

# **Dynamics and Meaning of assigning User Value in the Branding of Beverage Products in Uganda**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This multiple case study examined how user values are assigned on products through analysing user value signification and configuration processes carried out by producers and designers, as well as the user's input. Further, it explored the dynamics underlying the branding of Ugandan local beverage products. This qualitative case study was based on Omulondo Wild Root Liqueur, Tonto Improved Banana Beer and Splash Pure Fruit Juice because of their different modes of branding, so as to bring to light salient issues designers and producers need to investigate as well as taking into account the user's input so as to improve on design input and design outcome.

The study purposively selected producers of the products under study, designers in Uganda and Cape Town-South Africa and UNBS as participants. Three districts (Kampala, Masaka and Mukono) participated in the study where local users and non-users were randomly selected from two sub-counties in each of the three districts. Operation Theory of Meaning provided the thinking behind the establishment and investigation of meaning making process, while the Activity Theory facilitated the analysis of the dynamics underlying various activity systems in the process of assigning user values on beverage products in Uganda. Key findings from focus-group discussions, interviews, and questionnaires revealed the following as key facilitators that give rise to user values creation and assigning on local beverage products: social-cultural essentials, literacy and visual literacy, traceability, technical space, rules, origin, glocalization, authenticity, visual symbols and raw materials.

Crucially, the study identified tensions/contradictions in product creation and user value assigning process, whereby the artistic expressions on the products create tension between users' perception based on the context and the dynamics in which user values were assigned meaning. The study findings contribute to both theoretical and practical situations through bringing to light internal dynamics of various activity system networks of producers, designers and users to improve on meaning making in the process of user assignment onto products. This provides a basis on which to improve on the way local products are designed as brands, and to highlight the significance of visual branding in value addition chain during the production of beverage products in Uganda and their ability to transform into international brands.

The research has contributed to knowledge through two book chapters, journal publication and several refereed conference papers in which the research has been shared with professionals in this field.

**Keywords:** *Activity Theory, Glocalization, Literacy and Visual Literacy, Operational Theory of Meaning, Socio-cultural essentials, User Values, Visual Social Semiotics, Visual symbols*