

**Digital media marketing and the consumption of sugar-sweetened  
beverages in Africa: A reception analysis of the multi-channel marketing of  
Coca-Cola among young Africans from the University of Lagos, Nigeria  
and Rhodes University, South Africa**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates and examines how Coca-Cola's marketing communications, especially the newer forms of digital, social and mobile media marketing messages/campaigns, are received, understood and made sense of by two sets of purposefully selected young urban African students in Nigeria and South Africa. Embedded within a qualitative research design and underpinned by an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, this study was conducted against the backdrop of the recent surge in the consumption of Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) which has been directly implicated in the rise of obesity and a variety of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Africa. The thesis explores the role of multinational SSBs in this surge, as African countries have become key focus areas for multinational food and beverage companies seeking growth and profits, as home markets decline partly due to better health communications and, in some cases, the implementation of so-called 'sugar taxes' and the attendant negative publicity around these taxes. The focus on young Africans from Nigeria and South Africa was motivated by the similar rapid urbanisations in both countries, often accompanied by changes in diet and greater consumption of fast foods and SSBS, and by South Africa's ranking as the country with the highest prevalence of overweight persons and obesity in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similar rises in national average weights are now also starting to be seen in Nigeria, as are surges of diet-related disease incidence and prevalence.

The study is informed by Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) but also draws on other theories and some key concepts from marketing studies, health science and psychology. Methodologically, the study draws on in-person observations, focus group interviews and semi-structured individual in-depth interviews, to explore how Coca-Cola has created a deep and evocative historical 'brandscape' and how it has become a multicultural resource in both South Africa and Nigeria. Through an investigation into the lived experiences of study participants with regards to both their earliest and more recent engagements with Coca-Cola, as a brand and as a product, the study delineates the influence of older generations of Coke enthusiasts and consumers within participants' households and newer spaces of interaction with Coke via interactive, highly personalised social media-centric campaigns. This study explores how the ubiquitous nature of Coca-Cola's aesthetics and signage are engaged with – often in very 'sub-conscious' ways – by these students and how more recent social media campaigns evoke this multigenerational history. Unpacking study participants' self-

understandings of Coke and their often ‘sub-conscious’ engagements with the SSB, this study explicates the underpinning ideological grounding and how this is sustained over time to become an hegemonic code that does not only confine participants’ engagements with SSBs to Coke but also confines their reception of, and engagements with, Coke’s media marketing messages/campaigns to those that resonate with the multigenerational history evoked by the SSB.

It is within this contextual background that this study brings to the fore participants ‘cognitive dissonance’ and scepticism and often rank disbelief of the health risks posed by their high levels of Coke consumption. The study concludes that attempts to raise awareness about the dangers inherent in excessive consumption of SSBs in Africa need to be reviewed and rethought. There is a need for long-term, consistent and much more proactive health journalism, alongside public health campaigns in both official and indigenous languages, to dispel the powerful myths created by SSB marketing and explain how SSBs are implicated in the rise of diet-related NCDs in Nigeria and South Africa.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CCT	Consumer Culture Theory
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ISCOLE	International Study of Childhood Obesity, Lifestyle and Environment
LMIC	Low-income and Middle-income Countries
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
SMSP	Social Media on Smart Phones
SSB	Sugar Sweetened Beverage

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## 1.1 Thesis introduction

One of the major strategies currently employed by multinational food and beverage companies (collectively referred to in this study as ‘Big Food’<sup>1</sup>) to defend their market share and increase their sales, is the still relatively new and largely unregulated use of digital media<sup>2</sup> as a marketing platform (Dorfman, Cheyne, Friedman, Wadud, & Gottlieb, 2012; Moodie et al., 2013; WHO, 2016; Gertner & Rifkin, 2018). This shift in the locus of marketing activities is transforming traditional legacy approaches of product promotion and branding to embrace and incorporate more interactive selling techniques, as more corporations make the provision of digital content a key element in their overall marketing communications (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Reyneke, Pitt, & Berthon, 2011; Coulter, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; De Mooij, 2013). These new content-centric marketing campaigns potentially pose substantial challenges for health policies globally, and particularly in more lightly regulated developing countries. As is explored in this thesis, these new digital marketing channels create a qualitatively different experience for ‘end users’/consumers compared with the traditional systems of mass media

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<sup>1</sup> Big Food, a designation used often in this study, refers to multinational corporations that dominate and increasingly control the production and distribution of processed food and beverage products throughout the world with Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Diageo, Danone, Mondelez International and Unilever among the top ten Big Food corporations globally (Monteiro, Levy, Claro, Castro, & Cannon, 2010; Monteiro & Cannon, 2012; Nestle, 2013; McGrath, 2017, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Digital media as a term used in this thesis is conceived of and defined by both digital platforms, that is, online spaces where users can engage with content (such as Google and Facebook) and by the underlying technology (social media, web pages, digital video) that supports it (Castells, 2007; Fisher, 2010; Jarvinen et al., 2012; GSMA Report, 2018). Digital media as used in this thesis therefore refer to platforms, sites or spaces of multi-directional and instantaneous communication with a particular affordance of being able to share content quickly and rapidly through its platform (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011; Defining Digital Media, n.d.). Similarly, the term social media is often used interchangeably with digital media in this thesis when the study references electronic communication in forms of interactive technology and applications through which users, in real-time, share information, personal messages and other forms of content and create online communities (Jarvinen et al., 2012).

marketing. These new channels are arguably more entertaining, more intimate, interactive, social, and more targeted, thereby giving these companies greater depth – and sometimes better reach – as they interact with consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Wertime & Fenwick, 2011; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). The market aims at great levels of engagement and seeks to involve audiences in further propagating the marketing of consumer goods via ‘digital word of mouth’, i.e. by sharing, liking and in other ways extending the engagement across social networks.

As this thesis explores, Big Food are pioneering sophisticated media marketing campaigns (WHO, 2016; Jacobson, 2017; Buchanan et al., 2018; Gertner & Rifkin, 2018) that focus on music, youth culture, sporting activities and notions of ‘friendship’ and connection to better sell their products. The main aim, it appears, for Big Food, is to shift the consumption of Sugar Sweetened Beverages (hereafter referred to as SSBs) from more traditional ‘special occasions’ consumption in many African communities, to much more frequent ‘everyday’ use. This is consistent with these companies global campaigns to increase consumption frequency among young people in general and young people in developing markets in particular (Agyenim-Boateng, Benson-Armer, & Russo, 2015; Kelly, Vandevijvere, Freeman, & Jenkin, 2015; Gunter, 2016). The overarching goal of all the marketing of these companies of course remains getting increased consumption of their products, or at the very least protecting their market share and profit margins. Big Food have long understood the value of appealing to consumers when they are still young, as this can potentially translate into more substantial ‘lifetime revenues’ from these consumers (Jacobson, 2017) if their brand preferences can be established early on. Initial higher costs of marketing, to get consumers preferences set early and deeply in life, is viewed as a vital ‘acquisition cost’ that can be amortised or recouped over the lifetime of the consumers, so the earlier the better appears to be the aim of much youth-orientated marketing. This has multiple impacts on societies, on the health profiles of nations and on individuals.

SSB consumption is directly implicated in the rise of obesity and a variety of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)<sup>3</sup> (Draper, Basset, De Villiers, & Lambert, 2014; Uys et al., 2016) in both the developed and developing worlds (Williams, 2015; Stuckler, Reeves, Loopstra, & McKee, 2016). While digital media is now generally used to enhance the marketing campaigns of SSBs globally, it is, as this study will show, increasingly used as a marketing platform to create new markets and grow sales in Africa, as the use of mobile and social media by young adults increase on the continent (Duffett, 2015; Wangari, 2017; Jacobson, 2017). There is a developing scholarship that suggests consumption of Big Food products in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs)<sup>4</sup>, is at least partly attributable to the increased marketing activities through digital platforms and the considerably international experience they bring to developing markets, not to mention their large marketing budgets (Stuckler & Nestle, 2012; Chan, 2016; Sinclair, 2016).

Multinational companies in Nigeria and South Africa, for instance, seem to be well ahead in the use of new technology compared to indigenous companies. These local or indigenous firms in various sectors seem less able to strategically leverage on the affordances of these newer forms of digital technology in showcasing what they have to offer to the wider range of prospective consumers and grow their customer base, especially when there are already concerted efforts by multinational companies (Gbadeyan, 2010; Ibidunni, 2011; Ogbu, 2017; Statista Report, 2019a). This comes on the heels of the technology advancements and growth of Internet access which in Nigeria for instance has risen to 52%, as over 91 million Nigerians presently have Internet access (Adomi, 2005; Ogbor, 2009; Fink, Kopecky, Bos, & Thomas, 2012; Nigerian Communication Centre, 2017) while also in 2017, over 85% of this Internet access was through mobile phones (GSMA, 2017). Similarly, in the case of South Africa, the rapid growth in the usage of mobile phones is evident, as out of the 31.18 million

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<sup>3</sup> Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are diseases of long duration and generally slow progression. NCDs refer to a group of diseases defined by what they are not, that is, diseases one cannot ‘catch’, i.e. transmit from another person to another. The World Health Organisation (WHO) includes diabetes, heart disease, cancers and chronic lung diseases as the leading NCDs. Risk factors include unhealthy diets such as excessive consumption of free sugars, tobacco use, physical inactivity and excessive consumption of alcohol (10 Facts on Noncommunicable Diseases, n.d.; Demaio, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> LMICs, as used here draws on the World Bank’s classification of low-income economies, lower-middle income economies and upper middle-income economies using the gross national income per capita (World Bank Country and Lending Groups, n.d.).

internet users in the country, 28.99 million are mobile Internet users, as at January 2019 (Statista Report, 2019b). This is about 55% of the total population of South Africa.

Against the backdrop of this introduction, this study seeks to understand the reception of Coca-Cola as a brand and as a SSB product, and the reception of the company's mass media marketing campaigns including their digital, social and mobile media, among two sets of purposefully selected young urban Africans in Nigeria and South Africa. Located within the qualitative paradigm of enquiry and drawing on Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as its key theoretical framework, the focus on young Nigerians and South Africans is motivated by the digital marketing strategy and campaigns by Big Food that specifically target young adults, as SSBs produced by these Big Food companies constitute one of the largest categories of youth-targeted marketing expenditures that draws on digital platforms, especially social media on smartphones for their promotional and marketing campaigns (Falbe, Willett, Rosner, Gortmaker, Sonnevile, & Field, 2014; Jacobson, 2017; Yang et al., 2017). This is also consistent with the increasing number of those who primarily use their mobile phones to access the Internet, with examples from Nigeria and South Africa outlined above. As a number of studies have shown, globally, young adults mostly access the Internet through their mobile phones and also spend more time on these mobile devices than other activities (Sambira, 2013; Falbe et al., 2014; GSMA, 2017; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2018). The focus on young Africans from Nigeria and South Africa is also motivated by the similar rapid urbanisations in both countries (World Population Review, 2019) which is accompanied often by the 'necessity' to indulge in the consumption of ready-to-eat and drink products, together with Coca-Cola's increased marketing efforts to avail itself of this development and get more loyal consumers (Akarolo-Anthony, Willett, Spiegelman, & Adebamowo, 2014; Boseley, 2014; Euromonitor International Report, 2017; 2018). This, amongst other reasons, offers the rationale and motivation drawn on in this thesis to explore the hypothesis suggested in much of the secondary literature, that digital online media provides a more 'intimate' and more 'immersive' experience via Social Media on Smart Phones especially, and that these affordances enable Big Food to interact and socialise young adults in more powerful ways (Stuckler & Nestle, 2012; Taylor & Jacobson, 2016), by combining traditional and new digital tools to boost sales in both the short-term and long-term, to create consumption habits and preferences over their lifetime.

To understand the current reception of Coca-Cola by young adults in Nigeria and South Africa, this study argues that researchers need to access and understand the current lived experiences of consumers and explore those in terms of their past relationship with SSBs in general and Coke in particular. As this study explores, Coke is still a ‘prestige’<sup>5</sup> drink for many young Africans. Its desirability and high rate of consumption has to be understood in the context of multiple indigenous and often much lower priced cola-type drinks in both markets, and even in the context of other consumer choices from multinationals such as Pepsi. Why choose Coke when you can get something with a very similar taste at half the price? What ultimately does Coke mean to people? How does their messaging resonate with young people?

These are some of the themes this study’s research questions explores, as outlined more fully below.

As this study suggests, to understand the role of Coca-Cola’s digital, social and mobile marketing messages and campaigns, it is important to locate the answers to these questions of seeming consumer choice from perspectives gained from close examination of the ‘lived experiences’ of a set of young consumers from both countries. We need to know what young African users bring to their encounters with Coke (and other brands) online. These consumers do not come to the SSB product without context – there is often a complex and cross-generational history. That history is often artfully manipulated through new digital channels.

In line with this, this research project unpacks and examines how Coca-Cola’s marketing campaigns, especially those that draw on the newer and largely still unregulated forms of digital, social and mobile media, are received and ‘made sense’ of within the broader historical context of the purposefully enlisted study participants’ lived experiences and past relationships with Coca-Cola and other SSB brands, both local and global.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Prestige’ used here draws on Khalil’s (2000) conceptualisation in qualifying Coke as a symbolic product that to consumers is a self-regarding utility that comes with satisfaction each time a purchase is made and consumption takes place.

As these prior historical contexts and previous analogue marketing campaigns, going back generations, are now supplemented by digital offerings, this study develops a hypothesis that digital online media somehow provides a more ‘intimate’ and more ‘immersive’ set of affordances that is derived from both the affordances of Social Media and the affordances of Smart Phones, and looks at how these capabilities combine into a particular potent, evolving set of mutually enhancing affordances of social media on Smart Phones (hereafter SMSP).

This study suggests that SMSP is different in important ways to social media consumed on desktop or laptop computers; that is, there is a mobile specific set of affordances that bring the marketing ‘closer’ to the participants, in particular, which enable Big Food to interact and socialise young adults in more powerful ways (Stuckler & Nestle, 2012; Taylor & Jacobson, 2016) – combining traditional and new digital tools, boosting brand awareness, branding loyalty (and ultimately boosting sales), countering narratives about the un-healthiness of the product, and locking-in consumption habits and preferences over their lifetime.

The initial focus of this research project was on young adults in Nigeria, within which participants were purposefully drawn and focus groups and individual in-depth interviews were conducted. South African young adults were however drawn on and incorporated into this study after the completion of fieldwork in Nigeria, as the researcher became curious to unpack and understand if, using the same purposeful selection criteria (highlighted below) for research participants as used in Nigeria, the themes that emanated from the generated and gathered data resonates with young adults in a different African context. Extending the research to young South Africans, allowed this study to examine the similarities and differences in the data generated from young Africans across two different contexts. This is in part, a systematic cross-case comparison, which according to Rihoux and Ragin (2008) and Bloemraad (2013), and as this study argues, is useful in testing and extending the key assumptions of this study. This comparison is also useful because there does appear to have been a surge in the consumption of SSBs in both South Africa and Nigeria over the past decade, coinciding with expansion of the use of mobile phones; this is despite the economic head winds both countries have had within the decade and the stagnation of both economies in recent years (Kazeem & Chutel, 2017; BusinessTech Report, 2018; IDC Report, 2019). Increase in SSB consumption is exemplified, among other instances, in the 68.9% surge from 55 litre per capita in 1999 to 92.9 litre per capita in 2012 (Euromonitor International Report,

2013; Ronquest-Ross, Vink, & Sigge, 2015). During this period, Coca-Cola, in terms of sales and consumption, remained the highest amongst the SSB producers with 34 litre per capita in 1999 and 61.6 litre per capita in 2012, marking a significant increase of 80% consumption rate (Ronquest-Ross et al., 2015).

Coca-Cola in South Africa remains the leading company in the SSB industry, as it continually intensifies its marketing campaigns and draws on the brand's equity (Euromonitor International Report, 2019; South African Carbonated Soft Drinks Industry Landscape Report, 2019). Also, growth is still being recorded within the SSB industry in South Africa, as a value growth of 4.2% and a volume growth of 4.7% was recorded between 2017 and 2018 with predictions of positive growth in the years ahead (despite the implementation of the sugar tax) (South African Carbonated Soft Drinks Industry Landscape Report, 2019). This growth is especially impressive given the economic challenges both countries have encountered within the last decade.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is the core theoretical perspective and framework for this study. CCT allows researchers to examine consumerism and postmodernism in the digital age through a focus on consumers' experiences, their reception of mass mediated marketing messages and the sociocultural dimensions of consumption – which, according to Annamma and Li (2012), are not usually accessible through 'experiments' or surveys. CCT provides a framework that allows researchers to understand marketing approaches, consumerism and even purchase decisions, in ways that resonate and are related to approaches used in audience reception studies in media and cultural studies. These foreground the cultural contexts within which meanings are both encoded and decoded of consumers lived experiences (Jensen, 1993). As further discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, CCT, over time, has evolved into four key strands, all of which are useful in unpacking the webs of meaning constructed by consumers during reception and consumption processes (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Askegaard, 2015). These four CCT strands – which focus inter alia on consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, the socio-historic patterning of consumption and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies, are used to engage

with the data collected during fieldwork and this underlies the analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis.

This study, as further discussed in Chapter Two, also draws on the concept of cognitive dissonance as an additional useful set of illuminating ideas that allows the study to make sense of the often contradictory intersection of study participants' fundamental attitudes and beliefs about Coca-Cola and their frequent consumption of the Coke and other SSBs and their increasing knowledge of the ill-effects of SSB consumption on their health.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives of the study**

Drawing on studies that indicate how the mass media marketing and other forms of marketing by Big Food industries continually influence dietary patterns and behaviours' (including but not limited to Taylor & Jacobson, 2016; Jacobson, 2017; Gertner & Rifkin, 2018), this thesis investigates and examines how these marketing communications, more recently with the additional digital component, are received, and how they are understood and 'made sense of' by the 'targeted' young audiences with respect specifically to Coca-Cola. This study teases out from elements of the research participants' lived experiences, their reception of Coca-Cola marketing messages and tries to disaggregate how the company's digital, social and mobile elements of the 'marketing mix' 'works on the ground' and how these youthful audiences who consume Coca-Cola make sense of the company's marketing campaigns. As the shift towards more digital media marketing campaigns gain currency in the business world, this thesis also aims to bring to the fore how the 'hybridisation' of traditional and digital marketing of Coca-Cola is 'made sense of' by the youthful audiences who are enthusiastic about this brand of SSB.

The study thus explores the meanings a purposefully selected sample of young urban Nigerians and South Africans make of the advertising campaigns of Coca-Cola and also explores how these marketing strategies might impact on consumption patterns among these sets of young adults. It also explores what the key commonalities and differences are between Nigerian and South African youth. By so doing, the study is able to bring to the fore understandings of how the mass media marketing, especially digital, mobile and social media-centric marketing of SSBs, are received among young Africans in the wake of the

recent (past decade) surge in the consumption of these products. While Big Food employ digital media as a major marketing platform to influence and increase consumption rates, there is a relative dearth of studies in Africa that seek to understand the experiences of young adults with regards to their reception of SSBs marketing messages and consumption culture around SSBs. Newer forms of digital, marketing messages and their role in shaping consumer understandings of brands and their consumption practices, is also under-studied in an African context.

This thesis therefore seeks to identify the motivations, ideas and experiences of how Nigerian and South African youth consume Coca-Cola and to understand their consumption practices and their relationship to this particular brand, albeit often located in their relationships with consumer brands more broadly. The thesis explores the specific media they are exposed to (digital or traditional), and teases out how they perceive, respond and relate to SSBs marketing messages from the media. It explores the links these young people draw (or do not draw) between the marketing campaigns/messages they receive, their continued consumption of these beverages, and the likelihood of their excessive consumption harming their health. The study examines the interplay between the exposure to these marketing messages and actual consumption, to the extent that this can be ascertained, and investigates what Coca-Cola signifies to and for consumers. It does this partly by exploring both the sense making response and the ‘feelings’ of this purposefully selected group of participants, in the context of also exploring why, how and with whom this iconic global SSB brand – Coca-Cola – is consumed.

#### **1.4 Research design (methodology and methods)**

As is further explained in Chapter Three, this thesis is underpinned by an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, embedded within a qualitative research design. This approach is useful for this study, as it is aligned to the investigative aims of this study which seeks to explore ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions and also underscores the essence and structure of exploring lived-in experiences of research participants’ as an interpretative endeavour on the part of both researcher and participants. This approach provides the researcher with detailed and practical guidance on how to make the best and productive use of time during fieldwork. This thus enables the researcher to conduct in-depth research that

provides an ‘insider perspective’ and a holistic way of engaging and understanding the social construction and subjective meaning of a phenomenon in a specific real-life context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Schreier, 2012). As earlier indicated, this study uses observations, focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews that are semi-structured as methods to elicit data.

