.

But it is not clear what they want us to talk about, is it the campaign? Safe sex? We don't know – Female urban participant.

That is very creative of loveLife, they wanted to use something that will be stuck on your mind like 'talk about it', and you see how well you remember it? Now you will initiate conversations with your friends and eventually talk about loveLife – Female urban participant.

It means talk about sex, not only about sex, you can talk about your life, your partner and sex – Female rural participant.

Talk about your problems, because other people are committing suicide because of their problems, but if they talk about them, somebody can give them advice – Male rural participant.

Talk about the problems of HIV and these people who do not know how to live if they have HIV, if they talk about it they won't try to commit suicide – Female rural participant.

According to loveLife, 'talk about it' was conceived because international research showed that young people who were open and had frank discussions around issues of sex had delayed onset of sexual activity. 'Talk about it' is thus aimed to encourage talk about healthy, positive approaches to sexual health, to talk or express oneself more freely about sex, to talk about alternatives to sexual intercourse and sexual pleasure; to talk more about issues of coercion and recognition of sexual rights and exercise those rights; and generally talk about positive living (loveLife, 2001).

From the verbatim responses, it can be established that most participants have a fair understanding of what 'talk about it' means. In their own understanding, they all alluded to "open discussion about sex". In summation, both groups under study are aware of what the loveLife campaign is all about, but only the urban respondents have had maximum exposure to loveLife communication materials. Although the brand was recognized and associated to loveLife by most of the participants, especially those from the urban school, there was little evidence to suggest that they understood the brand. Participants from both rural and urban schools are aware of the composition of the campaign. Only the rural participants claimed to identify with loveLife billboards while the urban participants claim that loveLife materials do not tell them anything new about what they already know about HIV/AIDS or sex education. The study also revealed that most participants failed to recognize that 'thethajunction' at the bottom left of the billboards is loveLife's helpline, nor did they know what the word means. The term 'Talk about it', was termed to confuse the readers, because it leaves too much room for

negotiation of meaning. Similarly, Richard Delate, in his 2001 study, found that there was clearly a limited understanding of the brand, and this inhibited interpretations of loveLife billboards. However, he also found that ‘thethajunction’ was confusing to the participants who were unable to create its meaning due to language limitations, therefore failing to connect it to ‘talk about it’ (Delate, 2001:23). Supporting this view, in his 2003 study, Danie Jordaan concluded that loveLife’s 2003 poster campaign was bound to be ineffective because it concentrated on branding as the instrument that would change behaviour and failed to address the diversity in culture, religion, belief systems and socio-economic characteristics of South Africa (Jordaan, 2006:111).

4.3 Knowledge and interpretation of the loveLife billboards

In an attempt to understand the participant’s knowledge and interpretation about loveLife billboards, participants were asked the following questions:

- Have you seen any loveLife billboards in your area?
- Describe the billboards you have seen.
- What impression did you get about the billboard?
- What message did you get from the billboard?

It was significant to note that among the urban participants all of them indicated that there are no billboards in the areas where they live. They said that their exposure to loveLife billboards happens when they drive through areas such as taxi ranks in Pinetown, and on the way to the airport. They also said that one would not find these billboards in town they are mostly in the rural areas:

Verbatim responses:

I have seen loveLife billboards here in KwaZulu Natal, but not in urban areas. These billboards are not placed in town, for example I am originally from Sandton in Johannesburg, you will not find these billboards there, it is as if they

are telling the rich people, this is not for you, you guys are okay, this is for the poor people – Female urban participant.

I tend to agree with her, as much as I have seen these billboards, I am yet to see a billboards in the posh suburbs, I only see these in Pinetown, or at some taxi ranks, areas frequented by black, rural people – Female urban participant.

It was however, interesting to learn that as much as the urban participants felt that these billboards were distributed and displayed mostly in rural areas, rural participants felt that they were not displayed in their areas because they only see them on their way to town. Amongst the rural participants, only one respondent saw a billboard in their area and that was placed next to her school.

Participants were asked to describe the billboards that they had seen and also tell the focus group what their impression of the billboards was, as well as the message that they learned from them. Some urban participants found the billboards repulsive because of their portrayal of black people in most of the billboards, which they read to imply that young people are promiscuous and they are doing 'it' anyway. The rural participants described the billboards with unease, as they were often embarrassed and bent their heads as they talked about the billboards. Rural participants were also able to create scenes from the billboards, but when they were asked what message they derived from these billboards, it was clear that their deductions were very far from the rationale that loveLife has assigned to each billboard.

Interesting enough was the different perspectives taken by the two groups. The urban participants tended to look beyond the billboards, really questioning the use of personalities, their portrayal and other minor details. The rural participants only saw what was given by the billboards and did not question loveLife's motives in the choice of models used.

Verbatim responses:

The ones I have seen have naked people on them, with a condom. Most of these billboards have black people on them; it is as if the black people are the only ones who are plagued by HIV/AIDS. And it is as if we the young people are promiscuous and we do it anyway – Female urban participant.

I have seen the one with a black man and a lot of hands all over him, I also wondered why they used the black man, I got the idea that they are implying that the black man is the one spreading the virus – Female urban participant.

The one I saw had two people sleeping on the bed, I think they were having sex, there was also a condom - I got the impression that these people are trying to teach us about the importance of sex – Female rural participant.

The one I saw had a boyfriend forcing his girlfriend to have sex and the message I got out of it was that you have a right to say no to sex – Female rural participant.

I didn't feel right when I saw the billboard, because all the people they see this billboard and they think that we the young people, we are doing the sex and that we are not telling them the truth – Female rural participant.

When asked about what message they understood from the billboards, most participants preferred to start by saying “I think” loveLife means that. When asked why they started their responses in that manner, they said that loveLife was not explicit as to what they meant, so it was up to the readers to negotiate the meaning, and they were not really sure whether what they derived from the billboards was what loveLife meant:

Verbatim responses:

I think they are telling us that when you have sex, use a condom and stick to one partner, don't sleep around – Female rural participant.