To apply these methods, purposive sampling techniques were used (Deacon, Pickering, Murdock, & Golding, 1999) as the underlining sampling strategy that informs the purposeful selection of research locations and participants for this study. The University of Lagos, Akoka campus, served as the research location/site from which Nigerian young adults were purposefully recruited. This campus offered convenient venues and environment where fieldwork could be carried out and useful data elicited. The University of Lagos, founded in 1962, is an institution owned by the federal government of Nigeria and attracts studentship (undergraduate and graduate students) and staff membership from all regions of the country and beyond (University of Lagos, n.d.). This proffers a vibrant university community, embedded within Lagos metropolitan city – ranked one of the largest cities in Africa (World Population Review, 2018) – from which research participants were drawn. The fieldwork in Grahamstown (Makhanda) South Africa, was conducted on Rhodes University campus. Although Grahamstown is a small town compared to other towns and cities in South Africa, the university (Rhodes) located in the town was purposefully selected by myself as the researcher, as the institution with a student population of over 8000, has students from different parts of the country and beyond (Introducing Rhodes, n.d.). Regarded as a dynamic and cosmopolitan knowledge institution, Rhodes University community offers a conducive environment and space where young adults, among the students who are from different cities and provinces in South Africa, were enlisted as participants for the study. The two universities were purposefully drawn on in this thesis, as they are both emblematic of the urban youth, in Nigeria and South Africa respectively. They were also chosen because of the convenience of their locations with regards to my resources and networks.

Research participants were purposefully enlisted by me after days of daily observations in public spaces (restaurants, parks, lecture rooms, foyers of academic departments, hostel common rooms, etc.) on both campuses where data were generated and gathered. Participants were also enlisted for this study by carefully drawing on the elements of snowball sampling,

which draws on the social networks of initially selected respondents in providing the researcher with a set of potential contacts within a target population (Thompson, 1997). Although youth, also referred to as young adults in this study, as a concept is almost difficult to delimit or define unequivocally (Fornäs & Bolin, 1995; Steinberg, 2014), the youths enlisted as research participants for this thesis were between the ages of 18 and 24, which falls within United Nations' (2018) definition of who a youth is, as the inter-governmental organisation has defined a youth as those within the ages of 15-24. These participants were those I, through preliminary engagements with young adults on both campuses, discovered are enthusiastic consumers of Coca-Cola and who have had a 'relationship' with the brand through their childhood and teenage years. These enlisted participants were young adults who have also had exposure to a plethora of Coca-Cola's digital and traditional marketing messages and campaigns, while also being active on social media and other digital platforms. Further discussion about the research methods, participants' recruitment data collection and others are provided in Chapter Three of this thesis.

## **1.5 General background to the study**

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are responsible for over 70% of deaths recorded worldwide, as 40.5 million of the 59.6 million global deaths in 2016 were due to NCDs (WHO, 2017, 2018). Globally, there has been a substantial increase in risk factors of NCDs (Ritchie & Roser, 2018). Among these risk factors for NCDs are unhealthy diets characterised by high intake of sugars<sup>6</sup>, unsaturated fat, salt and other additives, tobacco and alcohol alongside reduced intakes of fibre, fruits and vegetables (Stucker et al., 2012; WHO, 2015). Unhealthy dietary patterns are the major risk factors that underlie the prevalence of NCDs, although a lack of physical exercise also contributes to high rates of NCDs (Onyike et al., 2003; Gilman, 2008; WHO, 2017). These unhealthy dietary patterns are partly caused by "durable, palatable and ready to consume" (Moodie et al., 2013, p. 671) products which are often made, advertised and sold by Big Food (Monteiro et al., 2010; WHO, 2017).

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<sup>6</sup> Free sugars, according to WHO refer to all monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods by the manufacturer, cook or consumer and also refer to sugars that are naturally present in syrups, honey and fruit juices. Free sugars exclude sugars which are naturally present in liquid milk and milk products along with the sugars naturally present in whole fruits, vegetables and grains (Mann, 2014; Moynihan et al., 2018).

Many countries in Africa are in a nutritional transition; a term that captures the shifting and changing modes of food production, patterns of food and beverage consumption and shifts in levels of physical activity and inactivity (Vorster, Kruger, & Margetts, 2011; Steyn & Mchiza, 2014). These are then related to subsequent shifts in body composition and corresponding nutrition-related diseases (Popkin, 2015, 2017). These shifts are often characterised by an increase in the consumption of processed<sup>7</sup> and ultra-processed<sup>8</sup> products which has largely replaced healthier dietary patterns in the global north, while in the global south<sup>9</sup>, food consumption is also shifting towards diets dependent on ultra-processed foods (Popkin, 2006; Moodie et al., 2013; Chan, 2016). Several studies that have explored the global shifts in food system<sup>10</sup> dynamics, assert that there are evident changes in the way the world's population 'shops and eats' and emphasises that there are consequences that come with these dietary shifts (Poti, Mendez, Ng, & Popkin, 2015; Popkin, 2006, 2015, 2017). This dietary shift presents a departure from the home cooked commodities such as vegetables, tubers or animal source foods that have been traced to the post World War Two era (Zeleza, 1997; Popkin, 2017). These shifts in dietary patterns have led to a gradual reduction of the task of cooking in many households, as the diets mostly consumed in the world, especially in

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<sup>7</sup> Processed as used here refers to the minimal altering of food in some way during preparation (International Food Information Council Foundation, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Drawing on Monteiro et al.'s conceptualisation, ultra-processed as used in this thesis refers to substances extracted or refined from whole foods (such as oils, fats, flours, starches, sugars etc.) with little or no whole foods that are mostly marketed and sold by Big Foods (Monteiro et al., 2013).

<sup>9</sup> The terms Global North and Global South has been charged with various shades of meaning which stem from varying historical trajectories that capture the efforts to define and make sense of different (poor and rich) parts of the world. However, while there is no precise definition of either term; within the context of this study, global south is used broadly in reference to developing countries, while the global north speaks to wealthy and developed countries and the attendant socio economic and political powers of these countries. This draws on the usage of both terms in existing literature where countries that make up *the North* and *South* respectively share broadly similar economic and historical characteristics with the other countries in their category. Also, the divide is not primarily defined by geography, although, there are most nations comprising the "North" located in the Northern Hemisphere (North And South, The (Global), n.d.; Rigg, 2015; Wolvers, Tappe, Salverda, & Schwarz, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Emerging since the dawn of civilization, since agriculture began, and constantly evolving since then, food systems refer to the diversity and complexity of processes and infrastructure involved in the growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption etc., of food and food related items (Choffnes et al., 2012). Food systems speak to all the stages that keep the population fed and has also been succinctly referred to as 'the aggregate of food-related activities and the environments (political, socioeconomic, and natural) within which these activities occur' (Pinstrup-Andersen & Watson, 2011, n.p.).

most urbanised cities and areas, has shifted from purchases at local fresh markets to packaged and processed “ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat food”<sup>11</sup> (Popkin, 2017, p. 73).

Meanwhile, the global growth rate of multinational Big Food companies, in terms of reach and market share, are becoming more evident at a time that being overweight and obesity – conditions previously limited to highly developed and industrialised nations and formerly associated with high economic status – is now recorded as a disease pervasive in both developed and developing countries (WHO, 2000; Onyike et al., 2003; Kruger et al., 2005). In LMICs, global shifts in dietary patterns have created conflicting issues whereby on the one hand, there is the dire need to focus on food security and undernutrition, while on the other hand, being overweight and related complications are on the rise, affecting all ages of the population with major health challenges, such as obesity and other diet related NCDs (Popkin, 2014; Steyn & Mchiza, 2014). This is paradoxically evident in sub-Saharan countries that grapple with the simultaneous public health effects of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, alongside the major challenge of being overweight and obesity (Puoane et al., 2002; Kruger et al., 2005).

An important component of the growing rates of obesity is the consumption of additional sugar (WHO, 2015; Bosu, 2015; Moynihan et al., 2018). This global consumption has increased rapidly since the 1960s and the consumption of SSBs play a considerable role in this upsurge in free sugar intake in most countries (Brownell & Warner, 2009; Montgomery & Chester, 2009; Chan, 2016; Monteiro et al., 2010; WHO, 2016). SSBs have been shown to make a direct contribution to the increase in the global average rates of obesity and in rapid increases in obesity-related NCDs such as diabetes, certain cancers (such as post-menopausal

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat food’ as this implies refer to several food and beverage products that are ultra-processed and packaged for consumers. These products are produced through the processes of salting, sugaring, baking, frying, deep frying, smoking, pickling, canning and also often through preservatives, cosmetic additives, the addition of synthetic vitamins and minerals alongside the use of sophisticated types of packaging (Monteiro et al., 2010; Poti et al., 2015).

breast cancer, colorectal cancer among others) and to some extent cardio vascular diseases<sup>12</sup> (WHO, 2000, 2017; Igumbor et al., 2012; Moodie et al., 2013).

As indicated in the introduction, the global increase in the consumption of SSBs has a direct link to increased marketing of SSBs by the Big Food corporations who produce them (Montgomery & Chester, 2009; Williams, 2015; Chan, 2016; Stuckler et al., 2016; WHO, 2016; McGrath, 2017). While there have been few empirical studies that proffer consistent and comparable data over time on the global consumption of SSBs, increases in consumption have been outlined as average consumption worldwide increased from 359 litres per person per year in 1997, to at least 431 litres per person per year in 2010 (Basu, McKee, Galea, & Stuckler, 2013). Also, in a 2011-2013 multi-national survey of nine to 11 year old children, the International Study of Childhood Obesity, Lifestyle and Environment (ISCOLE) reported that over 50% of the children surveyed consumed SSBs and 6 to 7% consumed them daily (Katzmarzyk et al., 2016). Also, the earlier cited increase in the consumption rates of Coca-Cola on the African continent also evidences an increase in the consumption of SSBs. These attest to the growing shift away from water and other non-caloric or dairy beverages as the global intake, on a daily basis, of several hundreds of extra calories from SSBs has become the new norm (Popkin, 2012). Because of this, more and more countries are developing policy responses to reduce the intake of SSBs and other added sugar (WCRF Report, 2015; Popkin, 2017; Thow, Downs, Mayes, Trevena, Waqanivalu, & Cawley, 2018).

These policy responses – designed to reduce the intake of SSBs and other added sugar – have resulted in the development and implementation of a variety of counter-strategies by SSB manufacturers. This has included introducing smaller portion sizes of SSBs, as well as

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<sup>12</sup> Cardiovascular diseases, with risks increased by smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, and obesity, speak to disease types that affect the heart or blood vessels. Cancers refer to a term for diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control and can invade nearby tissues. Cancer cells spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems with several main types of cancers such as carcinoma, sarcoma, leukaemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma among other types. (About cancer, n.d.). Also, diabetes refer to any of several diseases in which the kidneys make a large amount of urine. Diabetes is usually referred to as diabetes mellitus in which there is a high level of glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood because the body does not make enough insulin or use it the way it should. Obesity simply refers to a condition marked by an abnormally high, unhealthy amount of body fat (About cancer, n.d.).

noticeably more aggressive marketing of these SSBs (Brownell & Warner, 2009; Capacci et al., 2012; Mark, 2012; Nestle, 2015; Crawford, 2016). These counter strategies have also been used, among other responses from the industry, as a means to mitigate the impact of sugar tax which had earlier met with intensive lobbying of policy makers in nations like Mexico, United Kingdom and South Africa where such taxes have already been implemented. As a key executive in the United Kingdom asserted, the sugar tax came with no surprises for the company because the organisation was fully prepared (Myers, Fig, Tugendhaft, Mandle, Myers, & Hofman, 2017; Green, 2018; Arthur, 2018). Likewise, the sugar tax (referred to formally as health promotion levy) in South Africa, being the first African country to implement it, met with an orchestrated response from SSB manufacturers who maintained that the tax will lead to thousands of job losses in a country where unemployment is already rife, even though public health experts and advocates argue that this response is exaggerated (Chutel, 2019; Pilane & Green, 2019). So far, up until the end of 2019 when this thesis was being finalised, there have been no job losses, despite the dystopian warnings of the industry (Fooks, Sacks, Box, & Williams, 2019).

Similar to the tactics used by tobacco companies from the 1960s onwards, where ostensibly independent research organisations were created to cast aspersions on the science linking tobacco consumption to cancer and other related illnesses, Big Food corporations' multifaceted tactics are aimed at challenging the science that links consumption of their products to the epidemiology of NCDs (Backholer et al., 2017). Just as an uncovered internal document by one of the tobacco companies stated that “doubt is our product ... spread doubt over strong scientific evidence and the public won't know what to believe” (Saloojee & Dagli, 2000, p. 903), Big Food also echo similar responses which seek to whittle down scientific findings that connect their products to obesity and other diet related NCDs (O'Connor, 2016). This is evident in the Big Food companies that fund research that aims to broadcast and popularise the so-called 'energy balance' perspective and narrative. This suggests that consumers should worry less about cutting down on calories, but rather pay attention to their weight and bodily exercise. Through this, SSB companies seek to highlight issues of urbanisation, modernisation and other factors that they claim are promoting sedentary behaviours – which according to these multinational firms are the real causes of rising obesity rates – while encouraging continued consumption of their SSBs (Saloojee & Dagli, 2000; O'Connor, 2015).

However, new policies and more and better journalism and communication about the health risks of sugar and SSBs in the ‘global north’ have helped to lessen, and even cause a decline in the continued increase in the rising rates of consumption of SSBs (WHO, 2016; Popkin & Hawkes, 2016; McGrath, 2016; Kell, 2017). This has led to these large multinationals, who produce SSBs, targeting the developing world for almost all the planned growth of their core products, to compensate for the declining sales in their home markets (Stuckler, McKee, Ebrahim, & Basu, 2012; Moodie et al., 2013; Bankman, 2013; Chan, 2016, Jacobson, 2017; Lopez, Loopstra, McKee, & Stuckler, 2017; Jacobs & Richtel, 2017). This can be compared with the approaches launched by tobacco companies in the 1970s and 1980s whereby they shifted their marketing efforts to the developing world as evidenced by the over 260% increase in cigarette exportation into developing countries between 1986 and 1996 (Saloojee & Dagli, 2000).

African countries have become a particular area of focus for these large multinational food and beverage companies. Over the past two decades, investments in infrastructure, acquisitions, sales networks and marketing in many African countries have accelerated more than anywhere else in the world (Lawrence, 2011; Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2016; Mitchell, 2016; Bragg et al., 2017). This has impacted on the food eco-systems and supply chains of low and middle-income countries, mostly to the detriment of local companies and local producers in many African countries (Stuckler et al., 2012; Moodie et al., 2013; Herforth & Ahmed, 2015; Black, 2016). This targeting of Africa is partly because African countries have the highest population growth rates in the world (United Nations Report, 2018), as well as rapidly emerging middle classes, but also because in many African countries, there is less health journalism and few resources to run effective public health campaigns (Bremner, 2012; Allison, 2013; Dugmore, 2014; Leke, Jacobson, & Lund, 2016). Conveniently, too, for these Big Food companies, there are also usually fewer restrictions on marketing their products to children and young adults in the developing world (Igumbor et al., 2012; Chan, 2016; WHO, 2016). This can also be compared to how tobacco companies, despite their official commitment not to advertise their products to children, target African nations where they take advantage of the weak tobacco control environment to market cigarettes to children (Saloojee & Dagli, 2000; Cullinan, 2016).

Alongside the target of Africa by multinationals who produce SSBs, is the sharp increases in overweight and obesity rates in regions of Africa (Agyemang, Boatemaa, Agyemang Frempong, & de-Graft Aikins, 2016; Peyton, 2017; Holmes et al., 2018; Amugsi, 2018). While there is a dearth of consistent data/statistics that adequately measure the prevalence rates of overweight persons and obesity among Africans over time, the increase in cases of overweight and obese persons remain significant (Price et al., 2018). A recent WHO report suggests that one quarter of all overweight or obese children live in Africa, while being overweight is prevalent in over 40 African countries (Agyemang et al., 2016; WHO, 2016, 2017).

For example, in Nigeria, the most populous African country, a 2010 survey data showed that being overweight and obesity increased by over 15% between 2002 and 2010 (WHO, 2010; Akarolo-Anthony et al., 2014). Also, while 3% and 8.1% of Nigerian adult males and females respectively were obese in 2010, the percentage increased to 5.3% and 14.3% of Nigerian adult males and females in 2016 (WHO, 2016). Reviewing published papers on the prevalence of overweight persons and obesity in Nigeria, Chukwuonye, Abali, John and Ohagwu (2013) reported that the prevalence range of being overweight in the country was between 20.3% and 35.1 % while that of obesity was between 8.1% and 22.2%. By 2016, 29% of adults in Nigeria were either overweight or obese according to the Federation Internationale de Football Association's (FIFA) scorecard on obesity, with data sourced from WHO. Drawing on these studies, public health experts and relevant academic researchers affirm that over the last two decades, the prevalence of overweight persons and obesity (combined) have since risen to epidemic proportions<sup>13</sup> in Nigeria as a 2018 report by WHO indicates that NCDs are estimated to account for 29% of all recorded deaths in the country (Chukwuonye et al., 2013; Commodore-Mensah, Samuel, Dennison-Himmelfarb, & Agyemang, 2014; Ajayi et al., 2016; WHO, 2018). In South Africa, with a smaller population than Nigeria (World Population Review, 2019), the prevalence of overweight persons and obesity is higher, as 61% of the South African population is either overweight, obese or morbidly obese thereby ranking as the country with the highest prevalence of overweight

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<sup>13</sup> Epidemic proportions as used here refer to an outbreak characterised by widespread occurrence across different communities and territories within the country.

persons and obesity in Sub-Saharan Africa (Malambo, De Villiers, Lambert, Puoane, & Kengne, 2018; CANSA Report, 2019). While some of these figures show recorded cases of obesity and diet related diseases which predates Big Food's recent focus on Africa, this however evidences the continued challenges diet related NCDs pose on the continent which Big Food companies are also not absolved from, as the continued urbanisation in African cities make their products more attractive to urban dwellers.

This rise in prevalence of overweight persons and obesity in the instances cited above and in Africa generally, is largely attributable to the proliferation of fast foods and, in particular, the surge in consumption of SSBs, generally among residents in these countries and more specifically among the youth – for example, Nigeria in 2017, ranked as the fourth largest market for soft drinks globally (Otemuyiwa & Adewusi, 2012; Fadupin, Ogunkunle, & Gabriel, 2014; Premium Times Report, 2014; Adepoju & Ojo, 2014; Akarolo-Anthony et al., 2014; Olatona et al., 2017; Euromonitor International Report, 2017). Also in South Africa, Coca-Cola remains the leading SSB product in the country, as an annual increase in SSB sales has been recorded consistently over a decade with forecasts of ZAR 8.6 billion worth of sales by the year 2020 (WESGRO Report, 2016; Business Monitor International, 2016; Euromonitor International Report, 2018). Coca-Cola products contribute largely to the surge in SSB consumption in Nigeria and South Africa, as the company, rated as the largest supplier of SSBs in the beverage industry of both countries, remains the largest SSB company in the world (Moses & Vest, 2010; Taylor & Jacobson, 2016; Euromonitor International Report, 2017; Gertner & Rifkin, 2018; Coca-Cola Company, 2018).

As SSB consumption surges in Africa, young adults continue to experience faster weight gain, as they consume more unhealthy diets than any other age group (Buchanan et al., 2018). This could be related to Big Foods shift to greater use of digital, social and mobile media as a strategic marketing platform to target young adults who are mostly exposed to these media (Duffett, 2015; Rambe & Retumetse, 2017; Gertner & Rifkin, 2018). This is evident in the large marketing budgets of Coca-Cola for marketing and implementation globally, and on the African continent. As a Marketing Executive at Coca-Cola stated in 2017, the company needs to keep up its intense focus on the youth, because youngsters “are not caring about their health yet” (Jacobson, 2017, p. 312).

Big Food companies, like Coca-Cola, consequently tap into young generations as potential consumers of their products, as these set of consumers are at the forefront of digital media use and represent the largest generation of people to “grow up in a world saturated with networks of information, digital devices and the promise of perpetual connectivity” (Neuborne & Kerwin, 1999: 131; Montgomery & Gottlieb-Robles, 2006; Loader, ed., 2007).

Referred to as digital natives<sup>14</sup> by some scholars, young adults, being in the centre stage in the digital media world while staying abreast of the changes in the operations of platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram etc., perceive information to be malleable and therefore react in different ways to digital marketing campaigns as they see these messages as information they can discuss amongst themselves both online and offline and then control and reshape in various ways (Castells, 2007; Palfrey & Gasser, 2011; Jarvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012). Feeding into this realisation, Big Food make their marketing campaigns interactive in ways young adults can identify with. This, among other topical issues, is beginning to shape how the reception and consumption of marketing messages by young adults are being critically researched. These issues are now gradually being approached as critical dialogue, whereby these young adults speak, make sense of their lives and radically envision their future, while researchers listen and systematically engage with them as participants and not just as objects of study (Close ed., 2012; Steinberg, 2014).

However, in Africa, the need to focus more on this is imperative as the lack of qualitative empirical data on the reception and consumption of digital marketing products and the ‘why’ underlining these among the growing number of digital natives on the continent is becoming obvious by the day. This thesis, consequently, responds to the dearth of in-depth qualitative studies, especially within the field of media studies, that brings a social science outlook on the lived experiences of young adults in Africa who consume SSBs and are exposed to the

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<sup>14</sup>Digital native is specifically used in this thesis in reference to young adults who are totally aware of, and understand, digital technology (Barkho, 2016), a category the study participants enlisted for this thesis belong to. These are young adults who grew up mainly in the present digital technological culture and have little or no awareness to sufficiently compare the present contemporary world of digital technology to what was obtainable prior to when digital technology began to gain currency in today’s contemporary world. Initially invented and popularised by Marc Prensky who coined it as a metaphor to encompass the emerging landscape of digital natives in the early 2000s, the term ‘digital native’ has since evolved and is now more of a fluid term (What is a digital native, n.d.).

several mass media marketing, especially digital marketing, of these products. The need for qualitative research that brings to the fore the self-understandings of young adults who are increasingly consuming SSBs and are exposed to the mass media marketing of these products becomes imperative as the increase in diabetes prevalence parallels that of obesity in Africa with over two-third of those living with the condition undiagnosed (Kruger et al., 2005; Asfaw, 2006; Kengne et al., 2013). This thesis, from a media studies perspective, therefore, adds to the body of knowledge by focusing on how young adults from the developing world receive, experience and make sense of mass media marketing messages, especially digital, social and mobile marketing messages of SSBs and in particular, of Coca-Cola, the leading global brand, and main brand in Africa which has been in operation on the continent for 91 years and globally for 133 years (Coca-Cola Company, 2018).

## **1.6 Thesis structure/outline**

This thesis is structured into six chapters. This initial chapter is an overview of relevant literature and general background to the study. Chapter Two provides a focussed discussion on the literature and theoretical framework that underlie this thesis. To do this, the chapter explores the links between CCT and broader critical cultural and media studies tradition, explains why it is useful for this study and discusses the four interrelated strands of CCT that inform the analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis. Chapter Two also discusses the theory of cognitive dissonance as an additional theoretical lens used in this study and provides the motivations for its usefulness.

Chapter Three makes a case for the research design/methodological procedure, methods, sampling procedure and research participants used in this study. Chapter Three also discusses ethical concerns encountered in the research and how they were dealt with, while Chapter Four analyses and discusses the generated and gathered data for this thesis.

The theorised analysis presented in Chapter Four within the lived experiences and self-understandings of study participants, explores their foremost engagements with Coca-Cola and how it has become a hegemonic/historical ‘brandscape’ that is culturally embedded in their day to day activities.

Chapter Five, against the backdrop of Chapter Four's analysis, provides the analysis/discussion of study participants' conscious reception of, and engagements with, Coca Cola's mass media marketing messages, especially the digital, social and mobile media marketing campaigns of the brand within the context of their more recent lived experiences.

Chapter Six further looks at the study participants' self-understandings about the health implications of their continued regular and in many case copious consumption of Coke.

The seventh and final chapter summarises the key findings of this research, its limitations, and makes some recommendations in terms of public policy and health interventions that could be made in the light of this study's findings.

## **CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF STUDIES ON COKE AND SUGAR SWEETENED BEVERAGE (SSB) CONSUMPTION AND KEY THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of relevant literature within which this study is located, followed by an outline of the study's core theoretical framework, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) by, firstly, locating CCT within the broader cultural and media studies traditions. Thereafter, four interrelated strands of CCT theorising and empirical work are outlined and discussed, followed by a brief overview of current critiques of CCT as an approach to understanding consumer choices, brand loyalty, and consumer experiences of brands and products. The final section of the chapter briefly discusses cognitive dissonance theory (that is drawn upon mostly in Chapter Six).

### **2.2 A synoptic overview of studies on Coke consumption among young adults in Nigeria, South Africa and other African Countries**

As suggested in Chapter One, existing studies on young Africans consumption of Coke and a review of other food-related studies conducted over the last few decades, especially among young adults from the two countries where this thesis draws participants from, indicate the centrality of Coke in particular, as the foremost SSB choice amongst this category of African consumers (see Temple, Steyn, Myburgh, & Nel, 2006; Wojcicki & Heyman, 2010; Amos-Tautua & Diepreye, 2014; Jamal, 2016; Tugendhaft et al., 2016; Bilata, 2018). Despite the lack of regular nationwide or comparable food consumption data in most African countries, these studies underscore Coke's centrality in Africa, while also highlighting rapid urbanisation rates, convenience, availability and indulgence amongst other main drivers, as rationale for continued Coke consumption and the over reliance on other fast food and SSBs amongst young Africans and other busy on-the-go consumers in Africa (Wojcicki & Heyman, 2010; Rajan, 2012; Bosley, 2014; Euromonitor International Report, 2017). For instance, Wojcicki and Heyman (2010) in emphasising the centrality of Coke amongst other SSBs on the continent, highlight the well over 78 million daily servings of Coke back in the late 2000s and consumption of other products by Coca-Cola as at the beginning of the last

decade, which has increased substantially. Njoroge (2017) alludes to this in his study of consumer purchasing behaviour with regards to Coca-Cola's Novida malt drinks in Kenya, as he underscores the tendency for consumers to go for Coke and other SSBs ahead of the malt drinks. Rajan's (2012) study also aligns with this general sense of Coke's primacy, as he points out that the young adults he purposefully sampled in South Africa do not believe malt drinks can offer them the satisfaction they get from Coke and other SSBs. Dada and Awotunde (2017) in their study of non-alcoholic beverages made out of indigenous food stuffs in Nigeria, further allude to the dominance of Coke. Their study revealed that participants that preferred these locally made beverages, do not consume them frequently and do not deem it fit to be served at their events or ceremonies like they do with Coke and other multinational SSBs. Consumers preference for Coke, young adults inclusive, is also evident in Bilata's (2018) study which examines the loyalty of a cross section of Coke consumers in Ethiopia.

Emphasising the paucity of studies that focus on Coke consumption amongst young adults in Africa, and analysis of the marketing of the world's leading soft drink, some of the existing studies suggest that this might have escaped some scrutiny, from academics and health departments, because of the huge economic investment Coca-Cola and other multinational SSB companies have made on the continent – where poverty and unemployment remain widespread – as Coca-Cola employs more than 65,000 people in Africa, and is associated with 160 factories or plants on the continent (Wojcicki & Heyman, 2010; Taylor & Jacobson, 2016). This, alongside the popularity of the Coca-Cola brand, has been alluded to in a number of research efforts on the continent as part of the reasons for the continued consumption of Coke and other Coca-Cola products. This perhaps also contributes to the centrality of Coke and the increase in its consumption and that of other SSBs as Tugendhaft et al. (2016) report that young South Africans aged 15 and above, account for the compounded growth in the SSB industry between the years 2013 and 2017. Temple et al. (2006) had earlier, in their study of food consumption patterns amongst 476 high school students in Cape Town, South Africa, also alluded to the lack of sufficient critical analyses that hones in on the significant role of SSB consumption in unhealthy dietary patterns. Temple et al. (2006) pointed out that the young adults whose food consumption patterns they examined regularly consume Coke and other cola drinks and were often indifferent about the healthiness of their consumption patterns, as some of the young adults categorised this as part of healthy dietary choices.

While similar studies in Nigeria suggest that young Nigerians are in varying degrees aware of the health risks posed by their continued consumption patterns, these studies however emphasise the prevalence of Coke consumption amongst these young adults in the country (Fadupin et al., 2014; Sholeye, Animasahun, Salako, & Oduwole, 2018).

What is common in these studies of Coke consumption amongst young Africans is that they are mostly survey-based that draw much more, or exclusively, on the quantitative paradigm of enquiry, with far less of a critical focus on in-depth qualitative analysis embedded in the lived experiences of young Africans who somewhat habitually consume Coke, as outlined in Chapter One. While some of these existing studies allude to the place of mass media marketing in the increasing rate of Coke consumption (see Ibidunni, 2009; Bragg et al., 2017; Njoroge, 2017), these studies lack a significant focus on the increasing role of digital, mobile and social media as a marketing platform to increase penetration and acceptability of Coke on the continent. They also mostly do not account for the self-understandings – the reception – by young Africans of these marketing messages, which this study focuses upon, nor do they usually delve into how enmeshed, and why, Coke actually is in every day popular culture, which seems to allow Coke in particular to withstand health messaging about the perils of excessive SSB consumption. This study makes a contribution to these various interconnected academic lacunae and proffers insights into ways health journalism and communication can be usefully utilised with regards to the continued consumption of Coke and other SSBs by young Africans.

This is against the backdrop of the widening scope of public health interests and health communications globally ever since WHO drew attention to the multidimensional nature of health and ill health (WHO, 2001) alongside the increasing and growing consensus on the need to acknowledge the role of consumer culture as a factor associated with health and health behaviour (Scrimshaw, Bandura & Fishbein, 2002). Relevant studies further emphasise that cultural attributes of any given community can be directly or otherwise associated with health related priorities, preferences, decisions, behaviours and with acceptance of health education and health communication programs and campaigns (see for example: Pasick, D'onofrio & Otero-Sabogal, 1996; Kreuter & McClure, 2004). Incorporating this understanding into public health programs and campaigns on SSB consumption in the global north makes the absence, in sub-Saharan Africa, of a similar fairly

consistent, focused and holistic public health and health communication on young Africans continued consumption of Coke and other SSBs more significant alongside the much less health journalism in many African countries, as alluded to in Chapter One (Bremner, 2012; Allison, 2013; Leke, Jacobson & Lund, 2016). Consequently, with the currently high burden of ill-health on the African continent (Govender, 2005) and its attendant complexity contributed to by high consumption of free sugars and SSBs amongst the youthful population (Leke, Jacobson & Lund, 2016), the need for a significant improvement in public health and health communication and the underpinning methodology cannot be overemphasised.

### **2.3 CCT, critical cultural and media studies**

Theories, using concepts, arguments, symbols, narratives etc., serve as cognitive maps that illuminate social realities and help researchers to make sense of the phenomena that is been studied (Kellner, 1995). With the plethora of theoretical paradigms that are available to researchers within the fields of social sciences and humanities, the theoretical framework chosen for each research endeavour should ideally be hinged on not just epistemological commitments, but should be based on the potential of the framework to illuminate and aid how researchers make sense of experiences, discourses, practices and social relations being researched. From the 1960s, the consumption of consumer goods – enhanced by various mass media advertising and marketing messages – has been seen as more and more central to identity formation (Featherstone, 1987; Fiske, 1987; Miller, 1997; Storey, 1999; Strelitz, 2002) while young people (a group this thesis focuses on) increasingly create, curate and manage their identities in today's digital age through consumption (Wooten, 2006; Close, 2012; Steinberg, 2014). A transdisciplinary theoretical lens become critical and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has evolved rapidly over the past two decades to provide this as a basis to make sense of both the reception of Coca-Cola's media marketing messages (both traditional and, more specifically, digital, social and mobile media marketing messages), and a set of frameworks for understanding the habitual consumption of Coke for the many Coke 'super fans' who are, to some extent, the group this study focuses on.

The choice of CCT in this study is informed by how researchers have usefully drawn on it to foreground the socio-cultural dimensions of consumption which are not accessible, or fully explainable, through for example, more survey based studies (Annamma & Li, 2012).

Arguably, CCT is particularly useful in today's digital world characterised by rapid social changes captured in literature by concepts such as urbanisation, globalisation, technological innovations<sup>15</sup> etc., and by youthful audiences who develop their sense of difference and their self-identity more and more through their consumption practices (Carpentier, Schröder, & Hallett, 2013; Barker & Jane, 2016). CCT allows for a nuanced understand of the reception of both traditional and much newer forms of digital media marketing messages within specific cultural and social contexts, without falling into technological determinism<sup>16</sup>. CCT helps connect the interdisciplinary fields of media studies and cultural studies with marketing and consumer studies, and also usefully helps to tease out and make sense of contextual self-understandings of young people in two African locations.

CCT draws on cultural perspectives on consumption and earlier cultural studies' tradition that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, which focused attention on audiences' reception of media texts as a vitally important site of meaning making (Hall, 1980; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Akaka, Vargo, & Schau, 2015). The inspirations that CCT theorists draw on as theoretical roots can also be traced back to earlier efforts in the 1930s, when what came to be known as the Frankfurt School pioneered critical communications studies which combined political economy approaches to locating media's role in the society, with more 'cultural' analysis of texts and audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communications (Rosenberg & White, 1957; Kellner, 1989; 1995). CCT draws on Raymond Williams' assertion that "culture is ordinary" (Williams, 1958) thereby conceptualising culture as the "fabric of meaning ... experience ... and action" and suggesting that cultures

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<sup>15</sup> Urbanisation, globalisation and technological innovations as used in this thesis refer to interrelated themes that characterise, in varying degrees, most developed and developing capitalist societies. Technological innovations, as used here, refer to new or improved products or processes, whose characteristics are significantly different from what was obtainable before and, that achieve specified advantages for the enterprise concerned while globalisation, on the other hand, speaks to an intensified compression, and our increasing consciousness, of the world, which is constituted by the ever-increasing abundance of transnational connections and our understanding of them (Barker & Jane, 2016). Urbanisation as a concept, being one of the key features of capitalism, implies the transition of the countryside into a cityscape and it involves population, land use, social and economic activities and cultural practices that generate metropolitan zones (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Technological determinism as used here refers to explanations and analyses for rapid social changes that solely prioritise technology as the motor of change without recourse to cultural and social contexts (Barker & Jane, 2016).

are not pre-existing or static (Geertz, 1983, p. 145; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould, 2006).

Culture as conceptualised by CCT scholars refers to dynamic, interactive and paradoxical processes distributed along micro-macro continuum ranging from particular consumption events, product meanings and consumer identities to multinational ‘brandsapes’, and consumption collectives among others (Arnould, 2006; Thompson, Arnould, & Giesler, 2013). Culture here, differs from the conceptualisation evident in the broader field of business studies where, mostly referred to in essentialist terms, it is a homogenous structure of meanings, ways of life, and values that uniformly shapes the behaviour of its members. Rather in CCT, culture frames consumers’ differing horizons of conceivable actions, feelings, meanings and thoughts and not from casually determined behaviour (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Bajde, 2014). CCT draws on these and other models to develop its explanations of the notion of ‘consumerism’<sup>17</sup> and also on broader theoretical paradigms within critical cultural and media studies that have examined ‘active’ consumers and new trends in mass media marketing research that foregrounds agency and contestations (Hall, 1980; Hirschman, 1988; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Bourdieu, 1984, 1990; Fiske, 1989; Arnold & Fischer, 1994).

CCT as an interdisciplinary research field emphasises the fluid nature of culture and the agency of ‘active audiences’ who are able to shape and make meaning out of mass media mediated messaging (Hall, 1980; Fiske, 1989; Arnold & Fischer, 1994). This has seen CCT focus on the approaches and micro-social processes of consumption that emphasise consumer agency (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These conceive people as having some power and agency – a reflexive identity seeker who navigates his or her way through the plethora of available commercial and cultural products provided by the marketplace and both consciously and sometimes critically makes decisions and choices from the market mediated messages that embrace him or her (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Arnould & Thompson, 2007).

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<sup>17</sup> Consumerism, as used in this study describes a society where life goals and desires are formulated partly through people’s acquisition of goods that they clearly do not only need for subsistence, and how they become constant consumers that are enmeshed in the process of this acquisition, thereby deriving some of their identity from a possession of new items that they buy, ‘exhibit’ and consume in broader senses (Stearns, 2001).

While this might understate the cultural, collective and irrational/emotional ‘non-choice’ that is often made, it is a useful corrective to those views that downplay consumer agency too much.

Of specific value to this study, which provides analysis and discussion on the nuances that underlie the reception of Coca-Cola’s media marketing messages amongst selected African youths in South Africa and Nigeria, is how CCT theoretically locates how consumers make sense of global brands within their local contexts and how through this they collectively create value and experiences (Nairn et al., 2008; Akaka et al., 2015). This has been further reviewed to emphasise the experiential nature of value that is defined by the roles of customers in the creation of varying market related experiences (Ramirez, 1999; Holt, 2002; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2002, 2004). This stems from the theorising within CCT about finding more useful ways researchers can understand how people who buy products actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings or material goods to manifest their specific, personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals (Peñaloza, 2000, 2001; Holt, 2002; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Arnould, 2006). In other words, this speaks to how these consumers exert agency and pursue identity goals through something more like a ‘dialogue’, via modern digital technology with mass media marketing by multinational companies who market their products through digital platforms (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould, 2006).

This relates to the assertion that the increasing role of consumption-oriented practices has coincided with the growing precedence of digitisation and information. Even in poorer countries, growing consumer consumption and growing digital sharing via social media and other platforms, are now dominant practices in the world, both in the global north and south (Cohen & Rutsky, 2005; Akaka et al., 2015). Consequently, a number of studies have used CCT to explore the interwoven network of global connections and extensions, through which transnational corporations use the global mass media-scape to increasingly penetrate local cultures and consumers in the evolving digital age (Appadurai, 1990; Slater, 1997; Wilk, 1995; Holt, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The theorisations within CCT resonate with, and draw on, influences and debates within Critical Cultural Studies (CCS) and Political Economy (PE) approaches to the study of the

media, where research not only shifted from a behavioural to an ideological perspective but was also grounded on how societies or social formations are to be analysed (Hall, 1982). These emphasise how communications and cultural phenomena are being situated for cultural analysis of texts and audience reception studies which date back to the days of Horkheimer and Adorno, both Frankfurt theorists. They were the first set of theorists to refer to the mass media as part of a ‘culture industry’, based on their study of the reproduction of contemporary societies with varied economic, political, cultural and social effects (Kellner, 1995). CCT’s assertion that the individual is a reflexive and empowered identity seeker who navigates his or her way through available commercial and cultural products (Annamma & Li, 2012), can be traced to this lineage of critical theory which emerged in response to an uncritical approach to media studies that sees individuals as passive audiences (Fiske, 1989; Livingstone, 2000). The critical approaches to the study of the media also emerged as a critique of the quantitative methods used to categorise and analyse communication activities, which eludes the ethnographic turn that focuses on everyday social engagement that surrounds what audiences actually do with the media (Lull, 1990; Silverstone, 1990; Ang 1991).

The critical approaches to media research is exemplified by Hall’s (1980) theorising, where, through drawing on a schema originally proposed by the critical British sociologist Parkin (1971), he developed the encoding and decoding model. Through this model, Hall (1980) theorised the relationship between media producer, the text and audience and proposed three main readings or ‘de-coding’ that he suggests are possible for any given media’s reception. These are: a dominant (or hegemonic) decoding or reading, where the preferred meaning of text, if accepted, reproduces and enforces prevailing descriptions and explanations as specific ways of seeing the world; an oppositional decoding/reading, in which the audience understands but rejects the text’s preferred meaning in support of alternative readings (Hall, 1980). In addition, Hall (1980) proposed a negotiated code/meaning, in which the preferred reading of the text is acknowledged but situated and adapted differently under particular circumstances (Hall, 1980). This theorising by Hall (1980) has, over the years, been a central feature of CCS approaches to media consumption and to studies on youth subcultures and audience reception studies that have disputed the ideological claims of media imperialism

theorists<sup>18</sup> (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Wills, 1977; Hebdige, 1997). These studies drawing on qualitative research provide detailed descriptions of how audiences negotiate and use media texts in the course of their everyday lives (Curran, 1990; Strelitz, 2000).

However, various critical theorists, informed by the political economy approach to media research in particular, argue that the emphasis of cultural studies theorists on meaning-making at the point of consumption, has resulted in an approach which downplays the ‘structuration’ of audience experience through ‘objective’ factors (like socioeconomic position, etc.) which stand outside, or apart from, subjectivity (Murdock, 1989; Kellner, 1997; Garnham, 1995). Critical theorists within this approach, contend that the encoded message/text transmitted through the media is shaped by these outside and often economic factors, and sees the economic processes and relations in a cultural industry as primary, while the cultural or the realm of ‘super structures’ related to the processes of production are seen as secondary. Cultural studies as a field is concerned with the issues of signification in cultural text and audience reception, engagement, the moment of interpretation and consumption, while political economy is more focused on the issues of economic ownership and the overriding socio-political environment (Curran, Gurevitch, & Wollacott, 1987).

Both approaches need to be synthesised to understand the power dynamics that shape and are shaped by the creation and consumption of media, particularly media that seeks to promote the consumption of products, such as marketing media.

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<sup>18</sup> Media imperialism theorists drawing on ways in which the media, through the proliferation of media products, as a result of globalisation, have come to dominate people’s lived experiences and cultures, argue that globally there is a one-way flow of television, news, music and film from the countries in the global north to those in the global south (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974; Schiller, 1969; Miller, 2010; Boyd-Barrett, 2014). This has however been challenged by other researchers, who against the claim for the creation of global homogeneity of cultures, examined the media imperialism thesis and argue that there is now a complex and counter-flow of cultural products owing to great technological advancements in the world today (Straubhaar, 1991; Fejes, 1981; Morley, 1992; Liebes & Katz, 1993; Strelitz, 2003; Boshoff, 2005; Miller, 2010).