I think the message they are trying to portray is that the black man has a lot of girlfriends and he is spreading the virus - I don't see how that tells young people how to protect themselves, I mean for me I understand that they want young people to stop having multiple partners, but for someone who is un-educated or in the rural areas, the meaning is not clear, they need to spell it out – Female urban participant.

Probes into the participants' knowledge and interpretation of the loveLife billboards revealed that none of the urban participants have seen billboards in the areas where they lived. They were mainly exposed to loveLife billboards when they drove through areas such as taxi ranks in Pinetown or when they drove to the airport. Most of the rural participants also indicated that there were no billboards in the areas where they lived, as they were only exposed to loveLife billboards when they drove to town. Participants were asked to describe the billboards they had seen and share with the rest of the participants what their impressions of the billboards were, as well as the message that they learned from them. Some of the urban participants found the billboards repulsive because they portrayed black people in most of the billboards, which they read to imply that these young black people are promiscuous. Whilst rural participants were not comfortable to describe the billboards, their interpretations of the messages derived from the billboards were very far from the rationale that loveLife has assigned to each billboard. Similarly, Thembisile Makgalamele wrote an article in April 2003, with various commentary from different people who shared their comments on one of the loveLife billboards. The billboard entitled '*everyone he's slept with is sleeping with you*', depicts a bare body, looks like bare body of a black man, with female hands of different shades all over him. Most of these people shared sentiments as those of the urban participants that the billboard was "perpetuating stereotypes that black people are promiscuous" (Makgalamele, 2003:1).

4.4 Meanings derived out of selected loveLife billboards by the target youth

One of the most important objectives of the study was to investigate the meanings that the target audiences negotiate from the loveLife billboards. To achieve this, participants were showed selected loveLife billboards from the 2006 campaign called 'HIV: face it'. Participants were then asked the following questions in order to analyze their reception of the billboards and asses what meaning they derive from them:

- Have you seen these billboards prior to today?
- Describe what you saw on each billboard and tell me what loveLife is trying to convey to you as the audience?
- What is your understanding of 'HIV loves skin on skin?' 'HIV: Face it?' and 'HIV loves sleeping around?'
- What do the graphics mean to you?
- What are your impressions about the colours used in the billboards?
- What do you think about the information that is communicated through these billboards?

Both participants from the rural and urban focus groups were not widely exposed to the 'HIV: face it' campaign prior to the discussion. From the urban group only one had been exposed to one of the billboards and four of the rural group saw the billboards in Umlanga and Pinetown. The facilitator picked out copies of the billboards one by one and geared the conversation into interpreting the billboards by probing the group's description of the billboards, their understanding of the slogans, the graphics and the colour use. The following is what emerged from each billboard.

Billboard 1: HIV Face it.



Figure. 8: HIV Face it billboard

Source: loveLife, 2006

Verbatim responses:

That is straight forward, it means do not turn away from HIV/AIDS - you've got to face it – Male urban participant.

It means HIV/AIDS is a reality that we should all face and stop shying away from it – Female participant.

I think 'HIV face it' is telling us that if you go to the clinic and take an HIV test and your results are positive don't make it a secret, you have to tell other people that you are positive- Female rural participant.

I can say 'HIV face it', is there to give us the weapon of facing HIV/AIDS – Male rural participant.

I think 'HIV face it' is trying to tell us that do not have wrong ideas of HIV, and they do not support people who are positive because they think they can get HIV – Male rural participant.

For the 'HIV Face it' billboard, most participants said that loveLife implied facing the epidemic and accepting the reality of its consequences and learning to live with it. Responses ranged from acceptance by society or self acceptance upon discovery that one was HIV positive or counseling and supporting those that are positive.

The message as intended by loveLife:

Some of the reading of the billboard by the participants touches a little bit on the message as intended by loveLife but very vaguely. A semiotic analysis of the billboard as provided by loveLife states that the rationale for the 'HIV face it' billboard is that many South Africans fail to confront the reality of HIV and invest in understanding how they may personally be at risk of contracting the disease. They further state that it is individuals and society's disregard for the reality and impact of HIV/AIDS that needs to be challenged and confronted. However, reading into the responses of most of the participants, it is evident that the text being produced by some of the respondents, especially from rural participants, is not quite close to loveLife's original text. These revelations are however confirming findings by Jordaan, who in his reception analysis on the '*love to be there 2010*' poster campaign found that although a notable number of participants were able to identify elements of the poster, they could not integrate the verbal, iconic, indexical and symbolic signs in order to create meaning that corresponds with the intended rationale (Jordaan, 2006:119). Criticism by Luc Pauwels also confirm these findings as Pauwels predicted that the youth would struggle to create meaning or understand "what exactly ought to be talked about". Pauwels further reiterated that the billboard he saw entitled '*Love yourself enough?*' is a true testimony of the cultural gap between campaign designers and the target audience (Pauwels, 2005:349).

Billboard 2: HIV loves skin on skin



Figure. 9: HIV loves skin on skin

Source: loveLife, 2006

Verbatim responses:

I think it tells us that 'HIV loves skin on skin' because if you don't use a condom in that way you will get it – Male rural participant.

It also tells us that, if you talk to many people they say that "I won't eat banana without a cover", so that means that I won't sleep with you with a condom, so loveLife is telling us that if you do sex without a condom, you will get HIV – Female rural participant.

I think we've forgotten that HIV is not transmitted by sex only, so maybe, loveLife should indicate that. When loveLife says 'HIV loves skin on skin' they leave out other ways of getting HIV and they concentrate on sex only - Male participant.

I think loveLife concentrates on sex because sex is the popular risk of getting HIV/AIDS – Female rural participant.

'HIV loves skin on skin' is not clear, it may lead to misinterpretation by people who do not have the background on HIV/AIDS, people will start thinking that they

can get HIV through touching or any physical contact – Female urban participant.

They should just be direct and say use a condom! – Male urban participant

The message as intended by loveLife:

loveLife states that this billboard was created with the rationale to ensure high levels of consistent condom use for every sexual encounter, this billboard was viewed as to empower both males and females to insist that their partners use a condom even those in long term relationship.