CCT, as with critical cultural studies, takes issue with versions of this approach that reduce economics to the technological and institutional contexts of capitalism where so much emphasis is placed on the influence of the economic 'base'. In CCS the mode of production, though recognised, is not given a central place compared with the political economy approach where it is a major determinant. CSS practitioners see the very notion and practice of production as being culturally produced, a position that is consistent with the theorising in CCT. Although, Grossberg (1995) accepts as correct Garnham's (1995) position that many cultural studies researchers avoid detailed economic analysis, he attributes this to a legitimate fear of falling into reductionist models. He suggests that CCS sees differences in class, gender and race among other societal factors, and the various ways in which it is articulated, as what makes the difference in the formation of specific capitalism as against the political economy position that places emphasis on class in socio-relational analysis (Grossberg, 1995). However, emphasising that PE and CCS are both important approaches that must continually be drawn on in media studies research, Murdock (1995) opines that the lines of demarcation that separate both approaches must be blurred in order to make the best use of the gains delivered by cultural analysis.

Critical approaches to audience research has evolved over the years, with calls to rethink the process of analysing audience reception and meaning making in order to make it a more suitable framework for analysis in the age of interactivity afforded by digital, social and mobile media critiqued (Morley, 1980; Fiske, 1987; Kellner, 1995, Schroder, 2000; Ross, 2011, Press & Livingstone, 2006). An example of this is the on-going and extensive review and critique of Hall's (1980) widely accepted encoding/decoding model for its inability to fully capture the depth and nuances that underlie audience experiences, responses to media texts and other mediations that should be part of cultural studies, such as analyses of how texts are produced within the context of political economy and the system of culture production (Kellner, 1995). Fiske (1987) for instance, champions the individuated socially situated power of the audience, as people who have the freedom and autonomy to make a plurality of meanings from texts which goes beyond the 'dominant hegemonic/preferred meaning' structure outlined by Hall (1980), while also contending that the effects of the reception of these texts cannot be absolutely guaranteed or predicted. Fiske also contends that meaning production processes cannot be solely determined by one social factor, as there are a variety of social factors that underlie these processes (1987). Consequently, while Hall (1980,

p. 65) sees the media text as a “structured polysemy of unequal meanings”, Fiske, drawing on the concept of polysemy leaves the agency in the hands of the audience, who with various backgrounds and identities receive media texts differently.

Similarly, Morley (1980), being critical of modes of cultural theory that solely reduce meaning either to the subject positions inscribed within the text, or to the subjective prejudices of the audience, asserts that audience decoding, understanding and interpretation of mass media messages cannot be traced solely to the socioeconomic position of the audience. Morley’s (1980) analysis shows that he contends with the notion that the message content of the preferred code/reading as theorised within Hall’s (1980) model, is governed by the conscious intentionality of the message sender. He also asserts that the encoding/decoding metaphor invokes a specific ‘conduit’ of meaning, rather than the possibility of a radical discontinuity between these levels of meaning.

Furthermore, Murdock (2017) states that the simple tripartite division of a class-based meaning system from which the encoding/decoding model was theorised, “fell at the first empirical hurdle when Morley’s respondents’ refused to fit neatly into the categories” (Murdock, 2017, p. 10). Contending that the application of the model was lopsided, Murdock (2017) states that a limitation of the model was that almost all the instances used to analyse it were drawn from actuality television, while a more comprehensive map of programming reveals a wide range of possible relations between cultural forms and available social discourses that were not captured in the initial instances analysed.

While internal contradictions with the model have been discussed by certain critical theorists, such as those cited above, Murdock (2017) however accepts that the central metaphor of encoding/decoding offers a useful set of thinking tools for scholars to hang concerns about audience reception and consumption on, while it also provides a fruitful starting point for debate.

These debates have brought to the fore the continued need for a more systematic exploration that can better bring into focus audience lived experiences, production of culture and the contexts/local sites of cultural meaning making which shape people’s orientation to the media (Kellner, 1995; Press & Livingstone, 2006). This becomes even more important as the

interactivity that digital, social and mobile media affords have consistently “blurred the distinction between production and reception as communication moments, as institutionalised forms of practice and as research areas” (Fornäs, Klein, Ladendorf, Sundén, & Svenningsson, 2002, p. 25). Underscoring this, Murdock (2017) asserts that the arrival of the Internet as a mass media of frequent everyday utility, has repositioned audiences as more productive agents engaged in interpreting and responding to professionally crafted cultural goods and making and then circulating their own material, which can range from simple ‘likes’ right through to posting original photos, videos, and comments on social networking sites (2017).

Against this backdrop, CCT has developed, partly, as a response to scholarly engagements and debates that have been on since the late 1970s, where the need for newer perspectives in audience/consumer research has been emphasised to handle emanating complexity within the broad field of mass media, marketing and audience reception studies (Belk, 1975, 1976, 1986; Belk et al., 1989). This has seen CCT conceptualised as a more encompassing framework, that is simultaneously critical, emancipatory and transformative, which provides a distributed view of cultural meaning useful for assessing consumption apart from the usual frames of economics, microeconomic theory and cognitive psychology (Arnould, 2006; Belk, 2010; MacInnis & Folkes, 2010; Annamma & Li, 2012). More specifically, these usual frames have been critiqued for conceiving cultural products as vessels of meaning that signify similarity and yield specific benefits across all consumers, and for their methodological prescription and quantification of consumption practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Morley, 1986; Fine & Leopold, 1993; Holt, 1995).

This self-contained and narrow notion of audience/consumer behaviour, both in terms of its object of analysis and in terms of its associated causal factors, effectively eliminates these usual frames from the possible development of an interdisciplinary theory of consumer behaviour and discourages even a multidisciplinary approach (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Slater, 1997). CCT therefore offers a framework that resists the reduction of consumption to the demographics or psychographic traits of consumers or to the individuals’ utilitarian information processing and decision-making (Thompson et al., 2013; Bajde, 2014). CCT is located in calls for a broader focus among audience/consumer researchers, with the aim to critically investigate the experiential, social and cultural spheres of consumption in specific contexts (Belk, 1987; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

CCT is, this study argues, particularly useful as a framework for the key questions this study addresses, as it draws on themes that speak to cultural production of media messages and goes beyond the positions of audience responses encapsulated in other critical approaches to media studies, that theorises agency of the consumers as ‘reflexive audiences’. This approach appreciates and helps us think through the fragmentary, ambiguous, uncertain nature and an accelerated pace of living in today’s contemporary world, which according to Barker and Jane (2016) are the hallmarks of a postmodern culture. This is used in this thesis to unpack the nuances of Coke as a product, and the complexities of the multinational and local marketing, as well as the plethora of discourses within which the product is received and consumed by a group of young consumers which remain a significant gap in the literature on qualitative studies of SSB consumption. The emphasis of CCT on consumers’ lived experiences as a frame within which the reflexivity of consumers in the postmodern world can be brought to the fore, is also useful in this study. This emphasis on the lived experience of the audience, provides a way of understanding how audience activities carry the meanings communicated beyond the ‘moment’ of reception into other spheres of everyday life, thereby providing the researcher with a greater understanding of consumers’ reception of media marketing messages and consumption processes. This also provides the platform to examine the process by which reception is shaped through the symbolic practices of everyday life, and it aids the researcher’s understanding of what Press and Livingstone (2006) refer to as the active appropriation of the reception of media messages by the audience. While CCT thus acknowledges reception studies as a key tool in the field of media and cultural studies and other related disciplines (Annamma & Li, 2012), the framework acknowledges the complexity digital, social and mobile media brings to bear in contemporary research projects and aligns with the evolving focus of media anthropologists’ on ethnographic methods to understand at deeper levels how these newer forms of media ‘fits’ and ‘intersects’ with consumers everyday life.

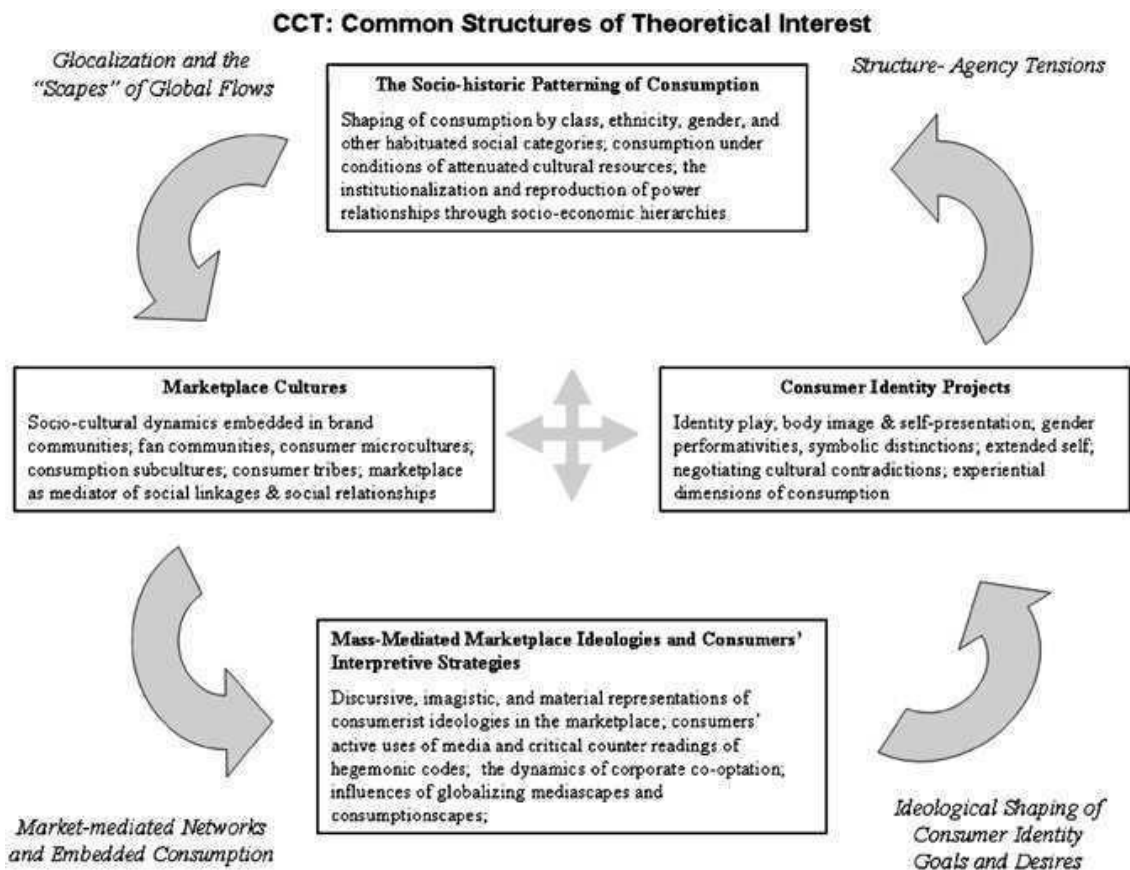
## **2.4 Key aspects of CCT**

CCT defines ‘consumer culture’ as a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and materials on which they depend, are mediated through markets (Arnould & Thompson 2005). In the centre of this social arrangement lies consumer goods and commodities that, over the

years, have been 'aestheticised' alongside the environment in terms of advertising, packaging, product design, display styles etc. (Slater, 1997). Drawing on this, CCT views consumption as being continually shaped by the lived experiences and identities of consumers within which the conscious and sometimes critical efforts made by these individuals to assess, shape, reject or partially accept various market-mediated messages can be unpacked and analysed (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; 2007; Nairn et al., 2008). This notion implies that in the contemporary world, the dominant values of a society are not only influenced through consumption practices, but also in some sense derived from them. This is evident in Slater's (1997) assertion that since consumers do not make the goods through which they reproduce everyday life, the act of choosing between a range of alternative commodities, produced by institutions that are interested in profit and economic values rather than cultural values, becomes integral to individual consumption and value creation and ultimately to senses of self. Further developed, mostly in the 1990s and onwards, CCT consequently seeks to understand the 'web of meanings' constructed by consumers during consumption processes and cycles (including the marketing stage or consumption of the marketing material) (Peñaloza et al., 2012; Askegaard, 2015).

There are four key strands to CCT as it has evolved over the past two decades. The first focuses on 'consumer identity projects' that postulate that people derive some of the sense of who they are from what they consume or desire to consume (Belk, 1988; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The second strand is the focus and theorising of 'marketplace cultures', which asserts that consumption has become a dominant human practice that mediates social linkages and relationships within consumers' lived experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The third strand focuses on the socio-historical patterning of consumption to explore how institutional and social structures influence and 'pattern' consumers' consumption, relationships, experiences, belief systems and practices (Holt, 1997, 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The fourth strand focuses more on mass mediated 'marketplace ideologies' and consumer interpretive strategies, whereby specific understanding of consumers' agency with regards to mass media marketing messages is deepened and how they operate as 'interpretive agents' with meaning-creative abilities is theorised (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

While mainstream consumer research has been critiqued for theorising that is uncritical and often solely focused on empirical questions of marketing efficacy (Wells, 1993; Lehmann 1996), the four strands of CCT have been used to better unpack and analyse the proverbial real world, which, for any given consumer, is neither unified, monolithic, nor transparently rational (Hirschman, 1985; Belk et al., 2003; Curasi, Price & Arnould, 2004; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). While these four strands are further discussed one after the other below as it is worth examining each strand in some detail, these domains of theoretical interest within broad CCT are interrelated and mutually implicative rather than being independent strands (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). The figure below from Arnould and Thompson illustrate the interconnectedness of these theoretical domains.



**Figure 2.1: Source: Arnould & Thompson, 2007**

## 2.5 Consumer identity projects

The identity element within CCT is premised on the assertion that the marketplace has become a source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people, including those who lack the means with which to fully participate in the market as consumers, construct

various narratives of identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Iqani, 2016). This CCT domain speaks to the framework's qualitative focus on consumers' lived experiences and the underlying socio-cultural dimensions of their reception of advertising and marketing messages/materials that cannot be brought to the fore through surveys (Annamma & Li, 2012). This places specific emphasis on consumer agency where the consumer is 'recognised' as an agent who draws on market place resources in constructing his or her own identity and meanings to make sense of products and environments (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). This is based on the theorising that the contemporary market produces specific kinds of positions that consumers can choose to inhabit; this being a result of the relationship between consumers and the structuring influence within the marketplace (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Annamma & Li, 2012). These positions chosen consciously or otherwise by consumers is evident in today's globalised world where to define oneself to others or even to one's self, requires greater use of products and going through consumption experiences, with many people having a sense that that we 'are' what we consume (Dholakia & Firat, 2003).

Consumer identity elements of CCT speak to consumers' dispositions, needs and actions in relation to product acquisition and the role and impact of mass media marketing in influencing these needs, actions and acquisition (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999; Wooten, 2000). These are particularly useful in evaluating the heterogeneous distribution of meanings which consumers derive from commercial and cultural products, the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groups that exist within the broader socio-historic settings, the cultural reconstruction of what is consumed and the role of commercial and economic systems in influencing consumption (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Hayward, 2004; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Within the consumer identity projects strand, CCT draws on the role of consumers' narratives, stories and experiences in constructing self-understandings as critical theorists across diverse fields, such as linguistics, media studies, social psychology, anthropology, and sociology, propose that human understanding is organised in terms of culturally shared narrative forms (Lévi-Strauss, 1963; Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Harré & Gillett, 1994). This narratological view of meaning making has gained theoretical currency as a more dynamic conceptualisation of conventional social constructs of self-identity (Thompson, 1997; Holt, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This social construct of self-identity offers a

basis for the researcher to examine consumers culturally shared narrative forms, as consumers are self-narrators whose experiences highlight facets of events in their retrospective narratives (Thompson et al., 1994, Thompson & Haytko, 1997). This is consistent with Hall's (2000) position that identity is always in part a narrative, that is, some kind of narrated sense of own self, as represented to one's self.

Consumer identity research thus foregrounds consumers as meaning making subjects and empowered identity seekers who forge a sense of their selves through co-constitutive and co-productive ways. This serves as a useful strand for unpacking contemporary ways and patterns of consumption which according to Bocoek (1997), has given rise to newer kinds of individuals who are anxious to maintain their autonomy and individualities in order to avoid "being levelled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism" (p. 17). For instance, drawing on this strand of CCT, studies have examined the ways consumers use brands and hyperlinks in constituting and producing multiple nonlinear cyber self-representations, alongside investigations of how consumers experiences are systematically linked to forms of their corresponding imaginative and fantasy-oriented selves (Kozinets, 2001; Jensen & Gilly, 2003; Joy & Li, 2012).

Similar studies drawing on consumer identity projects also show how objects are both central to definitions of self and become extensions of the self, while also examining how objects within a household can become a major resource with which the family construct their individual, family and social identities (Ahuvia, 2005; Tian & Belk, 2005; Epp & Price, 2008, 2010). Consumer identity projects, evidenced by these studies, is useful in unpacking and offering analyses of how people assure themselves of who they are and how much they have achieved through their respective consumption practices and how much they achieved through what they consume (Dholakia & Firat, 2003). This underscores Holt's (2002) prediction that in years to come, consumers will begin to look for brands to contribute directly to their 'identity projects' by providing original and relevant cultural materials with which to work thereby shifting the focus from questions about a brand's authenticity to the brand's contribution as a cultural resource. This is an important point for this study, particularly when looking at Coke's digital marketing and its personalisation, with actual names on Coke cans. Alluding to the need for consumer identity projects, Dholakia and Firat (2003) argue that increasing numbers of consumers now define their identities through what

they consume rather than the era when one's identity and worth were majorly reflected in what one produced and created and how one contributed to the betterment of society and humanity.

Another relevant study unpacks postmodern<sup>19</sup> buying and consumption in relation to consumer identity projects and argues that postmodern consumers pose a serious challenge to contemporary brands, as they increasingly see these brands as irrelevant and do not purchase these brands for mostly aspirational purposes as previous generations may have done. Instead, postmodern consumers see brands as a means to an end (Tybout & Carpenter, 1999; Thompson, 2003). These studies draw on Bourdieu's idea that taste classifies and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990) and that market products (evident in their design and imagery of the production and mass media marketing processes) can be actually consumed symbolically in various ways to produce a measure of satisfaction (Featherstone, 1990; Douglas & Isherwood, 1980). That is, enjoyment, satisfaction and different modes of identity formation derived from market products do not only relate to the physical consumption of these products but are crucially linked to their use as markers. This includes for example, the sharing of product names with others, as well as constellations of taste, consumption preferences and life style practices (Featherstone, 1990). This is seen as a criterion for success in the postmodern marketplace, which now depends on brands helping consumers to satisfy their personal needs and reconcile their conflicting goals of 'self-indulgence' in a way that allow consumers to act out their fantasy identities in their leisure time (Tybout & Carpenter, 1999; Dholakia & Firat, 2003) and, increasingly, also make ethical sense to consumers. According to Thompson (2003), "when you think the postmodern consumer is 'there,' safe and sound in the categorical box, he/she has gone underground and emerged in a very different place" (2003, p. 127). This is not consistent with the then modernist ideals of continuity, depth and originality as the cultural scene and consumer activities are now "one

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<sup>19</sup> Stemming from the dismissal of the rigidity of modernism, the focus of consumption practices on postmodernity dates back to a wider debate, mostly in the 1980s, from which the theoretical orientation now signalled by the term postmodern emanated. Although, it has been posited that postmodernism always exists in a state of un-centred excess and any discussion that traces its arrival runs the risk of misrepresentation (Cova et al., 2013); postmodern as used in this study drawing on Bocock (1993), refers to "a post-industrial, suburban, social formation in which old, stable points for establishing people's sense of identity has been displaced" (p. 4). Postmodern conditions thus speak to consumers' identities that gradually become more flexible and float around in a state of potential, if not actual, change (Bauman 1992 as cited in Bocock, 1993).

giant hyper-real amalgam which continually effaces modernist distinctions between fiction, fact, image, simulations and the ‘real’” (Thompson, 2003, p. 123).

Furthermore, Thompson (2003), reviewing contemporary consumption practices that underlie the identity of the postmodern consumer, posits two categories of consumption goals; *hyper-modernist* and *reflexive consumption goals* as that which the postmodern consumer can take up in different times, in different ways and in different combinations. Consumption goals that are *hyper-modernist* in nature refer to amplifications of modernist desires, fears and longings for something that seems to be missing in a fast-paced, hustle-bustle and depersonalised world, while those that are *reflexive* in nature manifest a playful, self-aware stance toward modernist socio-conventions and the many marketplace spectacles that are presented as the ‘real thing’ in the marketplace. (Thompson, 2003). *Hyper-modernist goals* are examined through *re-enchantment* and *communal consumption* as types within the category, while *reflexive consumption goals* are examined through *tactical flexibility* and *ironic consumption*.

Conceptualising *re-enchantment* as a type of *hyper-modernist* consumer goal which underlies how postmodern consumers construct their identities, Thompson (2003) draws on Lears’ (1994) persuasive argument that the dawn of modernism came with a countervailing spirit of anti-modernism. This is used in making sense of postmodern consumers’ insatiable hunger for something that seems lacking and plays out as “a simulation of the enchantment that we like to believe once animated everyday life - through consumption” (Thompson, 2003, p. 128). *Re-enchantment* offers an explanation for, and a way of understanding, why postmodern consumers often nostalgically draw on mythologised past and events, as they desire to be captivated by the advertising and marketing of products which are shrouded in symbolic meanings and invoke past mythic ideals and images. *Communal consumption* also speaks to how postmodern consumers identify with products in the marketplace through nostalgic feelings of an ineffable organic community they once had, or heard of, in the past. This sees postmodern consumers feeling intimately connected to each other in ways that spur them to consume more of marketplace products in efforts to “simulate a magical, mystical and communal solidarity they once had or heard of in the past” (Thompson, 2003, p. 128).

*Tactical flexibility*, being a type of *reflexive consumption goals*, refers to the postmodern consumer’s self-creation and construction of personal identity by drawing on several styles

and preferences from all over the cultural map available at his/her disposal (Thompson, 2003). This act of 'bricolage' brought to the fore by Thompson (2003), builds on existing studies that assert that the dominant cultural ethos of postmodernity is flexibility that has gradually seen plasticity triumph over stability in consumption choices (Harvey, 1989; Schouten & McAlexander, 1993; Martin, 1994; Bouchet, 1995). Although, the postmodern consumer might not always go to the extreme in acts of bricolage, Thompson (2003) refers to these category of consumers as cultural chameleons who become quite hard to find, identify or classify simply based on appearance alone or demographics. He stresses the importance of highly localised and contextually nuanced research if critical and particularistic understanding of how postmodern consumers construct their identities must be investigated.

In addition to the theorising on *reflexive consumption goals*, *ironic consumption* is conceptualised as that which embodies the reflexive and playful 'spirit' of postmodernity whereby the consumer, dropping off all forms of pretence, deliberately takes pleasure in contrived products and artefacts "irrespective of the tackiness, awfulness or tastelessness of these products" (Thompson, 2003, p. 134). Developing this concept, Thompson (2003) draws on relevant studies such as the theorised orientation toward travel, referred to as post-tourism and shopping, known as post-shopping (Feifer, 1986; Sherry, McGrath & Levy, 1992; Belk, 1997). This, for instance, sees some tourists taking ironic pleasure in being immersed in local tourism despite knowing that the apparent authentic local entertainment is as contrived as the supposedly quaint and traditional fishing village, which cannot survive without the income from tourism (Urry, 1990 as cited by Thompson, 2003). Emphasising that postmodern consumers almost never embark on ironic acts of consumption alone – as it is more enjoyable when it is a shared, social undertaking – Thompson (2003) suggests that researchers within this field of study must critically engage with these ineffable categories of consumption goals, if their understanding of the underlining dynamics of consumption must be deepened.

To unpack, critically analyse and discuss the research participants narratives and shared experiences with regards to Coca-Cola as a market product, as well as how they receive, consume and subsequently use the brand to draw the lines of social differences, relationships and identity formations, theoretical perspectives on consumer identity projects, discussed above, will be drawn on.

## **2.6 Marketplace cultures**

This second strand of CCT is the focus and theorising of ‘marketplace cultures’ which asserts that consumption has become a dominant human practice that mediates social linkages and relationships within consumers’ lived experiences (Hayward, 2004). Through the pursuit of common consumption interests, CCT scholars here assert that consumers find ways to collectively identify and participate in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and activities (Cova, 1997; Kozinets 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). This draws on studies of marketplace communities that unpack the diverse ways by which consumers, through their consumption practices, establish socialisation and personal relationships (Arnould & Price, 1993). CCT focuses on socially organised activities and relations such as the spectacular display and circulation of goods/commodities alongside all kinds of entertainments, amenities and spontaneous social reactions. This, for example, differs from the emphasis of mainstream economics in the market, and not the marketplace, whereby abstract market forces, mathematically modelled, with regards to maximising utility in the form of either profit or satisfaction is the central focus (Slater, 1997).

Marketplace cultures within CCT have been classified and referred to in several ways, either as a subculture of consumption, a consumption world, a culture of consumption or a consumption micro-culture (Holt, 1995; Kozinets, 2001; Kates, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Askegaard, 2015). Over the years, studies that draw on these across varying contexts with the aim to critically analyse and understand how the emergence of consumption as a dominant human practice speaks to the actions or inactions and interpretation of consumers, has been theorised to have three key qualities: cohesiveness, resistance and dedication (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Canniford, 2011). Cohesiveness is likened to sociological theories of subculture, whereby marketplace cultures of consumption infer social orders that have stood the test of time, have strong interpersonal bonds, have ritualised modes of expression and unique sets of beliefs that preclude other social affiliations, thereby influencing the identity formation of consumers (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Canniford, 2011).

The quality of resistance in marketplace cultures emphasise the rugged self-reliance, freedom to behave in manners barred in sectors of the society and the deviant status of consumers of

cultural products (Hebdige, 1979; Cohen, 1980; Wheaton, 2000). This resistance to specific schedules and forms are enacted through political, hedonic and stylistic practices through which studies have shown that marketplace cultures are not a field of mundane life (Celsi et al., 1993; Kate, 2002; Canniford, 2011). Also, dedication within marketplace cultures occur through processes of acculturation, evolution of consumers interests and gradual markers of consumption which often lead to individuals developing long term engagement with specific products (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Belk & Costa, 1998; Bonsu & Belk, 2003).

These key qualities, brought to the fore in marketplace cultures, allude to consumers' position as culture producers rather than mere culture bearers (Joy, 2001; Annamma & Li, 2012). This has seen consumers, within the context of major socio-cultural transformations that have eroded traditional bases for sociality, search and develop ways through digital media platforms to participate – whether fleetingly or permanently – in consumption practices within marketplace communities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Wright, Cova & Pace, 2006; Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). This is evident in the pool of symbolic resources shared online and offline by consumers and how these resources play out within localised marketplace cultures (Kozinets, 2001; Annamma & Li, 2012). This, for example, is analysed in a study that focused on Chinese consumers, the dialectic between structures and how these set of consumers employ western brands through the marketplace to assert different and competing versions of their national identities (Dong & Tian, 2009).

However, cohesiveness as a quality in the marketplace that asserts the ever-unitary configurations of compatible cultural meanings has been challenged by Kates (2002), who argues for a version of marketplace culture that is dynamic and constantly shifts in response to external and internal challenges. In addition, dedication as a quality amongst consumers has also been challenged to be of a temporary form and a phenomenon witnessed only at weekends when consumers enjoy more leisure time together (Kates, 2002). Recent studies also suggest that resistance against dominant orders are less likely to be characteristic of modern marketplace cultures, rather, weak bonds between consumers are likely expected, as social resistance, robust social structures and gender hierarchies are features that are gradually disappearing amongst modern marketplace cultures (Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander, 2006; Elliott & Davies, 2006; Canniford, 2011). This further supports the argument, based on empirical evidence from a study of the urban dance music scene, that

groupings traditionally theorised as coherent subcultures within broad marketplace cultures can be better unpacked and understood as a series of transient gatherings made up of fluid boundaries and floating memberships (Bennett, 1999). Consequently, cohesiveness, resistance and dedication are used within this domain of CCT, to critically examine how the youthful participants in this study utilise traditional and digital media with regards to their social lives/relationships and activities, their reception and consumption of Coca-Cola as a brand and how these interface with their self-understandings and identities in the marketplace driven by consumerism.

In further developing marketplace cultures as a strand of CCT, the concept and ideas of 'neotribes' by Maffesoli (1996) and others, is drawn on in theorising around traditional and modern bases of sociality and consumption practices across different contexts. Maffesoli (1996) asserts that "the tribe is without the rigidity of the forms of organisation with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form" (p. 98).

Drawing on this, CCT scholars, with a substantial part of initial research focused on youth subcultures, have gone ahead to show that subcultures are unstable and shifting cultural affiliations, which according to Bennett (1999), characterise late modern consumer-based societies. For instance, a locally based study of youth culture among Buddhists in Thailand, demonstrates the difficulty this category of consumers has in maintaining a conception of identity and consumption that is not appropriated within their community (Wattanasuwan & Elliott, 1999). Also, another locally based study on youth subculture shows how the recontextualisation of mediated imagery across cultures leads to metamorphoses of meanings that make these meanings unpredictable and contradictory in relation to their western origin. This is particularly useful for this study when looking at Coke consumption and consumer's integration within Coke's digital marketing.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural dynamics that underpin marketplace cultures and embed the lived experiences of consumers have been linked to how corporations creatively exploit customers by ceding 'control' of their brands, with the aim of strengthening their brand community through increased brand engagements (Annamma & Li, 2012). This is exemplified by studies on brand communities that suggest that customers direct participatory

involvement, personal engagement, confidence in outcomes and emotional immediacy, are ways corporations selling their product/brand hand over 'control' to their customers thereby enhancing collective formation of identities in the market place (Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009; Kozinets et al., 2010).

### **2.6.1 'Brandscapes' and 'glocalisation'**

Drawing on other relevant studies in their study of brand communities, Thompson & Arsel (2004) developed the concept of a hegemonic 'brandscape', which asserts that global brands and products exert systematic influence on marketplace cultures in local contexts. This is consistent with the notion of 'glocalisation', that is, the adaptation and objectification of global marketplace cultures and structures for local impact (Annamma & Li, 2012). While glocalisation is drawn on by multinational corporations to forge ways for consumers' to think beyond their specific nationalities in relation to brands/products, an investigation of the meaning consumers make of the systematic influence exerted by these brands and products within local contexts (as examined in this study) is useful in understanding the formation of social links, solidarity and interests among consumers within these socio-cultural contexts (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Askegaard, 2015). This provides the needed motivation for studies such as Kjeldgaard & Askegaard's (2006) analysis that brings to the fore ways in which the glocalisation of Greenlandic youth culture involves negotiations over the appropriation of both the global flows through the mass media and the marginalised ethnic identity in the Scandinavian region as well as their postcolonial relationships to the Danish culture. Cayla and Eckhardt (2008) in their study of marketplace cultures in Asia also emphasise that globalisation is beyond just a western-oriented one- or two-way street but rather a multiplicity of streets with intertwined cultures; hence the need for context based research (exemplified by this study) within specific local socio-cultural communities.

Although, owners of major brands and multinational firms continually update their strategies to creatively and systematically exert their influence in the marketplace, thereby maintaining their followership in the global and local markets and increase consumption figures; the efficacy of their strategies in the postmodern era is beginning to wane as theorists bring to the fore the contradictions in their strategies (Holt, 2002; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Annamma & Li, 2012). Holt (2002) argues that postmodern consumers, despite the influence exerted by brands in the marketplace are becoming

unconvinced, as they are gradually developing appetites for muckraking exposés that describe the stealthy persuasion that underlie marketing campaigns and strategies.

He further identifies what he describes as the compression of ironic distance, the sponsored society, authenticity extinction, peeling away the brand veneer and sovereignty inflation as the five ‘contradictions’ that threaten the present consumer culture influenced by systematic strategies of brand owners and multinational firms in the marketplace (Holt, 2002). These are useful in this study, as this research project seeks to gauge how the persuasive tendencies embedded in Coca-Cola’s marketing media campaigns motivate or de-motivate the young Africans enlisted as study participants to continuously consume Coke and associate with the brand, as they consciously and otherwise engage with these marketing messages.

The concept of the ‘compression of ironic distance’ brings to the fore the pervasive way the ironic modes of marketing communications are becoming monotonous and competitive among brands. These modes of marketing communications are used by brands and corporations to distance themselves and deflect perceptions that they are out there in the marketplace to primarily shape consumer tastes (Holt, 2002). Consequently, this technique, used to mock conventional advertising methods and present brands as not being majorly concerned about profit and commerce, has become a clichéd advertisement, as attentive postmodern consumers understand it to be a ploy targeted to use ironic distancing to hide their real desire to shape taste and make profits (Holt, 2002).

The contradiction that the ‘sponsored society’ highlights, comes from market competition driven by inflation, which has now resulted in increased aggressiveness in the stealth attempts by brand agents whose opinions the consumers value. This aggressiveness with which several brand agents diffuse brand awareness, has led to heightened attention and criticism of these brand agents whose opinion normally would have been received by consumers as one “unadorned by corporate influence” (Holt, 2002, p. 86).

Highlighting ‘authenticity extinction’ as one of the postmodern contradictions in the marketplace, Holt (2002) refers to the increasing struggle of brands and corporations to remain authentic in the use of cultural texts that are void of the tainted commerce and profit perception held by consumers. This is against the backdrop of postmodern consumers who

view some products in the marketplace as being crassly commercial, drawing on their marketing messages that use already known musical tracks and artistic expressions (Holt, 2002). Also, Holt (2002) highlights the struggles brand agents and marketers have with anti-branding movements and the efforts by these movements to blur the boundary between internal organisational decisions and external branding decisions, thereby tagging it *peeling away the brand veneer*. This speaks to the demand by anti-branding movements and postmodern consumers for public scrutiny of the activities and ideals of brands and corporations beyond what they project in the marketplace. Holt (2002) posits that such demand will gradually “grow as greater percentage of the population becomes socialised in this new form of aggregated consumer power” (p. 86).

Holt suggests ‘*sovereignty inflation*’ as the fifth contradiction that threatens the present consumer culture influenced by systematic strategies of brands in the marketplace. He points to the never-ending project of brands and corporations aimed at creating individuated identities of postmodern consumers through their consumption and contrasts this with the difficulty postmodern consumers will potentially face in reworking meanings of market products as they proliferate so rapidly in the marketplace (Holt, 2002). Holt (2002) posits that the widespread inflation in the symbolic work required to achieve what can be perceived as sovereign postmodern consumers becomes an uncomfortable task as this requires absorbing an ever-expanding supply of fashions, cultural texts, tourist experiences, different diets etc.

Based on the contradictions outlined above, Holt predicts that postmodern brands will eventually have little value in this new consumer culture, as they will not be able to hide their commercial motivations. He asserts that the more consumers are aware of the commercial motivations of brands, the more they will shift focus from questions of authenticity, as they will look out for brands in the marketplace that can contribute directly to their identity projects by providing them with original and relevant cultural materials they can draw on in their self-construction projects (Holt, 2002). Holt drawing on his predictions, further asserts that postmodern consumers will differ in how they make use of branded expressive culture as some will thrive on the abundant cultural materials, while on the other hand, some will also opt out of brand-assisted identities to pursue other bases of identity formation. Alongside this, other set of postmodern consumers may yet make less of a departure but rather lock out all but a micro subset of the branded expressive culture (Holt, 2002). With young adults over the

years being the focus of both the “explosion of affluent hedonistic consumerism and of radical cultural opposition and rebellion” (Slater, 1997, p. 165), these postulated contradictions are outlined here as these will be deployed and referenced in further examining and discussing the self-understandings and identities of the youthful participants for this study, within their specific contexts in the marketplace.

The theoretical assertions and discussions around marketplace cultures outlined above, with origins in naturalistic and humanistic inquiry (Belk et al., 1988), is underlined by the need to understand consumption from the point of view of consumers, which is also a key concern of this study. This also speaks to participant observation, where the researcher immerses herself/himself into the context/phenomena of reception and consumption (Hirschman, 1986; Peñaloza, 1994, 2000; Rokka, 2010). This entailed that as the researcher in this study, I had to, drawing on Gertz (1973), take up the role of an empathetic investigator who observes consumers in their natural surroundings, in order to gain a rich and in-depth understanding that could lead to a thick description/account and examination of the phenomenon under study.

## **2.7 The socio-historic patterning of consumption**

This dimension of CCT hinges on assertions that individual consuming subjects operate within a cultural, economic and political frame that shapes and limits how such consumers think, feel and act in the contemporary market place (Holt, 1997, 1998; Nairn et al., 2008; Rokka, 2010). This strand views consumers as enactors of social roles and positions that are underlined by the institutional and social structures that systematically shape consumption practices. A major line of enquiry within this CCT domain, seeks to know what a consumer society is and how it is constituted and sustained along the institutional and social structures of gender, ethnicity, religion, class, families, households and community (Cova, 1997; Holt, 1997, 1998, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In other words, this thesis in similarity with other studies that draw on this third strand of CCT, critically examines the historical and cultural events and dynamics that structure consumer culture and the means through which social factions, and their competing socio-cultural interests, vie for dominance or struggle against forces of subordination and marginalisation through marketplace actions (Holt, 2002;

Humphreys, 2010; Karababa & Ger, 2011; Press et al., 2014; Thompson & Tian, 2008; Varman & Belk, 2009; Vikas, Varman, & Belk, 2015; Arnould & Thompson, 2018).

Consequently, CCT researchers have examined the relationships among consumers' experiences, belief systems and practices and the underlying structures of gender, ethnicity, religion, families, community etc. (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991; Belk, 1992; Wallendorf, 2001; Allen, 2002). In this vein, the underlying logic in the reception of marketing materials, consumption practices, cultural reproduction and patterning is linked to collectivities who have socialised under similar conditions and social relations, such as similar levels of exposure to mass media content, education patterns or similarities in peers, which are embedded with a tendency to have similar cultural understandings (Holt, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Drawing on this strand of CCT is a study by Peñaloza (1994) that explores inequality and consumption and seeks to capture the complex dynamics between its socio-cultural forms and the interpersonal responses to it. David Crockett's (2017) similar study also provides analysis on the socio-historic patterns that underlie anti-racist strategic actions of middle-class African Americans, whereby he investigates and illuminates the intersection of race, class, culture, and consumption among middle-class African Americans.

The recent currency of the socio-historic patterning of consumption as a domain of CCT, can be traced to Holt's (1997, 1998) adaptation of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction to the more fluid and heterogeneous conditions of American consumer culture. This has since seen CCT researchers attend to the socio-historic and institutional structures that produce consumer subjectivities and naturalise specific taste and preferences within particular socio-economic factions (Arnould & Thompson, 2018).

In addition, CCT scholars, who examine socio-historic patterning of consumption across various communities, indicate that the social patterning constituted and sustained in social processes are not necessarily a conscious phenomenon, as they are mostly not formally organised and are sometimes wildly dispersed and ambiguous units (Holt, 1995, 1997; Allen, 2002, Rokka, 2010). However, while these often dispersed and ambiguous social patternings within which consuming subjects operate have always embraced social dynamics and relationships, some traditional forms of these social dynamics and relationships in the consumption community have been broken in terms of geographical location, temporality and

weakened social ties (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Kucuk, 2008; Schau et al., 2009; Healy & McDonagh, 2013).

With recent developments in online shopping environments and digital media, Hirschman's (1970) seminal work on customer's voice, exit and loyalty, for instance, has over the years served as a springboard to develop newer theories with which to make sense of the dynamics of consumption practices in the contemporary era. In line with this, the socio-historic processes and patterns as a domain of CCT do not just map out the general macro-social, cultural and political conditions surrounding the place of technology in consumption practices, neither does it approach online shopping and digital environments as neat or stable structures and patterns that determine how consumers think, feel and act (Bajde, 2014). Rather this strand delves in-depth into the underlying socio-historic processes and patterns through which mythologies and discourses are patterned within economic, political and social frames (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Kozinets 2008; Bajde, 2014).

Furthermore, the tendency for researchers to focus on differences between sexes and genders has meant that substantial parts of the similarities have been overlooked in several studies (Hyde, 2005; Barker & Jane, 2016). Stating in her gender similarities hypothesis that claims that gender differences are often inflated, Hyde (2005) argues that despite the popularity of several theses that have expounded sex and gender based studies, there are variables that show sex and gender based similarities are often ignored. Going by the assertion that products/commodities are "containers of social relationships and are often hidden" (Willis, 1991, p. 52), the gendered social relations embedded in consumers' consumption practices in terms of both similarities and differences, deserves more attention by CCT researchers. It is however pertinent to state that while CCT draws on the rich theoretical perspectives from cultural studies, it does not have the history, overview or classification of sexuality, gender and power as its central focus. In line with this, this strand of CCT as drawn on in this thesis is not purported to be any of these, but rather the exploration of these streams of perspectives, as drawn on in the analyses and discussion chapters of the data generated and gathered in this study.