For most rural participants the meaning or deconstruction of skin on skin was quite close to the rationale of loveLife. Participants knew that the billboard cautions against unprotected sex or engaging into sexual intercourse without a condom. One of the participants referred to popular youth saying “one does not eat sweets with a wrapper” or “I won’t eat a banana with a cover”. What was interesting to note as well was one participant’s observation that when loveLife uses the term ‘HIV loves skin on skin’, they disregard the fact that HIV is not only spread through sexual intercourse, but through other activities as well which loveLife fails to address. However, for the urban participants a debate sparked on loveLife’s usage of skin on skin. Saying that for the younger people or those with little or no knowledge of means and ways of HIV transmission, skin on skin could mean that one may get HIV through touch or any form of physical contact. This school of thought is shared by CADRE et. al., who in their letter to loveLife raised a concern that the term ‘skin on skin’ is a slang term that is often used to describe the concept of unprotected sex in urban townships. They raised concern that this billboard could be problematic, as it is a slogan that is not comprehended by all people especially in a country that is as diverse as South Africa and may result in wrong interpretations that HIV is transmitted by touch. Although Jordaan’s study was based on the ‘love to be there 2010’ campaign, he found that loveLife campaigns have to differentiate in terms of addressing specific cultural groupings and using appropriate

language and visual media that reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of messages (Jordaan, 2006:121).

Billboard 3: HIV loves sleeping around



Figure. 10: HIV loves sleeping around

Source: loveLife, 2006

Verbatim responses:

'HIV loves sleeping around' means that HIV spreads from sleeping around – promiscuity – Female urban participant.

loveLife is trying to warn the youth against this behaviour – Male urban participant.

It loves people who sleep anywhere with anybody, so it teaches us not to sleep with anybody anywhere, because if you sleep with anyone anywhere without a condom it might get complicated – Female rural participant.

'HIV loves sleeping around'...I think those people who use to drink alcohol, sleeping around is about that, even prostitution – Male rural participant.

I think the message is not clear, sleeping around, is not clear, you can't just sleep with anybody and get HIV, the message can be misleading, like people in the rural areas, a boy can sleep in one bed with another man, now they will think that they can get HIV from that – Female rural participant.

The message as intended by loveLife:

A semiotic analysis of the text as intended by loveLife says that the billboard was designed with the aim to warn young people that they may not be aware of their partner's sexual behaviour which may in turn increase their risk of contracting HIV. It is self evident that although respondents grasped the message in their own interpretations, a few participants found the billboard to be offensive as it presupposes that young people are promiscuous.

Almost all participants felt that by saying 'HIV loves sleeping around', loveLife was telling the readers that HIV is spread through promiscuous behaviour such as sleeping around and the billboard was warning the youth against such behaviour. However, a rural participant felt that this billboard is misleading because of the use of "sleeping around". She says that in the rural areas often people share a bed and if they see the message 'HIV loves sleeping around' they might feel that they will contract the virus by sharing a bed with them. These sentiments by the respondents are also shared by CADRE et. al., who say that the slogan 'HIV loves sleeping around' suggests that those who have HIV have been sleeping around as it fails to address other means of transmission, this they termed as a contribution to stigmatization of people with HIV. This they say undermines efforts invested over the years to reduce stigmatization towards people living with the epidemic (loveLife, 2006:4).

In summary, from the verbatim responses listed, one can tell that there are a few elements at play as readers construct meaning from the billboards. These are the text and the pictures (graphics). Some tender their interpretations based on what they see and others based on the reading. Semiotics is the construction of meaning through language, pictures or other forms of expression. Through the respondent's responses we can see how

meaning is being constructed in relation to loveLife's intended text. All billboards under study were termed by the respondents to have a certain percentage of error in interpretation. It is evident that respondents derive different meanings from the same billboard. The 'HIV face it' billboard leaves enough room for wrong meaning appropriation, it is not clear what is to be faced, whether it is the virus, or the reality of the epidemic or whether the billboard implies that society must accept those who are infected. The 'HIV loves skin on skin' billboard was easier to interpret, especially for the rural participants. Most rural participants knew that the billboard cautions against unprotected sex and these interpretations are in line with the rationale assigned to the billboard by loveLife. The urban participants criticized the billboards saying that 'skin on skin' could imply that one may get infected by the virus through touch and other forms of physical contact. The third billboard was also a lot easier to interpret by the majority of the respondents, however, one of the respondents indicated that the billboard could also mislead readers, as "sleeping around" could be interpreted to imply sharing a bed with an HIV infected person.

Colour usage in the billboards

Historically, some loveLife billboards portray black and white people as models who act out the storyline displayed on the billboards. This portrayal of race by loveLife has been viewed by some critics as perpetuating black people as being responsible for the spread of the disease [see pgs. 33 – 34]. For the billboards under study, loveLife billboards carry very bright and attention grabbing colours such as purple, blue, yellow, lime green and red. These are the colours they use for the background and also for the people and other graphics. Since it is unusual to see blue people for instance, and taking into account, earlier comments and concerns about the portrayal of black people in previous billboards, the research also attempted to enquire from the targeted youth what they thought of the colour usage and whether they had any impact in their understanding of the messages on the billboard. The participants were asked what their impressions are about the colours used in the billboards and the following is what emerged from both focus groups.

Verbatim responses:

From the different colours they use for people, I think what loveLife is trying to say is that AIDS does not discriminate – Female urban participant.

Red symbolizes blood, now if you see red footsteps; it is so scary – Female urban participant.

The colour distracts attention from meaning, the billboards do not come out clearly, they don't really complement the wording, the meaning only comes out when you see the word HIV face it – Female urban participant.

I think that loveLife is refraining to use black or white people because if you remember your earlier comments about using a black man, I think now the colours are there to represent the rainbow nation, because if you look at the colours, you will see all the colours on the South African flag – Male urban participant.

The colour distracts attention from meaning, they are too bright, normally colours are meant to attract attention but bright colours do not have that impact that we want to have of HIV, if colours were darker, they would add more gravity to the issues of HIV and immediately it would hit home – Female urban participant.

If I look at the one that says that HIV loves sleeping around, you see the feet are red; red always represents blood, so it is trying to tell us that HIV is a danger – Female rural participant.

On HIV loves skin on skin, yellow means beware – Male participant

It is not clear why loveLife uses bright and unusual colours for the different billboards. As we can deduct from the participant's responses, these colours were assigned different

meanings by different readers. If the bright colours were meant to grab attention, respondents felt that the colours distract attention from meaning. If the various colours represent the rainbow nation, then some readers get the message. What is evident from all of these is that readers are often confused and left wondering as to what loveLife means; meaning is never solid. However, CADRE et. al., commented on the colour use on the 'HIV loves skin on skin' billboard, saying that it does not contribute to the understanding of the slogan nor does it clarify meaning, nor does it persuade readers to use condoms consistently (loveLife, 2006:2). According to CADRE et. al., in one of the billboards 'HIV loves pelegi gosupa bosadi' which was later withdrawn by loveLife after it attracted its fair share of controversy, the bright green graphic does not aid readers with interpretation. On some billboards only the top half of the graphic is shown which led to some readers concluding that the graphic depicted two lemons (loveLife, 2006:3).

Graphics usage and information dissemination on the billboards

The participants were probed further on their reception of the graphics used on the billboards, such as the drawing of the two shadows that looked like a man and a woman making love, one had a shape that looked like a bare body of a woman, and the third one had different footsteps as opposed to previous campaigns where real people were used. Rural participants were more at liberty to assign meaning and action to the different graphics whilst the discussion amongst the urban participants concluded that loveLife's usage of graphics was very poor and lacked hard-hitting pictures and messages. Urban participants also felt that the overall information disseminated through the billboards is very minimal and lacks very important details that could facilitate their understanding. The following is what emerged from both focus group discussions.

Verbatim responses:

The construction of the billboard is very poor; it should be more hard-hitting and use real people because HIV/AIDS is real – Urban male participant.

These billboards leave too much room for assumptions because they do not tell us like it is; they should use facts and put them up onto these billboards – Urban male participant.

I think that the billboards should have real people and be more detailed, they could for example use statistics to complement the words and again I agree it must be hard – hitting cause it immediately hits home- Urban female participant.

Female rural participant: The one with the 'skin on skin' I think it is a naked female.

Male rural participant a: How do you know it is a woman's body?

Male rural participant b: It is a man's buttocks.

I think the 'skin on skin' it's a caution, because the woman is naked, it means that if you are having sex naked without a condom you will have HIV – Male rural participant.

'HIV face it', the people are blue because I think they used the colour of the condom – Male rural participant.

I think they use all these colours, because it is a warning to all, not only to blacks and not only to whites, it is for the whole of South Africa – Female rural participant.

Without the words, I cannot understand the picture, but the words 'HIV face it', they help us understand the picture – Male rural participant.

In summary, most respondents are not comfortable with the graphics used on the billboards. They prefer graphics that depict real people and clear cut scenarios, where readers do not have to negotiate meaning. Because the graphics do not tell a clear message, some respondents feel that the message formulation for the

billboard is very poor. For some, the use of different colours depicted impartiality by loveLife, therefore dealing with earlier concerns that one race is portrayed as the carrier of the virus. Respondents also indicated that the use of different colours extended the target audience to include all South Africans regardless of their race. The research also revealed that some respondents prefer the use of real models as opposed to animated ones; because when they see real people it is more hard-hitting, depicting the severity of HIV/AIDS. In his study on the 'his & hers' billboards, Delate also encountered similar findings, where the graphics, symbols and words were open for a variety of interpretation, which most readers constructed based on their culture and historical experiences. He said that the relationship between 'his' and 'hers' was in certain instances interpreted as representing male and female organs and in some cases as indicative of sex by depicting two naked people for "toilet people" (Delate, 2001:18). The relationship with the words 'his' and 'hers' was not apparent to the participants. Similarly, Jordaan had the same experience with his study on the 'love to be there 2010' posters. He said that although a significant number of respondents were able to identify certain elements on the poster such as a graduate, a pilot, a pregnant woman, they failed to "integrate the verbal, iconic, indexical and symbolic signs" in order to create meaning or an interpretation as intended by the creative people. This, he said, rendered key aspects of loveLife's rationale for the artistic execution of the poster meaningless (Jordaan, 2006:119).

4.5 Have the billboards succeeded in communicating the message as initially intended by loveLife?

loveLife critics have on various occasions pointed out that because loveLife does not explicitly say what they want to say, their messages may lead to misunderstanding and confusion among the youth or those in the target group that do not have the background of HIV/AIDS. In order to assess whether the billboards have succeeded in getting the message across as it was initially encoded by loveLife, the following questions were asked to the participants:

- What effect do the messages on the billboards have on you?
- What does the message on the billboards tell you about HIV/AIDS?
- Is the message easy and straightforward to understand?
- What action do the billboards prompt from you?

Notable was the fact that many urban participants felt that although meaning is not explicit and that messages were poorly conceived, they were keen to negotiate what messages loveLife is trying to bring across. For the rural participants, on the contrary they indicated that the messages were easy to understand and that the moment they saw the billboards with these messages, they knew that they are talking about HIV/AIDS because that is what loveLife is all about. It was difficult though to tell whether the respondents' interpretation of the billboards was based on what they saw and read on each billboard or whether they were based on preconceived background about the loveLife campaign but their interpretations were often vague and a far outcry from what the billboards rationale stated:

Verbatim responses:

For us, these billboards do not make any difference to what we already know about HIV/AIDS, they don't give any new information from what is already known – Female urban participant.

The pictures should be clear and direct and as we have already discussed the message should also be clear – Female urban participant.

Messages are poorly stated and are not straightforward. For us who are literate, or educated for that matter, we might negotiate meaning, but for people in the rural areas, it will be difficult for them to understand what loveLife is trying to tell them – Female urban participant.

The message I get is that even though I get HIV, I can still live, HIV does not mean that my life is over – Male rural participant.