Another rationale for studying the underlying socio-historic processes and patterns within CCT is the assertion by theorists that both gender and biological sex, for example, among

other socio-historic patterns, are social constructs that force people into categories using language (Barker & Jane, 2016). It is further argued that a nuanced understanding of the patterns of gendered behaviour, assumed to be ‘natural’, can only be brought to the fore by researchers who take socio-cultural factors into consideration while conducting their fieldwork (Barker & Jane, 2016). This becomes important as various service promotions and marketing efforts targeted at increasing consumption rates of products, have long been situated in representations of social roles and behavioural patterns that diffuse and affirm specific cultural constructions (Douglas, 1994; Thompson, 1997). It becomes useful to therefore proffer perspectives from different communities on how different markers interact with social roles, patterns and expectations concerning consumption practices, while also accounting for why people within varying social roles desire specific products and find them pleasurable, even though they might be unsure and hesitant about how healthy their diets are.

Further emphasising an underlying point of inquiry within the socio-historic patterning of consumption, Arnould and Thompson (2007) ask, “can individuals use consumer culture to transcend the internalised or habituated orientations that emanate from their socialisations in class, gender, ethnicity and other dimensions of social structuring?” (p. 11). In interrogating this line of inquiry, this thesis in similarity with CCT researchers, seeks to move beyond the known dichotomous opposition between sociological determinism and existential autonomy (Sartre, 1956) or models of audience reception and consumption which entail untenable and/or culturally naïve models of sociological agency (Swidler, 1986; Fuchs, 2001), in favour of more nuanced discussions of social reproduction (Arnould & Thompson, 2007). Further unpacking this, Arnould and Thompson (2007) assert that studies that draw on this strand of CCT do not explore social reproduction among consumption subjects in a mechanical sense of ‘genetic cloning’ (that replicates copies of prevailing social conditions). Rather, this is critically explored more in the sense of biological reproduction whereby “‘genetic’ fusions create new and distinct identities with possibility of family resemblances to their structural progenitors” (ibid., 2007, p. 11). This can be understood in terms of Hall’s (2000) assertion that, in the contemporary world, the fragmentation and erosion of collective social identity has led to a whole new set of cultural practices that emerge from a problematic enterprise in the social reproduction of identities.

The socio-historic and institutional structures that produce consumer subjectivities are carefully delineated from the lived experiences and narrations of the research participants for this study. They are used in critically examining how conceptions of gender, ethnicity and social class, for example, play out and are possibly reproduced among these young Africans who are passionate about Coca-Cola, consume it and are exposed to the marketing on traditional and digital media platforms. This creates an analysis and nuanced discussion that will draw on the above perspectives on socio-historic structures within CCT and on assertions that mass consumption and mass cultural audiences attract gendered imagery, and are described as inconstant, easily seduced or overcome by persuasions stimulated by marketing messages and materials (Slater, 1997; Rokka, 2010; Barker & Jane, 2016).

## **2.8 Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies**

Drawing on perspectives and debates in critical media studies as discussed earlier in this chapter, CCT within this fourth strand specifically examines the agency and ideology<sup>20</sup> of consumers who engage with various forms of mass media advertising and marketing of market products. In this regard, it examines their interpretive strategies, actions, creative abilities and understandings which have over the years, instigated a rich tradition of exploring audiences as symbolically and discursively constituted communities (Jensen, 1984; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; O'Neill, 2014). Consequently, CCT theorists assert that various mass media are potential platforms used to convey systems of meaning in the form of 'ideological instructions' that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions with the aim of creating desires for certain identities and lifestyle ideals, while defending dominant interests (Fiske, 1987; Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Also, they argue that consumers creatively and constructively rework mass media advertising and marketing messages in ways that often run against the grain of their corporate encoded meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2018). This domain of CCT sees consumer agency

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<sup>20</sup> The reference to ideology in this thesis is underlined by Thompson's (1990) critical conceptualisation of it as meaning in the service of power, whereby he contends that "the study of ideology entails an examination in different socio-historic contexts of the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various types, from every day linguistic utterances to complex texts and images, in order to establish and sustain relations of domination" (p. 7). Thompson also contends that to study ideology, the ways in which market products are understood and used by those who receive them coupled with how these intersect with forms of domination must be critically unpacked (Thompson, 1994).

as key, as consumers being social actors use media advertising and marketing messages to suit themselves as they develop social relationships in and through media reception and communication (Nairn et al., 2008; Annamma & Li, 2012).

This stream of research therefore examines how consumers exert agency and pursue identity goals through a dialogue with the cultural frames imposed by dominant commercial ideologies that emanate from media marketing messages. This, as used in this thesis, is useful for thinking about how contemporary consumers of cultural and commercial products individually, within specific contexts, make sense of marketing messages disseminated through digital and other mass media platforms, and how critical responses are formulated whether consciously or otherwise (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Kozinets, 2002; Annamma & Li, 2012).

With consumers, conceived as interpretive agents with meaning creative abilities, operating within a plethora of mass media marketing messages which continually saturate everyday life, CCT further draws on the expanding tribe of cyber cultural studies that combine media and cultural studies with Internet research (Fornäs et al., 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; 2018; Barker & Jane, 2016). This is important as consumers now increasingly refer to the Internet when making consumption choices, as they are more connected to each other and other sources of information in the current marketplace than at any point in history (Albinsson & Perera, 2012). This is consistent with the positions of researchers who have over the years opined that, because of mediatisation, we now live in a mediatised society, and as a result, practices and research about media use and consumption must stem from critical understandings of the intersection of cultures with the fluid boundaries between mass media and ICT (Fornäs et al., 2002; Strömbäck, 2008; Hepp, 2010; 2013; Deuze, 2011).

Another important aspect of cyber cultural studies that combine media and cultural studies with Internet research – which CCT draws on – is the use of digital platforms like social media, for instance, for various forms of consumer resistance and activism (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2018). This stems from earlier social movements and concepts, such as

consumer boycotts and ‘prosumption’<sup>21</sup>, which have been established in literature as collective efforts to transform the social order often with respect to marketing and consumption (Peñaloza & Price, 1993; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Albinsson & Perera, 2012). This speaks to CCT theorists’ conceptualisation of contemporary consumers as interpretive agents who are not passive dupes, but who seek to form lifestyles that may defy dominant consumerist norms or challenge corporate power (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Kozinets, 2002).

Although the need to bring to the fore the radical changes in modes of media reception as a result of new media environments has been pointed out in literature, the need for these changes to be tempered has also been emphasised (Carpentier, 2011; Bjur et al., 2013). This is because there are notable continuities of significance between the ways in which audiences and users engage with media messages whether they are mass or interactive audiences (Das, 2010; Carpentier et al., 2013). The understandings gleaned from these have been useful in achieving the desire for a nuanced approach to research that intersects the four CCT strands with the contemporary media scape of the Internet and digital media platforms, now recognised to be culturally significant.

Recent developments has seen the Internet, and more recently, social media, give rise to participatory consumers who interpret marketing messages differently thereby countering the encoded messages and presenting to other consumers, through dialogue, their interpreted versions of the messages. This has been referred to as a sense of empowerment taken up by consumers as a result of their desperation to present messages that reflect their stories, ways of thinking and cultural histories that are fundamental to their personal identity survival (Ross & Nightingale, 2003). Several studies have drawn on the fourth strand of CCT to make sense of consumer narratives of their exposure to media advertising and marketing messages, especially the interactive forms enabled by digital technology and consumption practices (see

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<sup>21</sup> Prosumption, attributed to Alvin Toffler (1980) who devoted attention to it and argued that it has always been pre-dominant in pre-industrial societies, refers to the increasing centrality of both production and consumption, in a consumer society, as a result of social changes such as the explosion of user generated content on social media platforms. Prosumption also captures the dynamics and complex interplay that underlie the involvement and evolving of consumers in both production and consumption processes thereby seeing them as prosumers (see Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

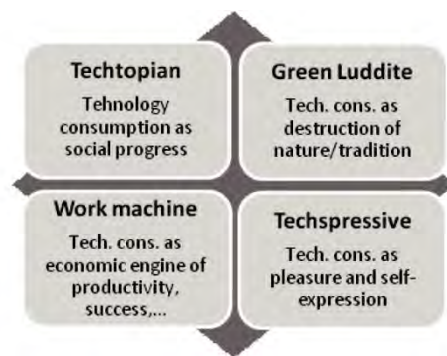
McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, 1999; Kozinets, 2000; Varman & Belk, 2009; Munar, 2010). This has been used to offer analysis to specific research questions like: What normative messages do commercial media transmit regarding consumption? How do new technologies and markets become legitimate objects of consumer desire and consequent consumption? What are the ideological underpinnings of consumer societies? How do consumers make sense of these ideologies in relation to their consumption or anti-consumption practices? etc.

One such study is Varman and Belk's (2009) that looks at the perception and consumption of Coca-Cola products by villagers in north India, with an analysis that indicated anti-Coca-Cola sentiments expressed by the villagers. The anti-consumption ideology held by the villagers indicated that both Coca-Cola as a corporation and the various products offered were framed negatively as Coca-Cola beverages, alleged to have pesticide content, were deemed inferior to local soft drinks (Varman & Belk, 2009).

A different study that demonstrates an investigation into mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies is the research by Zhao and Belk (2008), which through the medium of advertising in China examines the country's on-going transition from communism to a consumer society. The analysis underscores the assertion that the marketplace is alive with cultural mythologies and political ideologies, as the advertising messages analysed show that these messages draw on a rich tradition of political propaganda to recast China as a consumer society (Zhao & Belk, 2008; Varman & Belk, 2009). In another study, advertisements and marketing messages are analysed to show how they often become a means for humour, social bonding and interactions in which consumers together critique and rework the meanings of messages, with few of the messages and interactions actually instigating pressures and desires to buy the product advertised (Ritson & Elliott, 1999).

Further reviewing the usefulness of CCT's fourth strand, Bajde (2014) emphasises how this strand can be used to analyse technological consumptions and developments and how these fit into the landscape of various subcultures and societies. Bajde's (2014) review which draws on Kozinets' (2008) analysis of contemporary technology ideologies and consumption, alludes to how this CCT strand helps researchers to unpack and deepen their understandings of how technological innovations, evident in consumers' reception and consumption of newer

forms of advertising and marketing, goes hand in glove with cultural dynamics. Kozinets' (2008) four 'ideological nodes' used to show how the ideological field of technology consumption is composed, illustrates how CCT research which investigates newer forms of advertising and marketing messages can be used broadly to understand consumers' narratives and their different preferences of contemporary technology. With three of the four resultant ideological nodes identified by Kozinets (2008) (see figure below), being technophilic in their appreciation of technology as social progress, economic advancement etc. and the last node being technophobic, these (as drawn on in the analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis) proffer additional frames for CCT researchers to make sense of their gathered data, while their analyses can contribute to theoretical expansion within the CCT community.



**Figure 2.2: The ideological field of technology consumption (Kozinets, 2008)**

An overview of most analyses within the purview of the fourth strand of CCT emphasise the importance of considering cultural contexts within which advertising and marketing messages are received and consumers make decisions (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Ritson & Elliott, 1999; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). By decoding and deconstructing mass-mediated marketing messages and marketplace ideologies, CCT theorists reveal the ways through which systems of cultural production, firms and corporations 'seduce' consumers, as willing participants, into lifestyles through consumption of their products (Scott, 1994; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Annamma & Li, 2012).

Furthermore, unpacking and analysing media advertising and marketing messages within the fourth domain of CCT, also often involves researchers drawing on analytical tools from semiotic and literary critical theories to make sense of the symbolic meanings, cultural ideals and ideological inducements encoded in popular culture texts, alongside the rhetorical tactics that are used to make these appeals compelling (see Scott, 1994; McQuarrie & Mick, 1992, 1996, 1999; Escalas & Stern, 2003; Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2018). This is evident in CCT studies that employ multi-method approaches to analyse rhetorical and imagistic qualities that contribute to advertising and marketing resonance among consumers across varying contexts (see Scott, 1990, 1994; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Escalas & Stern, 2003). In the same vein, the analysis and discussion of the advertisements and marketing materials the research participants for this thesis engaged with during fieldwork, alongside the ensuing narratives, is carried out by also drawing on useful analytical tools from semiotic and literary critical theories. Analyses within the fourth domain of CCT are hinged on assertions by theorists who read media advertising and marketing messages as lifestyle and identity instructions that convey “idealised consumer types and unadulterated marketplace ideologies” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 875).

## **2.9 Critiques of CCT**

While CCT is by conceptualisation multidisciplinary with adjoining disciplines and fields through which intellectual horizons can be expanded and insights added, it has however been critiqued by several researchers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Thompson et al., 2013; Bajde, 2014; Akaka et al., 2015). Part of these critiques is that the continued emphasis of CCT research on experientialist/emic analysis of individual consumers, has constituted a hegemony of some sorts that is impeding research focus on sociocultural shaping and reproduction of ideology and consumption practices of consumer subject positions. More specifically, is the critique of the CCT domain that examines multiple aspects of culture and consumption context alongside consumers’ collaboration in value creation, co-creation and evaluation of experience (Akaka et al., 2015). This has been critiqued for concentrating more on the study of the practices and perception of consumers, while paying less attention towards the participation and perspectives of firms and other actors in co-creating and evaluating experience (Akaka et al., 2015). However, with some cited examples outlined in the earlier discussion of CCT in this chapter, alongside several other recent research efforts,

this has been proved untrue (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999; Allen, 2002; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Peñaloza & Barnhart, 2011; Giesler, 2006, 2012). Also, referring to this critique as portentous assessments, Thompson et al. (2013) argue that there are a plethora of CCT studies that have extensively addressed the institutional, historical, ideological and sociological shaping of consumption and the broader market and social systems, which situate consumers' identity projects and consumption practices. They further emphasise that CCT researchers do often contextualise, in their studies, the specific firm or corporation whose product consumption is being analysed, as the activities of the corporation have an underlying or explicit influence on consumers' experience or perspectives (Thompson et al., 2013). However, this critique might, perhaps, classify as one of the critiques that has been referred to by Arnould & Thompson (2005) as judgment biases where some exceptional and controversial experimental moments in the CCT tradition takes precedence over the baseline activities within the research community. Another notable critique of CCT, similar to that cited above, is that CCT researchers study particular contexts as ends in themselves, and as a result of this, its contribution to theory development within the broad fields of consumer research, critical theory and cultural studies is not significant (Lehmann, 1999; Simonson, Carmon, Dhar, Drolet, & Nowlis, 2001; Fitchett et al., 2014). Arnould and Thompson (2005) however, argue that the diversity of investigative contexts/fields within which CCT researchers study makes it easy to lose sight of the "theoretical forest within which these studies are situated" (p. 870). This consequently makes it convenient to singularly classify such studies based on the main issue/topical setting such studies set out to investigate and not as theoretical questions interrogated in the specific research setting (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Arnould & Thompson (2005) further argue that this critique is analogous to classifying experimental research in terms of its research stimuli as CCT researchers do not just study contexts where products are received and consumed, but rather, they study in reception and consumption contexts to generate new constructs and theoretical insights and to extend existing theoretical formulations.

While the counter arguments above attempt to illustrate the diversity of CCT research and present it as a framework through which virtually any cultural, social and individual consumption context can be examined, the need for critical assessments of the values and benefits of applying CCT as a framework with a totalising potential across varying contexts has been emphasised (Cova et al., 2013; Fitchett et al., 2014). This according to Fitchett et

al., (2014) will enhance discussions that will pave the way for a more critically reflexive awareness in CCT, as the framework has been said to be less impressive in terms of its own production of ideology in consumer culture. Although past and present CCT scholarship is interspersed and driven forward by self-reflective, critical, alerting and demanding texts (Bode & Østergaard, 2013), the trans-disciplinary nature of CCT makes continuous critical assessments expedient.

Similarly, there has been a call for critical assessments of the concept of 'we-ness' in CCT. 'We-ness' here refers to the constructedness of the border between the included and excluded domains of CCT and the dynamic collectivity of theorists and researchers within CCT community (Bode & Østergaard, 2013). Noting that beneficial 'we-ness' emerges out of internal and external 'struggles and conflicts', Bode and Østergaard (2013) argue that critical assessments are needed to ensure a sustainable and dynamic development in CCT, as this will aid disintegration and help achieve the needed balance between the radical and pragmatic voices within CCT community. These critical assessments become imperative as the CCT community moves beyond the action period where efforts were mainly geared at conducting ground-breaking research that evidences the position of CCT pioneers and scholars (Bajde, 2014). This according to Bode and Østergaard (2013) has seen the current CCT community transform partly to the reputation era where the focus is to establish CCT as a reputable framework in the scholarly 'world'. Referred to as the transformation from action to reputation and described as a move towards the power position, this comes with the tendency to assume a sense of 'we-ness' which can lead to the CCT community overlooking the changing relationship between the diversity of individual researchers and the overall construction of the 'we' (Bode & Østergaard, 2013). The need for this assessment is also underpinned by the new entrants into the CCT community, who like first year doctoral students, for instance, have backgrounds in different disciplines in the social sciences and humanities and may not be familiar with the theoretical perspectives drawn on by CCT pioneers (Thompson et al., 2013).

Another key aspect critiqued and put forward as needing critical assessment within CCT, is the varying histories of the academic movements that later became the CCT research community. This becomes important as Askegaard and Scott (2013) bring to the fore subtle evidentiary gaps from different historical accounts that came out from their fieldwork of

interviewing a short list of living sources, who were instrumental in the birth of CCT. The selection and reference of the mid-1980s as the moment of a paradigm shift that gave rise to the emergence of CCT has been cited as an example, as the respondents (pioneer CCT scholars) argue that there are research projects published prior to the 1980s (Askegaard & Scott, 2013). The diversity of scholars from different disciplines who proffer historical accounts through the lens of their respective disciplines and circumstances has been brought forward as a possible reason for the differences in dates (Askegaard & Scott, 2013). As this critique causes different reactions within the CCT community and beyond, what remains germane, as Oladipo (1996) argues, goes beyond historical accounts of how a theoretical framework originated, but rather, the extent to which it can illuminate contemporary problems of the day and provide the context of ideas within which particular choices and preferences made in the realm of social action can be unpacked and analysed. However, the need to critically assess the historical records amongst other epistemological perspectives has been foregrounded in recent CCT literature, as existing historical accounts have been referred to as being less a history of CCT (Askegaard & Scott, 2013; Bode & Ostergaard, 2013).

Further justifying the need for the urgent overviews and assessments needed in CCT, is the call for the CCT community to incorporate what Holt (2017) terms Consumer Culture Strategy (CCS) as a subset within CCT. This he argues, will better position CCT as a framework that can drive substantive engagements that have real world impact and that can bring novel solutions to social problems such as climate change and public health issues (Holt, 2017). While Holt (2017) acknowledges that CCT has become a useful research model, skillset and wide portfolio of intellectual tools that, in combination, has the potential to shape policies and solve challenging social problems, he however posits that CCT as presently constituted is “unintentionally disabling the expected societal impact” (p. 2). Drawing on his over 25 years’ experience as a proponent and active member of the CCT community, Holt (2017) further argues that CCT as presently constituted, takes after the natural sciences which though useful for theoretical expansions and contributions needs to be intentionally restructured into a problem-solving strategy model. Putting CCT’s eclectic approach to theory and research into a problem-solving strategy model will position the CCT researcher as an adept development strategist that comes up with relevant solutions to pertinent social problems rather than just advancing a theory that may only have a tangential relation to societal problems (Holt, 2017).

Finally, the CCT set of approaches has also been critiqued for having a bias for qualitative research projects. This according to Arnould and Thompson (2005, 2018) highlights the misconception that has reduced the differences between CCT and other consumer research traditions to mainly methodological differences. Although qualitative data has been central to CCT research projects (for instance, Belk et al., 1988; Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994), it is argued that this predilection is hinged on the aims that drive the research community and not a passion or fidelity for qualitative data (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Thus the CCT community over the years, has seen the emergence of research projects which place particular emphasis on qualitative data collected in-context (that is, in the field) for the purpose of understanding (not prediction) and particularisation (not generalisation). This demonstrates the critique by CCT pioneers that the dominant research methods prior to the advent of CCT has “inherent limitations that kept consumer research from developing a full picture of the consumer experience” (Arnould, 2006, p. 606). However, it has been emphasised in recent literature that CCT is committed to any methodological orientation, as it does not canonise a qualitative-quantitative divide as evidenced by notable CCT studies that embrace quantitative methods (see Arnould & Price, 1993; Moore & Lutz, 2000; Coulter, Price, & Feick, 2003; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Arnould, 2006).

With postmodernism, a core theme in the consumer identity projects and market based formations of CCT, posited by some theorists and researchers to be at its saturation phase, is the call to reimagine CCT framework in line with the debates gradually gaining momentum around concepts such as ‘post-postmodernism’, ‘auto-modernity’, ‘meta-modernism’, among others (see Vermeulen & Van der Akker, 2010; Boje, 2011, Fjellestad & Engberg, 2012; Cova et al., 2013). These emanating debates are however, against the backdrop of another ever-growing debate on postmodernism in Africa which indicates the ambivalence of the concept on the continent (Irele, 2010; Afolayan, 2007), alongside speculations that the transition to postmodernity is still occurring in some other countries, like India and Turkey for instance, and that the western world is yet to fully transcend modernity (Yüksel & Mirza, 2010; Bradshaw & Dholakia, 2011). Cova et al. (2013), however assert that CCT is better reimaged in line with emerging concepts such as ‘post-postmodernism’, if it will continually remain a community of reflexive scholars who critically engage with the macrostructures within which the framework is located.