The message is straightforward, loveLife wanted to make us think about the words and if you think about the words you will think about it more and more and sometimes you end up researching and you ask your friends and you talk about HIV/AIDS – Female rural participant.

The message is not straightforward, if you look at HIV face it and you see the two people making love, someone might say, how can I make love with a person having HIV/AIDS? And someone will say no I can make love with someone who has HIV/AIDS, I will face it – Female rural participant.

The participants were asked further whether the loveLife billboards prompt any action from the readers and all the urban participants almost simultaneously shouted out no. Urban participants feel that the billboards don't tell them anything new about HIV/AIDS or their sexual orientation; neither do they affect their behaviour:

Verbatim responses:

No! The billboards should have real pictures on what really happens when a person is HIV infected; we want to see the real life situation – Male urban participant.

No! These billboards don't teach me anything new about AIDS – Male urban participant.

However, the rural participants expressed the opinion that the billboards were action oriented and that most of their safe sex practices were learned from the loveLife campaigns;

Verbatim responses:

Yes, I take care of myself – Male rural participant

I talk to my friends about sex – Female rural participant

Yes, I use a condom – Female rural participant.

While it is not possible to generalize findings from the small sample used in the present research, the responses to this question seem to indicate that there are significant differences between the perceptions of the rural and urban audiences. Rural audiences have less exposure to materials, generally are most conservative.

In the probe to assess whether the billboards have succeeded in communicating the message as initially intended by loveLife, it is undoubtedly clear that the messages have failed in certain areas. Urban participants expressed their dissatisfaction on the poorly conceived messages displayed on billboards. They feel that that the billboards would not be easily translated by people who are less educated. Rural participants' failure to understand the message on the billboards could be seen from the vague interpretations they made from the billboards. It is however, difficult to assess whether the loveLife billboards prompt any action, as all urban participants indicated that the billboards do not tell them anything new about HIV/AIDS, or their sexual orientation and behaviour.

On the other hand, rural participants were assured that the billboards were action oriented. This was one of the concerns that CADRE et. al. had - that the billboards were not pre-tested which should be one of the basic steps that loveLife should have taken when developing communication messages which is subjective to a variety of audience. On this basis they felt that the possibility of misinterpretation and misunderstanding exists in the loveLife billboards because their messages are not direct (loveLife 2006:1). In his 2003 study Jordaan also concluded that the loveLife 2003 posters were bound to fail and would present insurmountable communication barriers because of the use of a generic campaign that used one language and failed to address the different cosmologies found in South Africa (Jordaan, 2006:111). Similarly, in his 2005 study in rural Transkei, Jordaan concluded that this study supports previous findings "that the loveLife

poster campaign carries “not only contradictory but vague messages” and that “the visual messages also make no clear connection with the services the campaign provides” (Bechan in Jordaan, 2006:121). Unfortunately, Richard Delate had similar findings in his research, where he said that “meanings associated with imagery were consistently discrepant, and led to divergent interpretations of the billboards. It was interesting to note however, that in some instances, there was uniformity in the discrepant decoding e.g. the puzzle piece and condoms” (Delate, 2001:23).

4.6 Do the Urban/Rural youth identify themselves as target audiences for the loveLife billboard messages?

A loud outcry from community members, NGO’s and other institutions and academics and many others who have participated in the loveLife debate centered around the identification of the audience segmentation of loveLife as being the age group between 12 – 17 years old. Many feel that the gap in intellectual and understanding capacity between a 12 year old in comparison to the 17 year olds is very wide (Halperin, 2003;CADRE, 2002). Another issue was that of the urban – rural divide. Some critics felt that the campaign design did not differentiate between the levels of understanding of people in rural areas in comparison to that of those in the urban areas, considering the socio-economic challenges of the rural dwellers (Diko, 2005). These feelings or concerns also came out strongly amongst both rural and urban participants.

In order to get an indication of what the target audience themselves feel, the following questions were asked to the participants:

- Who do you think is loveLife’s target audience?
- Do you consider yourselves as the target audience?
- Do you identify yourselves with the messages being communicated by the billboards?

Verbatim responses:

I think, rural areas, because in rural areas, most houses have no radio and no television so they do not know about HIV but people in the urban areas have electricity and they have radio, and watch television so they know everything about HIV – Male rural participant.

Rural areas, because people firstly are poor, they are not having money to afford paying the rates of electricity and other places there is no electricity, like this one so they do not have television and other families cannot afford to buy the radio, and they can't hear and see a message like this, so they see it on billboard – Male rural participant.

I think that the target audience for loveLife are teenagers but it should not stop at teenagers, they should target different age groups because HIV/AIDS has affected all age groups – Female urban participant.

A child of 12 years old has different challenges in life, psychologically, emotionally and physically, so she cannot understand, but me as I am 17 years old I will understand them because I have many challenges – Female rural participant

I think that loveLife should revisit their target audience sampling. The understanding of a 12 year old is not similar to that of the 17 year olds. Their intellectual capacities are not the same. Seventeen year olds' knowledge about HIV/AIDS is at more advanced stages than that of 12 year olds, I think the audience should be properly sampled – Female urban participant.

I agree with her, my sister is 14 years old and she will not understand some of these messages, and these messages are improper for her, but I am 17 years old and I understand – Female urban participant.

All participants from both focus groups regarded themselves as target audiences. However, the billboards' target audience is between 12 – 17 years and some participants felt that the billboards were too complex for people aged 14 and younger. At this juncture, it would probably benefit to make a comparison with Jordaan's study that involved teachers (adults). One might argue that maybe the reason why they could not create meaning from the billboards they were tested on was probably because it was not intended for that age group, but the chances that the adolescent and young adults would interpret the billboards as intended, if adults could not get it right are also questionable. In an analysis presented by CADRE in 2002, they also raised concern regarding loveLife's choice of 12 -17 year olds as target audience. CADRE noted that 12 – 14 year old young people are very different emotionally, intellectually and sexually to 15 – 17 years old. They have special and different needs in terms of sexuality education and any dialogue around sex requires an informed and framework of support (CADRE, 2002).

The rural participants felt that they were the target audience because the loveLife television and radio advertisement catered for the urban dwellers who were able to afford to pay electricity and therefore own television and radio, hence the appropriate production of billboards for rural dwellers. Urban participants indicated that the billboards are mainly found in the rural areas; nevertheless they felt they were target audience because the messages depicted on the billboards were too complex for the rural youth, especially for the uneducated who would find the billboards difficult to understand.

In conclusion, the urban youth further reiterated their strong inclination towards real life situations. They said that the days when the consequences of HIV/AIDS were not shown to people, were long gone. Real peoples' life stories should be told and the message should come out clearly and strongly; people must use a condoms.

4. 7 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented the findings of the focus group discussions with urban and rural participants. Findings were presented in a comparative manner to highlight the opinions of the one group in comparison to the other. These findings were further subject to a semiotic analysis on what loveLife had intended and the interpretations of the participants. The participants' responses were further analyzed and compared with studies by Richard Delate, Danie Jordaan and CADRE et. al. Research findings indicate that some respondents were aware of the loveLife campaign and what the campaign entails. They also had recognized the loveLife brand although most of them did not know what it stood for, nor could they explain what the term 'thethajunction' meant. Interpretation of the loveLife billboards showed that loveLife's lack of straightforwardness leaves much room for error in the creation of meaning from the billboards and that readers are at times not sure what message the billboards convey.

Some of the targeted audiences, especially the urban participants felt that these billboards do not teach them anything new about the epidemic, nor do they prompt any action, such as using a condom during sexual intercourse. However, some rural participants felt that loveLife has taught them a lot about what they know about the disease, they encourage them to talk to their friends about HIV/AIDS and sex, and that now they use condoms because of loveLife.

The next chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and also make reference to the literature review and further conclude the study findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

To conclude, this chapter presents a discussion of research findings. The findings are backed up by literature review, and are analyzed in comparison or in complement with previous studies. This is achieved by discussing findings in light of the three focus questions and by weighing them against the theoretical framework that guided the research. The discussion then ends with a conclusion by the researcher.

5.2 What meanings does the target audience assign to the three loveLife billboards?

The study found that, despite respondents' general awareness that loveLife brand connotes awareness around sex and HIV/AIDS, many different meanings were attributed to the different loveLife billboards. However, from the circuit of culture, we learn that the creation of meaning is indeed an interactive and dialogic process of translation, through which the receiver of the message is an active participant (Hall, 1980; Hall, 1997; Tomaselli, 1996). In this circuit Stuart Hall further stresses that an audience or interpreter's decoding does not automatically constitute the same meaning as the one initially encoded by the producer (Hall, 1997). Variations in the respondent's interpretation could be attributed to an array of different factors such as; 1) pre-conceived knowledge about HIV/AIDS infection and prevention; 2) limited exposure to other loveLife materials such as the TV ads, radio and other printed materials; 3) poorly conceived artwork and messaging; 4) ability to speak freely about sex education.

1) Pre-conceived knowledge about HIV/AIDS infection and prevention

It was clear that respondents from both the rural and urban areas know that these billboards are part of a campaign that is focused on young people, that teaches them about safe sex and HIV/AIDS prevention. However, for the rural respondents, it was difficult to establish whether the meanings they attributed to these billboards were based on pre-conceived knowledge about HIV/AIDS that they might have acquired through

other interventions such as school sex education, or through other campaigns such as *Soul City* etc. The rural respondents' interpretations were at times very vague and failed to address the billboards at question as loveLife billboards do not simply promote safe sex, as some respondents believe they do. It was obvious that most of the respondents do not understand the meaning of the messages as stated in the billboard rationale by loveLife producers.

2) Limited exposure to other loveLife materials such as the TV ads, radio and other printed materials.

loveLife billboards are part of a broader campaign entailing other forms of media. In order to understand the campaign holistically, it would be an advantage to be exposed to all media used. Most of the respondents, particularly the rural ones, were disadvantaged in this regard as they were not really familiar with the other elements of the campaign and this thus limited their exposure to the core message that loveLife wished to communicate to the youth. As Luc Pauwels (2005) points out, billboards can be an effective media for health promotion, especially if they are used as support of more in-depth methods such as personal counseling and flyers, as well as television and radio advertisements.

3) Poorly conceived artwork and messaging

The billboard messages are highly problematic as they require a great deal of lateral thinking. Alone, these ambiguous messages would not prompt any action or behaviour change, especially for the targeted audience. If some educated people and intellectuals find it difficult to assign meaning to some of these billboards, what about 12 year olds who are yet to understand how HIV is contracted?

loveLife fails to realize the stated rationale for each billboard into the final artwork of the billboard. For example, the rationale behind the 'HIV face it' billboard was the persistent failure of many South Africans to confront the reality of HIV and understand their personal risk. It was created to prompt discussions among youth aged 15 – 24 about

being tested for HIV and knowing one's status. Amazingly, if we look at the meaning that the readers assigned to this billboard, none of the respondents brought the element of 'understanding personal risk' as stated by the rationale, none of them brought in the element of 'being tested for HIV' and 'knowing one's status', as stated in the rationale. The billboards are a form of representation, which is the medium or channel through which loveLife meanings are represented. In order for meaning to be shared and understood by the producer (loveLife) and the consumer (audience) of the material, both entities must share the same 'cultural codes'. They must be able to read visual images in roughly similar ways, interpret expressions in broadly similar ways. According to Hall, meaning is a dialogue that is always partially understood and exchanged unequally (Hall, 1997:4).

4) Ability to speak freely about sex education

The study found that the two groups displayed contrasting characteristics throughout the process of discussion. Respondents from the urban schools felt more at liberty, and were more inclined to converse on issues related to sexual activities than the rural respondents. As much as they participated in the discussion, rural respondents often shied away from the words 'sexual intercourse'; at times they would bend their heads and whisper their opinions. This confirms the findings of a study undertaken by Diko (2005) that found that while the urban participants responded to many questions during the interviews, most of the time there was no response from the rural participants. Rural participants were also shy to discuss some of the topics around sexuality.