Also notable is the critique that the CCT community over time, has not had sufficient input from theorists and researchers in the global south (Thompson et al., 2013). This is similar to Arnould's (1984, 1989, 2001) sustained critique of 'americo-eurocentrism' in CCT and the calls to inject voices from Africa into the CCT community. This has seen Arnould come up with research projects, that over the years have emphasised the distinctive role of consumption practices in defining the boundaries of Hausa households in West Africa, alternative globalities enacted through their consumption, distinctive forms of relationship marketing, existing flexible cluster forms among other themes (Arnould, 1984, 1989, 2001; Arnould & Mohr, 2005). This can be seen as motivation for researchers such as Bonsu (2008, 2009), Scott (2009) and Dolan et al. (2012), who draw on CCT for their respective research projects. In line with these research efforts, this thesis serves as an addition and important contribution to the African voice in CCT, as contemporary research projects from Africa and the global south will provide needed perspectives and contributions useful for the desired critical assessment needed in improving the CCT framework.

The researcher thus understands the critiques of CCT as discussed above and despite the limitations and somewhat overdependence at times on notions of consumers unfettered 'agency', as seen in some anthropological studies (for example, Abu-Lughod, 2008; Boellstorff, 2015) this study strives, in applying CCT as framework in this dissertation, to balance the 'agency' of the study participants within the constraints and limitations of 'structures' that shape their responses, in ways that they are almost always unaware of.

## **2.10 The theory of cognitive dissonance**

This theory drawn from psychology has been incorporated into this study to provide some theoretical perspectives to understand the contradictions between study participants' attitudes and beliefs about Coca-Cola. These include their generally positive reception of the various media marketing campaigns of Coca-Cola, their often habitual and frequent consumption of Coke and the information they receive about the ill-effects of SSB consumption, including, especially weight gain, and a greater likelihood of being diagnosed with NCDs as they get older, due to their continued Coke consumption.

Leon Festinger (1957) first developed the theory of cognitive dissonance to describe a state of being where individuals simultaneously hold cognitions that are seemingly inconsistent and

conflicting and are therefore compelled to expend effort to eliminate or reduce the ‘dissonance’ between conflicting sets of knowledge or views (Aronson, 1969; Akpan, Beard, & Notar, 2018). Cognition as used here refers to the act or process of knowing based on personal belief systems that have mostly been acquired and accumulated through various perceptions of reality (Akpan et al., 2018). Dissonance, on the other hand, comes to play when new information, that suggests that erstwhile thoughts, feelings, belief systems, as well as the behavioural patterns it sponsors are unwise, become available after a period of time and stand in apparent contradiction to these belief systems (Stone & Fernandez, 2008; Akpan et al., 2018). Cognitive dissonance does not occur automatically when individuals come across opposing beliefs and opinions, but it occurs when there is an awareness of both the inconsistency among cognitions and the different sets of consequences that come with the cognitions (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976).

Theorised as a negative state of tension similar to hunger or thirst, which results in the reactionary human efforts made to reduce or eliminate dissonance whenever there are inconsistencies among cognitions (that is, their opinions and belief systems), cognitive dissonance has also been posited as a very common psychological phenomenon that many individuals experience on a daily basis (Festinger 1957; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). While there are research projects that have over the years shown that the pressure to restore and maintain consistency between cognitions can potentially lead to enduring and meaningful changes in the way people think and act, dissonance is more likely to be reduced or eliminated by aligning with the most attractive option, i.e. going with the stronger belief regardless of the consequences (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Festinger, 1962; Cooper, 2007; Stone & Focella, 2011). Festinger (1962) further suggests, as evidenced in the experiment he conducted amongst high school girls, that an already chosen object or course of action is always more attractive to the individual when compared to similar ‘not yet chosen’ alternatives.

Chapter Six of this thesis tries to make sense of study participants various opinions, beliefs and information about Coca-Cola, which they have come across at various stages of their childhood and young adult lives, and how that contrasts with health information, increasingly frequent, that SSBs are hazardous to human health. People resort to three tactics to reduce dissonance: the deliberate reduction of the importance of the dissonant beliefs; the deliberate

addition of more consonant beliefs in such a way that they outweigh the dissonant beliefs; and the changing of dissonant beliefs so that they become consistent with other beliefs, opinions and behaviours (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976; Akpan et al., 2018). These three ways of reducing dissonance are driven by a strong desire for ‘internal consistency’ of beliefs and the comfort that deeply held opinions and beliefs have ‘always’ been right (Festinger, 1957; Stone & Focella, 2011). This has been referred to as the principle of cognitive consistency, which is always at play due to the ubiquitous nature of dissonant situations (Gawronski & Strack, 2012). Also highlighted in relevant literature are some of the ways to know when cognitive dissonance is being experienced. These include conflict avoidance, rationalisation, ignoring the facts, the fear of missing out, feeling squeamish or uncomfortable right before or after making a decision or having a conversation, among others (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976).

The theory of cognitive dissonance also posits that the magnitude of dissonant cognitions can be determined using the most resistant cognition as the focal point or point of orientation while each consonant or dissonant cognition is weighted by the importance the individual attaches to the cognition (Festinger, 1957; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Additionally, an increase in the number of consonant cognitions coupled with the sense of importance attached to it will lead to a reduction in the magnitude of the dissonant cognitions, provided the dissonant cognitions remain constant both in number and in the level of importance attached to it by the concerned individual(s) (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976).

As the study participants made sense of the themes discussed during focus groups and the individual in-depth interviews sessions conducted during fieldwork, this theorising provided an additional perspective to make sense of the transcripts of the interviews and conversations that emanated from the fieldwork.

The next chapter discusses the research design/methodological procedure, alongside other procedures and ethical considerations taken during the fieldwork.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter comprises of five sections. The first section provides a discussion and rationale for the research design and methodology for this study. This section, drawing on the quantitative and qualitative research designs available in extant literature, makes a case for qualitative research design, while also outlining some key ideas from the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) paradigm, as the main qualitative approach used in this study.

The second section focuses on, and provides rationale for, the particular sampling strategies designed for use, and then used, at various points in this study. The third section discusses the techniques, procedures and methods of data collection and how the data was analysed. The fourth and final section of this chapter explains the ethics permissions granted, the ethical approaches taken by me, and discusses the paths followed to enhance the validity, reliability and overall trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.2 Research design and methodology - the qualitative approach**

Referred to as the procedure used in collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data, the research design aids the researcher's decisions while conducting the study and describes the model used for the study (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007; Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011). The research design is the overall plan adopted by the researcher with the aim to connect research problems/questions to empirical research in an attempt to provide answers to the research questions. Implicit or explicit in every empirical study, the research design articulates the type of data required for a specific study, choice of research subjects and research sites, the methods to be used to collect and analyse the data and how all these will answer the research questions (Yin, 2003; Wyk, 2011). Yin (2003) further describes the research design as the logic that links the data to be collected for a study to the initial questions of the study.

The research design used for this study is embedded in the qualitative approach to research, which is underpinned by the phenomenological tradition<sup>22</sup> that emphasises and takes into account that all human beings are in a “continual process of constructing, interpreting and making sense of their world” (Bryman, 1984; Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 28-29). This phenomenological tradition rooted in the lived experiences of people, is centred on human consciousness which primarily entails the understanding of individuals in terms of their own personal interpretation of reality and the meanings they give or make of social practices in the society: it is an investigation and examination into what constitutes consciousness without a subject-object dichotomy (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Lock & Strong, 2010). Thus, this study is embedded in the qualitative approach to research because it speaks to the aim/objective of seeing the social world from the perspectives and experiences of young Africans who consume Coca-Cola and are regularly exposed to the mass media marketing, especially digital, mobile and social media-centric marketing of Coca-Cola and other SSBs.

The qualitative methodological approach to research drawn on in this study, can be contrasted to the positivist tradition and approaches taken in natural sciences within the quantitative methodology which comes with the tendency to often “see people as inert” (Bryman, 1984), “thereby viewing events from the perspective of a cluster of empirical concerns, imposed upon social reality, that sees events outside the individuals’ lived experiences and interpretation of reality” (Bryman, 1984, p. 78). The quantitative approach as a research methodology, places emphasis on fixed measurements, hypothesis (or hunch) testing and an arguably less protracted form of fieldwork involvement by the researcher (Bryman, 1984). The qualitative approach however is more fluid and flexible as it emphasises the discovery and exploration of unanticipated, unusual and novel findings, while examining a social phenomenon within a specific context (Bryman, 1984). This approach also emphasises the

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<sup>22</sup> Rooted in the 20th century philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger; phenomenology is an inductive qualitative research tradition related to human consciousness, and based on the meaning drawn from human experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Reiners, 2012). Smith et al. (2009, p. 11) contends that “phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience”. Consequently, phenomenologists describe and interpret the world as perceived and experienced by their research subjects.

researcher's close involvement on the research site(s), because of the commitment to see the social world through the eyes of the research participants (Merriam, 2002; Neuman, 2003).

The differences between the quantitative and qualitative research designs are mostly in terms of their ontological, epistemological and theoretical underpinnings (Bryman, 1984; Lindlof, 1995; Yilmaz, 2013). For example, the quantitative research is often informed by objectivist epistemology which endorses the view that psychological and social phenomena have an objective reality that is independent of the subjects being studied (Yilmaz, 2013). The qualitative research design by contrast, is based on an interpretivist-constructivist epistemology and explores what it contends to be a socially constructed and dynamic reality through a framework which is value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic and context sensitive, with an aim to provide, and then examine, an in-depth description of a particular phenomenon from the perspectives of the people involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Yilmaz, 2013). While the quantitative research design in social sciences and humanities requires the researcher to use a pre-constructed standardised instrument or predetermined response categories into which varying responses and perspectives of randomly selected large sample of participants are expected to fit, the qualitative approach mostly draws on purposeful sampling to understand the social world from the perspectives of a smaller number of participants in their natural settings without recourse to standardised or predetermined response categories (Yilmaz, 2013). For instance, detailed and open-ended responses from participants in a qualitative study affords the researcher the needed understanding and platform to present the world as seen and experienced by research participants, without necessarily predetermining these standpoints or responses.

Although there is no simple distinction between the qualitative and quantitative approach to research, researchers within both paradigms of enquiry do often affirm that human behaviour can be patterned and regular, even though quantitative researchers see this in terms of the laws of cause and effect, while qualitative researchers see this as being created out of evolving meaning systems that people generate as they socially interact (Neuman, 2003; Tuli, 2010; Silverman, 2013). This, among other varying epistemological and ontological positions among researchers, has over the years seen the reliability and validity of the qualitative approach to research being debated and these engagements, evidenced in literature, are still ongoing (Bryman, 1984; Deacon et al., 1999; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln,

2008; Silverman, 2013). This has seen the qualitative approach critiqued as being a paradigm of enquiry that is unscientific and a disguised version of secular humanism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

However, researchers within the qualitative medium of enquiry contend that studies which draw on the basic principles of social sciences cannot be said to be unscientific merely because they are aligned more with interpretive than positivistic methods in their approach (Lindlof, 1995; Mabweazara, 2006). It is argued that the appropriateness, reliability and validity of qualitative research is realisable through the researcher's inter-subjectivity, and ability to document, demonstrate and follow the study procedure systematically, consistently and rigorously (Kvale, 1989; Silverman, 2010). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) point out, research, either quantitative or qualitative is scientific and the qualitative research is a paradigm of enquiry in its own right. The place and importance of the qualitative medium of enquiry has been established as far back as the 1920s and 1930s when the 'Chicago school'<sup>23</sup> used this paradigm of enquiry for their research projects which were "heavily qualitative, rigorous in data analysis, and focused on the city as a social laboratory" (Lutters & Ackerman, 1996, p. 2). Within the qualitative paradigm of enquiry, the researcher is interested in understanding the perspectives of informants and participants, while fostering trust, retrieving experiences from the past, gaining expert insight or information, obtaining descriptions of events or scenes that are normally unavailable both for observation, and in understanding a sensitive or intimate relationship or analysing certain kinds of discourse (Lindlof, 1995).

The qualitative researcher embarks on a research out of personal and intellectual enthrallment by a phenomenon and continues to respect its integrity as they carry out field activities using rigorous and systematic procedures that are reliable, valid and methodological (Lindlof, 1995; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Qualitative methodology as a research paradigm is most suited for studies that seek to uncover, understand and gain new insights into phenomenon

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<sup>23</sup> The 'Chicago school' refers to a specific set of researchers at the university of Chicago during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who motivated and argued that humans are constituted by symbolic and cultural elements not biological forces or instincts and that urban and social phenomena are therefore best observed and studied qualitatively in naturalistic contexts (Lutters & Ackerman, 1996; Wiley, 2011).

that little or nothing is known about, or knowledge areas where in-depth understanding is needed (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This is the case with regards to the key questions that animated this study, hence the use of the qualitative approach to research in this thesis.

Furthermore, researchers in support of the qualitative research paradigm argue, that while quantitative research approaches may produce large quantities of statistical data, such data cannot reproduce the intricacies of the social setting in which mass media messages are ordinarily received let alone bringing to the fore an understanding of the meanings that people make of the complex social world that they inhabit (Deacon et al., 1999). Also, drawing on the influence of the “ethnographic turn” (Moore, 1993, p. 1), mass media researchers who function majorly within this paradigm further argue that culturally nuanced insights, ‘thick description’ and in-depth understandings gleaned from politically and socially situated mass media audiences, is best gotten from the qualitative research paradigm (Morley, 1986; Tuchman, 1991; Ang, 1996). This understanding also informs the choice of the qualitative approach to research in this thesis as it provides the researcher with methods and tools with which social phenomena can be investigated in-depth. This allows for the emergence of rich data that enhances a contextual understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

The decision to embed this thesis within the qualitative research paradigm is consistent with the assertion that the choice among available methodologies, should be based on the nature of research questions to be answered and not just on ontological and epistemological commitments (Bryman, 1984; Lindlof, 1995). In line with this, Bryman (1984) argues that an underlying reason for the continuous divergences between the quantitative and qualitative approach is the simultaneous and occasional confused treatment of both philosophical and technical issues. Philosophical issues refer to questions of epistemology, that is, the appropriate foundation for studying the human society while technical issues speaks to the appropriateness of methods of research in relation to one another (Bryman, 1984).

This study, with an understanding of methodological issues in knowledge production, therefore, employs the qualitative approach to research firstly because it provides a useful set of systematic and concise procedures which enhances the inter-subjectivity of the researcher. Secondly, this is hinged on assertions that significant research projects within the fields of

media and cultural studies have been through the qualitative approach (Tuchman, 1991). Thirdly, this study employs the methodology embedded in the qualitative approach and not quantitative because it aims to have a particularistic (focus on a particular context), naturalistic (about real people and situations) and a thick explanatory, as well as descriptive data that is inductive, holistic and heuristic (illuminates the reader's/researcher's understanding of the phenomenon) (Willis, 2007) and not to provide evidence that is solely based on the "logic of mathematics, the principle of numbers or the methods of statistical analysis" (Meyer, 1988, p. 247).

### **3.2.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)**

Although phenomenology underpins all qualitative research as it underscores the essence and structure of an experience, interpretative phenomenologists focus on examining and showing how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience thereby bringing to the fore inner experiences usually un-probed in everyday life (Merriam, 2002). For interpretative phenomenologists, there is a nexus between individuals' lived experiences, their culture, social context, and historical period in which they live (Orbanic, 1999). IPA, within which this qualitative research study is embedded, is committed to clarifying and elucidating a phenomenon (for example an event, process or relationship) and, thus proffers a platform useful for examining experiences of embodied socio-historic situated persons (Willig & Rogers, 2017). With an aim to underscore the essence of a phenomenon, IPA entails analysing and making sense of the experiences of people, who are research participants in a study, with regards to the specific phenomenon (Patton, 1990).

The description, interpretation and analysis of lived-in experiences of research participants in IPA, stems from the idiographic component emphasised in the IPA approach. IPA is idiographic in that it emphasises detailed and in-depth examinations of how individual persons in their unique contexts make sense of a given phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA researchers seek to learn from each participant's individual story, and through a deep individualised analysis, a more informative understanding of participants' thoughts, beliefs and behaviours is unpacked and made sense of (Smith, 2011), hence the decision to embed this qualitative research within IPA. Accordingly, IPA researchers utilise "small, purposively-selected and carefully situated samples" (Smith, Flower, Tindall, & Larkin,

2009, p. 29) as they aim to produce an in-depth examination of certain phenomena, and not to generate a theory to be generalised over the whole population. However, comparing multiple IPA studies on a particular problem proffers generalisable insights into universal patterns or mechanisms (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

As indicated above, this qualitative study is embedded within IPA specifically because of its commitment to intense qualitative analysis of detailed accounts derived from participants, as evidenced in IPA studies that represent in-depth examinations of participants lived experiences (see Bramley & Eatough, 2005; De Visser & Smith, 2006). More commonly, this commitment involves the detailed individualised analytic treatment of each case, followed by the search for patterns across the cases whereby the balance of convergence and divergence is evidenced in the data interpretation and analysis, as shared themes are not the only focus of analysis but specific ways these themes play out for individuals are also examined and analysed (Smith et al., 1999; Smith, 2011).

IPA, mostly developed and articulated in the 1990s within the field of qualitative research, brings to the fore the flexible and dynamic nature of qualitative studies as it shows that there is no direct route to experience and that research is really about trying to be “experience close” rather than “experience far” (Smith, 2011, pp. 9-10). As discovered, and corroborated, while undergoing fieldwork for this study, Smith (2011) rightly states, that the lived-in experience of the research participants which the IPA researcher wants to make sense of requires a process and series of engagements and interpretation, “as the lived-in experience cannot be plucked straightforwardly from the heads of the participants” (p. 10).

Consistent with early phenomenological tradition, IPA recognises that exploring lived-in experiences of research participants is an interpretative endeavour on the part of both researcher and participants, as the researcher is trying to make sense of participants as the participants themselves, try to make sense of certain phenomenon in their world<sup>24</sup> (Smith,

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<sup>24</sup> IPA’s position on seeing the exploration of participants lived-in experiences as an interpretative endeavor is consistent with Heidegger’s (1962) proclamation that ‘the methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation’ (Orth, 1984).

2011). This is often referred to as a double hermeneutic<sup>25</sup> or dual interpretation process because it entails firstly the meanings particular experiences, events, and/or phenomenon hold for participants in their personal and social world. Secondly, it entails the researcher examining and analysing these meanings to make sense of the participants meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). While IPA researchers examine and try to understand what an experience is from participants' perspective, they at the same time, drawing on the on-going process, try to formulate critical questions such as; what is this participant trying to achieve here?, Is anything meaningful being said here?, Do I have a sense of something going on here that s/he is perhaps less aware of?, etc. (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). By doing this, IPA researchers aim to underscore the participants' cognitive and affective reaction to what is happening to them, as IPA believes in a chain of connection between an embodied experience, talking about that experience and participants making sense of, and emotional reaction to, that experience (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2011).

IPA's commitment to interpreting and analysing participants experience by seeing them as cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical beings with a chain of connection between their talk, thinking and emotional state, distinguishes it from other discursive analytical approaches which focus more on the linguistic resources or conversational features participants are drawing on while providing accounts of their experience. Although, IPA and other discursive approaches draw on linguistically based resources and are concerned with the close reading of participants' reports, their rationale is different, as IPA researchers talk to participants and analyse what they say in order to try to learn about how they are making sense of their experience, while discourse analysts, for instance, examine what participants say in order to learn about how they are constructing accounts of experience (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999; Smith, 2011).

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<sup>25</sup> The hermeneutics (from the Greek word 'to interpret' or 'to make clear') referred to as double here stems from the phenomenological tradition developed by Martin Heidegger (1962) as existential philosophy and hermeneutics (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Heidegger (1962) concerned with the ontological question of existence itself, referred to phenomenology as hermeneutics and maintained that the function of the phenomenologist is to 'help make sense' of the phenomenon which occurs (Smith et al., 2009).

The increasingly large quantity of research projects embedded within IPA has made the approach widely used within “cognate disciplines in the human, health and social sciences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 5). These plethora of studies (e.g. Larkin et al., 2006; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, 2011; Tuffour, 2017 etc.) provide the theoretical, philosophical and methodological underpinnings of IPA and have provided ample response in various ways to critiques that IPA is ambiguous and is mostly descriptive and not sufficiently interpretative (Smith et al., 2009). Also, the critique that IPA focuses more on perception has been rebuffed as Smith et al. (2009) argue that IPA does not only seek to understand lived experiences, but also explores why they occur by employing contextual, idiographic and hermeneutic analysis to understand the cultural position of participants’ experiences.