5.3 Have the billboards succeeded in communicating the message as initially intended by loveLife?

The reception of the billboards messages affected members of the two focus groups differently. Factors such as age, level of education, environmental factors, cultural and socio-economic factors are key determinants of the success of loveLife billboards.

loveLife billboards as a representational system were meant to express loveLife's ideas and concepts meant to get young people to confront HIV; understand the main drivers of HIV today and talk about it and take action. The study found out that while loveLife has reinforced the level of awareness and has got many people and organizations to talk about their campaign and not really HIV/AIDS, the intended messages have failed to reach the targeted youth in an even manner. These findings are supported by findings by Richard Delate, Danie Jordaan and comments by CADRE et al. [see pgs. 54 – 74]. The targeted youth, who responded in this research, especially the urban participants felt that loveLife assumes too much; the message is not immediately obvious, and the youth will not necessarily come to the same conclusions as intended by loveLife.

Messages such as 'HIV loves skin on skin' could have different meanings to different people as already stated by the respondents in Chapter Four of this study. Stuart Hall also states that in any culture, a single topic would have a variety of meanings, and more than one way of interpreting or representing it (Hall, 1997:2). Respondents from the urban school felt that instead of loveLife saying 'HIV loves skin on skin' they should instead spell it out and say that one can get HIV by engaging in sexual intercourse without using a condom. However, the same group of respondents claimed that for them it was clear what the message entailed but they expressed concern over people who do not have the same educational background as theirs and people mostly in the rural areas who cannot afford or do not have access to television and other forms of media that carried the other aspects of the loveLife campaign.

From the study it was evident that loveLife has contributed to the awareness of HIV/AIDS and safe sex, amongst the youth. However, to say that loveLife's communication via the billboards has succeeded in the organization's goal to reduce rate of HIV infection amongst 15 – 20 year olds in the next five years by 50 percent, is an overstatement. This analysis is further supported by the critique presented in chapter 2 by Rena Singer, whose analysis states that whilst there is evidence that shows that loveLife has helped South Africans to talk more openly about sex and provided many schoolchildren with knowledge of HIV/AIDS, there are only few signs that can prove that

the campaign is prompting the youth to delay sex or reduce the number of sexual partners with whom they engage.

5.4 Do the youth from urban and rural areas identify themselves as target audience for the loveLife billboard messages?

The study found that as much as participants criticized most aspects of the loveLife billboards, respondents from both focus groups regarded themselves as target audiences. Both groups, however, felt that loveLife's audience segregation needs revisiting as one cannot feed 12 year olds the same information about sex education as one would for 17 year olds. Both groups expressed their concern that 12 year olds' psychological, mental and emotional maturity is not appropriate for the messages being communicated over the loveLife billboards. This concern is also supported by CADRE who criticize loveLife's understanding of the target audience (12 – 17). CADRE noted that 12 – 14 year old young people are very different emotionally, intellectually and sexually to 15 – 17 years old. They have special and different needs in terms of sexuality education and any dialogue around sex requires an informed and framework of support (CADRE, 2002).

Rural participants felt that they were the target audience because the loveLife television and radio advertisements catered for the urban dwellers who can afford to pay electricity and therefore own television and radio; therefore there was a necessity to produce billboards for rural dwellers. For the urban participants although they indicated that the billboards are found mainly in the rural areas, they felt that they were target audiences, especially the black participants, who voiced out that the billboards were too complex for the rural youth and especially for the un-educated who would find the billboards difficult to understand.

5.5 Limitations

The study was limited by a number of factors that might have influenced the study design and results.

Time – The research timeline indicated that the researcher was going to collect data in August, but due to the delay in ethical clearance this was not possible. The researcher managed to collect data in September but because school children were writing exams and preparing for a break, the third school was not available to participate in the research anymore because students were in the middle of exams and it was too late to request a third school as schools were preparing for a break.

HIV face it billboards – This study is limited to the ‘HIV: Face it’ 2006 billboards only.

Sample - KwaZulu Natal is a large province and the study was only conducted at two schools, therefore it should be noted that this sample is not representative of the rural and urban population of this province, however to a certain extent the sample indicates the differences in findings from rural and urban areas.

Gender variables – The study did not look at how gender variables affected the target audience’s interpretation of billboards.

Age segregation – Although a very important element, which might require further research, the study did not separate the target group, so as to compare results of the 12 – 14 year olds against those of 15 – 17 year olds.

5.6 Conclusion

Designing health communication messages in a country such as South Africa could pose a challenge to many formulators of such messages. Satisfying the needs of the youth is in itself a bigger challenge. Communicating via billboards can be the simplest medium through which information can be disseminated and has a tendency to reach a larger audience if used strategically, but at the same time a medium that can easily be misunderstood, due to their nature that normally does not allow them to carry much supporting information. This case is not any different for organizations such as loveLife.

This study set out to investigate the meaning that youth aged 12 – 17 years old assign to messages depicted on loveLife billboards and whether loveLife has succeeded in communicating their health messages to the intended audience. Lastly it aimed to find out whether this audience regard themselves as loveLife's target audience. The study revealed that meaning varied among respondents. Some were able to deconstruct meaning that is closely related to the intended message by the encoder but for most there was a constant struggle for meaning. Most respondents regarded themselves as target audience for the billboards, but loveLife's communication to the intended youth is clearly open for misinterpretation.

In essence, the first important step for the producers of health messages is to speak the language of the targeted reader or audience. This is achieved through formative research. The process is then followed up with reception analysis or other forms of evaluation research and monitoring process. Finally, the communicator needs to carry out summative research which in turn informs the direction of the next campaign. This is important because it gives the producer the chance to tighten up the strings on the weaknesses of the previous campaigns.

loveLife has been bombarded with criticism since its earliest campaigns and it seems that the trend will continue unless, loveLife makes the youth, the core components of their message formulation process. Current loveLife statistics are questionable, as loveLife

cannot prove that the awareness impact claimed to have been made by loveLife had no association with similar campaigns that audiences might have been exposed to in as much as creating awareness does not guarantee a change of behaviour. In order to change behaviour, loveLife needs to take into account the variance of contexts of culture and identity of the target audience, specifically at those characteristics that may serve as possible barriers to communication. In conclusion, loveLife has failed dismally to reach communicate with its intended audience the intended message.

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Focus Group Discussion Guide

Research Topic

Lost in interpretation? Creating meaning from loveLife's *HIV: Face it* billboards

Warm-up and explanation

A. Introduction (by the moderator)

“You are all welcome to the venue of this discussion. We are happy that you have made time to participate in this discussion. Let’s begin by introducing ourselves.” The moderator should introduce himself/herself first and then each member of the research team should do the same. The moderator should assure the participants that their identities will be kept anonymous. The point of the discussion is to talk about loveLife billboards and related issues only.

The moderator should ask participants to mention their favorite hobbies as an icebreaker (5–8 minutes).

B. Purpose of the discussion (by the moderator)

All the issues that we will be discussing are of importance for understanding the messages that the youth derive from the loveLife billboards. These billboards are used by loveLife to promote a safe lifestyle among young people aged 12 – 17. The discussion will include talks about sex, and HIV/AIDS. We are interested in the ideas, comments and suggestions from each one of you. Please remember that there is no preferred answer. Your views are very important. This research is mainly to have more information that will enable improvement in the quality of health of young people. All information will be treated as confidential.

(3 minutes).

C. Explain the ground rules for discussion (by the moderator)

We would like you to have a friendly discussion amongst yourselves about these issues. There is no right or wrong answer. Everyone should feel free to air his/her views and opinions. We would like to have one speaker at a time and there should be no side discussions during the session. Anyone can contribute to the discussion at any time. You all should feel free to agree or disagree in a friendly manner. We are asking for your permission to tape the discussion. We will spend between one – one and half hours in total and some refreshments will be served midway through the discussion. I will let you know at least 10 minutes before we end the discussion (3 minutes).

1. Knowledge and Deconstruction about the loveLife brand

- What is loveLife all about?
- Have you seen any communication material about loveLife?
- What messages do these materials convey to you?
- What does the junction mean?
- What does loveLife mean by 'talk about it'?

(First the moderator will ask whether participants have seen any loveLife billboards.)

2. Knowledge and Deconstruction about loveLife billboards

- Have you seen any loveLife billboards in your area?
- Describe the billboards you have seen.
- What impression did you get about the billboard?
- What message did you get from the billboard?

(The moderator will show the four billboards, numbered A, B, and C.)

3. What are the meanings that are derived out of selected loveLife billboards by the target youth?

- Have you seen these billboards prior to today?
- Describe what you see on each billboard and tell me what loveLife is trying to convey to you as the audience?
- What is your understanding of:
 - i. HIV loves skin on skin?
 - ii. HIV loves sleeping around?
 - iii. HIV: Face it?
- What do the slogans mean to you?
- What do the graphics mean to you?
- What are your impressions about the colours used in the billboard?
- What do you think about the information that is communicated through these billboards?

4. Have the billboards succeeded in communicating the message as initially intended by loveLife?

- What effect do the messages on the billboards have on you?
- What does the message on the billboards tell you about HIV/Aids?
- Is the message easy and straightforward to understand?
- What action do the billboards prompt from you?

5. Do the youth from urban/rural areas identify themselves as target audience for the loveLife billboard messages?

- Who do you think is loveLife's target audience?
- Do you consider yourselves as the target audience?
- Do you identify yourselves with the messages being communicated by the billboards?

OTHER COMMENTS

Please if there are any other comments that we might have left out, feel free to share them. We have 5 minutes before the end of our discussion.

Concluding Remarks

Moderator: We would like to thank you most sincerely for your time and insights. Your thoughts will be treated as confidential.

Informed Consent Form

(To be negotiated with school authorities, parents and students ahead of research.)

The research project is entitled: Lost in interpretation. The creation of meaning from loveLife’s billboards by youth from Kwa-Zulu Natal. The aim of this project is to understand how youth aged 12 – 17 years decode meaning from loveLife billboards. The research will be conducted by Rosalia Martins, Student No: 206519182, a MA candidate in the School of Culture, Communication and Media Studies. This project is supervised by Professor Keyan Tomaselli and Professor Lynn Dalrymple at the School of Culture, Communication and Media Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Should you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact Rosalia Martins at:

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Email: 206519182@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. However, I would like to emphasize that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary;
- you are free to refuse to answer any question;
- you are free to withdraw at any time.

The information you provide in the Focus Group Discussion will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Participants are also obliged to respect the confidentiality of all discussions. Excerpts from the Focus group discussions may be made part of the final research report but your identity will not be reflected in the report. If you give consent to participate in the study, please sign this form to show that you have read the contents.

As participating student:

I..... (Full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time should I so desire.

Signature of the Participant.....Date.....

Informed Consent Form

(To be negotiated with school authorities, parents and students ahead of research.)

The research project is entitled: Lost in interpretation? The creation of meaning from loveLife's billboards by youth from Kwa-Zulu Natal. The aim of this project is to understand how youth aged 12 – 17 years decode meaning from loveLife billboards. The research will be conducted by Rosalia Martins, Student No: 206519182, a MA candidate in the School of Culture, Communication and Media Studies. This project is supervised by Professor Keyan Tomaselli and Professor Lynn Dalrymple at the School of Culture, Communication and Media Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Should you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact Rosalia Martins at:

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Thank you for agreeing to avail _____ (student name) to take part in the project. However, I would like to emphasize that:

- the student's participation is entirely voluntary;
- the student is free to refuse to answer any question;
- the student is free to withdraw at any time.

The information you provide in the Focus Group Discussion will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Participants are also obliged to respect the confidentiality of all discussions. Excerpts **from the** Focus group discussions may be made part of the final research report but your **identity** will not be reflected in the report. If you give consent to the student to participate in the study, please sign this form to show that you have read the contents.

As Principal of the above mentioned student:

I _____ (Principal's name printed) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I hereby give consent to the above mentioned student to participate in the research.

Signature of the Principal.....Date.....