IPA has also been critiqued for being more of a psychological ‘therapy oriented’ research approach rather than being phenomenological (Van Manen, 2017). Arguing that psychology and phenomenology are not mutually exclusive, Smith (2018) asserts that IPA is used by many researchers within human and social science fields and these researchers, for instance, can be both phenomenological and sociological or architectural etc., as IPA has a conception of individuals as inherently self-reflective beings who as part of being human, can make sense of events around them without needing the therapist or researcher to engender it. Smith (2018) further argues that this position is consistent with early phenomenological tradition and human science researchers (e.g. Taylor, 1985; Giddens, 1991 etc.) that sees the human as a self-reflective agent. The IPA researcher is not a therapist but has the role of inviting purposively selected participants (as done in this study), as self-reflective beings, to a session of sense-making as s/he acts as witness to the articulation of participants’ experiences as they self-reflect while the researcher in turn makes sense of the exercise/session (Smith, 2018).

### **3.3 Sampling strategy**

As indicated in Chapter One, the overall sampling technique that underlies this study is purposive. This was drawn on bearing in mind, firstly, that a sample is a portion of a population/universe where population does not necessarily refer to people only, but can also mean total quantity of the things or cases which are the subject of a particular research project (Taylor, 2005; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Secondly, the sampling technique used in this thesis stems from the understanding that sampling remains a critical step in the research

process as it is “rarely practical, efficient or ethical to study whole populations” (Marshall, 1996, p. 522) and the eventual sample selection has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research (Coyne, 1997).

Consequently, the non-random sampling technique of purposeful sampling as a ‘purposive’ sampling strategy which evidences the “conscious and deliberate intentions of those who apply the procedures” (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 50) was used in this thesis. Sometimes referred to as judgement sampling, the purposive sampling strategy is consistent with the IPA approach whereby the researcher deliberately employs criteria that allow him/her to use as a sample a fairly homogenous group for whom the research questions will be significant (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Also, as a study conducted within the qualitative research tradition, purposive sampling is useful because it proffers the platform to gain the needed intensive and in-depth understanding which this thesis aims to achieve, and not an extensive statistical representation which depicts sampling within the quantitative research tradition.

As a technique widely used in qualitative research, purposeful sampling is used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Information rich cases, which remains the underlying principle that is common to all purposeful sampling in qualitative research, refers to data sources from which the researcher can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry (Coyne, 1997; Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling thus entails the researcher seeking out and selecting participants according to the needs/aims of the study, whereby the specificity of the participants is dependent on the phenomena under investigation. Purposeful sampling was employed in this thesis on two levels: firstly, on the choice of the geographical locations for the study and secondly, on the choice of the young adults who were enlisted as participants for this study.

### **3.3.1 The choice of field sites/geographical locations for this study**

While the rationale behind the choice of Nigeria and South Africa has been outlined in Chapter One, intensity sampling underlies the choice of the University of Lagos and Rhodes University as geographical locations where young adults were enlisted as participants within both countries. Intensity sampling, also referred to as intensive sampling, is a type of purposeful sampling where information-rich locations are selected as they intensely, but not

extremely, manifest the phenomenon of interest to be examined (Patton, 1990, 2002; Suri, 2011; Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier & Wilhelm, 2011). Intensity sampling allows the researcher to draw on locations where there are excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest but not extreme or unusual examples that characterise extreme case sampling, where extreme or deviant cases may be so unusual to the extent of distorting the manifestation of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990).

The University of Lagos and Rhodes University were selected as they were both information-rich locations for this study and present intensive and interesting cases of young Africans who consume Coca-Cola and are regularly exposed to the mass media marketing, especially digital, mobile and social media-centric marketing of Coca-Cola and other SSBs. The choice of the University of Lagos was initially made in the year 2017 when the research proposal was being prepared. This was followed by a two-week preliminary observation phase<sup>26</sup>, specifically with this study in mind, in the month of January 2018 on the University of Lagos, Akoka campus. Although, the researcher is relatively familiar with the university, being a Nigerian and having visited the campus a couple of times prior to the start of his PhD programme, the preliminary observation phase (around 11:00 am to 3:00 pm daily for the two week period), was to further ensure the suitability of the location for the study and get better acquainted with the research location. This was done with the understanding that the appropriateness in the choice of field site(s) is among the most important decisions to be made in the early stages of a research project, as the research field is a social process that can be strengthened through this preliminary phase (Raybeck, 1992; Burgess, 1991; Caine, Davison, & Stewart, 2009).

The social process of ensuring the selected geographical locations are where information-rich cases can be elicited, can be likened to a construction that allows for the development of a contextually appropriate knowledge base that can potentially lead to continued dialogue and co-learning among the researcher, the informants and the potential study participants within

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<sup>26</sup> The preliminary observation referred to here is categorised as both semi-structured and unstructured types of observation in literature (Wilson, 2005; Bailey, 2018). This entails a “relatively flexible observatory phase where the researcher observes, with or without an observation guide, what s/he within a predetermined time and location thinks is important to the study” (Bailey, 2018, p. 94).

the field site (Caine et al., 2009). During this process, visits were made to eateries, hostel common rooms, parks, foyers of academic departments and other public places on the University of Lagos, Akoka campus, where it was ascertained that Coca-Cola and other sugar sweetened beverages were daily consumed by young adults and other members of the university community. Young adults on campus were noticed daily taking advantage of the free Wi-Fi<sup>27</sup> available within certain locations, one of which is a Coca-Cola branded spot where access cards to connect to the free Wi-Fi are handed over to those who have come to unwind, mostly young adults, after buying their beverage drink and snacks. The plethora of Coca-Cola signage and branded refrigerators all around the campus, especially the area where the kiosks and other business centres are located, alongside the researcher's preliminary engagements with informants and young adults, evidenced the appropriateness of the purposeful selection of the campus.

Rhodes University, being the institution where the researcher was based as a full-time doctoral candidate, is a more familiar community having been a full-time graduate student for well over four years. Although the advantages of researching in familiar settings are replete in literature (e.g. Hockey, 1993) – for instance, the relative absence of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses etc. – the preliminary observatory phase, specifically with this study in mind, was however consciously conducted for a week in the month of March 2019. Young adults who were students on campus were engaged with at various spots, following the same pattern as at the University of Lagos, Akoka campus. While the plethora of Coca-Cola signage witnessed on the University of Lagos, Akoka campus was not the case on Rhodes University campus, the Coca-Cola branded refrigerators noticed on campus alongside the researcher's preliminary engagements with young adults on campus however, showed that a host of them are constantly exposed to the mass media advertising and marketing of Coca-Cola and also consume Coke and other SSBs, thus providing the platform where information-rich cases could be elicited.

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<sup>27</sup> Referred to as a wireless network, Wi-Fi using radio waves allows computers, smartphones or other devices to connect to the internet wirelessly within a particular area (Wi-Fi, n.d.)

### 3.3.2 The selection of research respondents/participants

In the two geographical locations, the University of Lagos, Akoka campus, Nigeria and Rhodes University, South Africa, young adults who were undergraduates were purposefully approached and enlisted as participants after a period of participant observations and preliminary interviews to ascertain their suitability for the study and their interest in participating in the study. As indicated in Chapter One, the purposeful sampling that led to the young adults enlisted as participants for this study hinged on their keenness about Coca-Cola and their consistent and continued consumption of Coke through their childhood and teenage years up till the moment they were approached to participate in the project. The young adults enlisted for the study were also those who were cognisant about the digital, social and mobile marketing activities of Coca-Cola and had forms of active engagement on at least one digital platform. Forms of active engagement on digital platforms, used as one of the criterion for participant selection, was deduced when the young adults during preliminary interviews, recounted their use of the ‘like’<sup>28</sup> button on Coca-Cola’s digital marketing messages, how they shared these marketing messages with their virtual friends and followers on their social media timelines and how they discussed these digital marketing messages offline among friends. It was also ensured that these chosen participants were cognisant of various Coca-Cola advertising messages on traditional media.

The type of purposeful sampling that speaks to how participants were enlisted for this study is homogenous sampling, where the aim is to recruit research participants with similar traits or specific characteristics in terms of age, culture, nationality, life experience etc., with a focus on how these traits or characteristics relate to the phenomenon being researched (Patton, 1990; Etikan et al., 2016). With the purpose of going in-depth in the description and interpretation of the data elicited from the homogenous subgroup of study participants, this type of purposeful sampling is consistent with the IPA approach of participant selection and

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Like’, as used here speaks to a feature used to give positive feedback or connect with things you care about on social media (Sumner, Ruge-Jones, & Alcorn, 2018). Conceptualised as a ‘paralinguistic digital affordance’ of social media that facilitates communication and interaction without specific language associated; the ‘like’ feature on social media “allow users to interact in prosocial ways whereby they acknowledge others, observe politeness norms, and enact social grooming without nuanced communication” (Hayes et al., 2016, p. 5; Sumner et al., 2018).

can be contrasted with the maximum variation type of sampling, where differing characteristics can be drawn on in participant selection (Patton 1990).

The process of participant recruitment at the University of Lagos was conducted during the month of October 2018, while participant observation which commenced earlier in September 2018 was ongoing. Developing rapport with young adults on campus was not as easy as expected considering that most of the initial efforts to initiate interesting and lasting conversations were not successful, as the undergraduates met in the early phase of the participant enlistment process, though responsive, were not ready for any detailed conversations around SSBs generally or Coca-Cola specifically. However, it was helpful having the foreknowledge that gaining entrance/access into a research site and enlisting study participants can be a complicated process that entails “progressive series of negotiations rather than a one-shot agreement” (Johnson, 1975, p. 176), as there are no specific or absolute ways to go about it.

An informant<sup>29</sup>, a final year student in one of the undergraduate programmes of the University of Lagos and an executive of the student union government, whom the researcher met and developed rapport with during preliminary observation early in the year 2018, was helpful in introducing the researcher to some students who he felt could proffer useful information. The informant, being a keen Coke consumer and knowledgeable about the university community, introduced the researcher to the first set of young adults whom he had over for brunch in one of the restaurants on campus, in order for the researcher to meet them.

In addition, the researcher made contact with one of the waiters at the Coca-Cola spot, which was frequented during the fieldwork, and later was able to gradually garner useful preliminary conversations with the young adults that often came to the spot. The waiter, after the researcher patiently answered all his questions about the research project and mission on the campus, was useful in introducing the researcher to undergraduates who he felt would be suitable for the study based on his observation and experience as a waiter at the Coca-Cola

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<sup>29</sup> Drawing on Lavrakas (2008) and Bygstad and Munkvold (2011) – informant, originally an anthropological concept, as used specifically in this thesis, refers to the individual that provides the researcher with information about the research site and helps to locate contacts that are suitable and potential study participants/respondents.

spot. The waiter, who was taken on as an informant considering the role he played, alongside the first informant, were both instrumental in providing information about the research site, while also corroborating the information that was gathered during the preliminary observation phase conducted earlier in 2018. The information and assistance gotten enabled the researcher to move beyond what had started off as a difficult endeavour to eventually conducting useful and detailed preliminary discussions with young adults from whom research participants were drawn. Furthermore, in recruiting participants for this study, the first set of young adults the researcher held preliminary discussions with were asked to suggest their colleagues, with whom they consume and share a common fondness for Coke. Consequently, the participants' recruitment for this thesis evidences snowball sampling, which according to Deacon (1999) is dependent on initial contacts suggesting further people for the researcher to approach.

A total number of 78 Nigerian undergraduates from the University of Lagos were engaged in preliminary discussions using the screening parameters outlined above. These included five young adults with whom the researcher had held brief discussions and exchanged contact details with during the preliminary observation phase early in the year 2018. The preliminary discussions, mostly between 15 and 25 minutes, were held on campus at different times, all at the convenience of the young adults. While some of these conversations were held individually, some were in groups with four being the largest number present at the conversations per time. Some of the young adults were engaged with more than once, before it could be determined whether to formally invite them to participate in the study. 41 out of the 78 young adults were purposefully selected, having met the parameters outlined above, and were given another brief overview of the research and what was expected of them while also explaining their rights as participants to choose either to participate or not to participate in the study. Eventually, out of these 41 young adults, three could not participate in the study as they travelled out of the state to write their professional examinations, four were not reachable using the contact information they gave the researcher and five opted out of the study without stating any cogent reason for doing so. 29 young adults who were Nigerian undergraduates of the University of Lagos finally participated in the study.

The same procedure of participant selection as used at the University of Lagos, Akoka campus was followed at Rhodes University campus, where preliminary discussions to

purposefully select study participants were also conducted in the month of April, 2019. In seeking out South African young adults on campus who fitted the study needs, the researcher frequented the student union building of the university where several social events that had a cohort of university students in attendance were often held. Also, the ‘Oppidan’ dining hall of the university was visited daily during lunch hour (with the exception of Sundays when activities were minimal) in the month of April, 2019. A total number of 52 South African undergraduates were engaged with in preliminary discussions to ascertain their suitability for the research, out of which 36 of them were purposefully selected and enlisted for the study. However, four of the 36 could not participate in the study; three of the four indicated that they were no longer interested in being part of the study, while one could not make it to any of the sessions on account of academic commitments. Consequently, 32 young adults who were South African undergraduates of Rhodes University participated in the study. Although the participant recruitment procedure on Rhodes University campus was tasking, as most of the preliminary discussions were rescheduled several times, the researcher tried to accommodate different time preferences and schedules of the young adults engaged with, in order to enlist and sustain their interest in the study. The experience at the University of Lagos campus and the researcher’s familiarity with the Rhodes University campus were however drawn on, thereby leading to enhanced communication and rapport while engaging with the young adults on campus.

Even though there were different racial groups amongst the student population in Rhodes University (Africans, Whites, Coloureds, Indians/Asians - with Africans outnumbering other groups over the past five years) (Rhodes University Digest of Statistics, 2015; 2016; 2018), it is pertinent to state that the young adults purposefully enlisted as participants were drawn from black South African students categorised in this study as Africans. This is similar to the participants from the University of Lagos who are Nigerian students and are from the African ‘racial category’, as the studentship of the institution is predominantly within this category. This purposeful selection of research participants is in accordance with the specific focus of this thesis on young Africans’ reception and consumption of Coca-Cola and other SSBs as earlier outlined in Chapter One.

### **3.4 Focus group interviews**

Now considered as an important research technique, focus group interviews, according to Lunt and Livingstone (1999), involves “bringing together a group, or, more often, a series of groups, of participants to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator” (1999, p. 55). The origins of focus groups as a research method can be traced back to the work of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University in the 1940s (Bloor, 2001; Silverman, 2013). As the name implies, focus group interviews, as a data collection method, connotes the focus and priority of the researcher on a range of open-ended questions s/he uses in engaging with a group with the intention to generate data from participants’ responses and the group’s interactions (Madriz, 2000; Duggleby, 2005; Bailey, 2018).

Essentially, focus group interviews are small groups that deliberate on a particular topical issue within a specific context, with group membership varying from four to eight participants (Deacon, 1999). Casey (2014) submits that focus group interviews are composed of five to eight people, although the size can range from as few as four to as many as 12. Casey (2014) further states that focus group interviews must be “small enough for everyone to have an opportunity to share insights, yet large enough to share diversity of perceptions” (2014, p. 15). Taking a cue from this, the focus groups for the study had a minimum of three participants and maximum of six participants. Although the minimum number scheduled was four participants, there were some of the focus groups where participants opted out of the sessions. The maximum scheduled for each focus group session was six, because the researcher desired to have a group which could be properly handled and managed, as Curtis and Curtis (2011) posit that this is a key requirement for successful moderation of focus group interviews.

Consistent with the position of a number of scholars (see Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Krueger & Casey, 2014; Bailey, 2018) on what the role of a researcher should be during focus group interviews, the researcher’s role in the focus group interviews was that of a moderator that stimulated discussions and ensured that these were kept in line with the aim of the study and that participants did not wander far away from the research focus. Although participants were not stopped abruptly when in proffering answers to research questions they deviated from the

focus of the study, the researcher rather ensured that the discussions were steered back to the focus of the conversation after such contributions.

The researcher, as the moderator, facilitated 13 focus group interviews for this study (seven focus group interviews were conducted on the University of Lagos, Akoka campus and six focus group interviews were conducted on Rhodes University campus). Five of the sessions at the University of Lagos were held at the Coca-Cola branded cafe on campus, as the participants were comfortable and familiar with the place and the researcher felt it might be interesting having the focus group interviews in a place branded with Coca-Cola since this was the phenomenon to be discussed. The other two focus group interviews were each held at two other cafés on campus, as the participants' requested that these locations were closer to where they had academic engagements for those days.

The six focus group interviews at Rhodes University were held in one of the main cafés on campus. At the suggestion of one of the participants, the first focus group interview was held at the café, while subsequent ones were also held there, as the participants all agreed, when the researcher inquired from them individually prior to each session, that they were comfortable having the discussions at the café. The researcher observed that there was Coca-Cola signage and branded refrigerators at the two other cafés where focus group interviews were held at the University of Lagos, while the café where focus group interviews were held at Rhodes University also had a Coca-Cola branded refrigerator. These were referenced during the discussions at these cafés and spurred interesting conversations about the phenomenon being researched. The venues for the 13 focus group interviews are in accordance with the position of qualitative research scholars (see Bryman, 1984; Hansen et al., 1998; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Krueger & Casey, 2014, among others), who assert that focus group sessions are ideally best held in natural settings that are public spaces and not in a laboratory or artificial setting.

During the 13 focus group interviews held, it was ensured that the participants were all part of the discussions, as those who were observed to be initially quiet were deliberately but gently probed by the researcher to contribute. This was aimed at mitigating a limitation of focus groups, which has been noted in literature to be the tendency of some participants to dominate others in the discussions (Liebes & Katz, 1993). The researcher strived to remain

observant during the focus group interviews in order to take note of gestures, non-verbal cues and other emotional responses, as this helped to also initiate into the discussions those who were quiet in the early part of the conversations, as these participants though not verbally communicating, were either nodding their heads in assertion or smiling to affirm their likely agreement with what others were discussing. The researcher, drawing on these observations, then encouraged the quiet participants to contribute to the ongoing conversations.

Prior to the start of each session, written and verbal consent was sought, as participants signed their consent forms and their permission was also sought to use a digital field voice recorder. This was preceded by a reintroduction of participants to the research project, while also assuring them of concealed identity in order to further create an avenue where they would find it convenient to provide detailed and factual narratives, void of the tendency to hold back. In addition, the research participants were also assured that their identities would be concealed to ensure that their privacy and confidentiality were not compromised. Consequently, pseudonyms were employed in the data presentation, analysis and discussion.

Prior to each focus group interview, the researcher, drawing on Litosseliti (2003) and Alvesson (2011), also informed participants that there were no right or wrong responses to the questions and themes that would be answered and discussed, and that they were not expected to build a consensus on any issue. This was aimed at addressing another potential limitation of focus groups whereby participants suppress their real thoughts and experiences about the phenomenon being discussed in a bid to build a false consensus, by either trying to tell the moderator what they think they would like to hear or to support the view of other participants who might have spoken convincingly (Litosseliti, 2003).

Consistent with literature (see Hansen et al., 1998; Jensen 1988; Litosseliti, 2003; Silverman, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2014 ), an interview guide (carefully drafted and developed by the researcher with the guidance of the doctoral project supervisor) comprising of open-ended questions was used to elicit nuanced, detailed and rich amount of information from the lived world of the participants, as this brought to the fore their perceptions, past experiences, scenes, events, as well as descriptions of the past in relation to both their reception of Coca-Cola's media marketing messages and their consumption of Coke. This exemplifies the appropriateness of focus group interviews as a useful data collection method that draws upon

respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that is not feasible using other methods (Gibbs, 1997; Duggleby, 2005). Although these attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, they are however, more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group proffers (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995; Gibbs, 1997). Kitzinger (1994, 1995) further argues that focus groups are useful as the interaction that it generates, if properly conducted, enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate their own understandings of their specific experiences which are not always encapsulated in reasoned responses that emanate from other methods of data collection. This is useful as it elicits in-depth information in a way which allows researchers to find out why an issue is salient, as well as what is salient about it, thereby bringing to the fore an understanding of the gap between what people say and what they do (Morgan, 1988; Lankshear, 1993).

The focus group interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured as the interview guide was used mainly as is implied – a *guide* – thereby allowing the discussion to follow a conversational manner. This enabled the researcher/moderator to probe further, when needed, in order to seek clarity on interesting themes and responses, while also allowing participants to interact with one another and speak at length about their lived experiences in relation to the phenomenon being examined. During the sessions, participants were provided with snacks, as a token of appreciation for making themselves available and for their contributions during the discussions. This is consistent with relevant literature which highlights the possibility of appreciating research respondents for their participation (Hansen et al., 1998; Bloor, 2001; Umana-Taylor & Bamaca, 2004).

The focus group interviews did not go beyond 90 minutes, with the shortest session lasting for 70 minutes while the longest lasted for about 85/86 minutes. The moderator ensured that the sessions were not too long so as to avoid participants leaving before the end of the focus groups, as this could cause a distraction and create an unwillingness for others to concentrate in the sessions. In line with this, Bloor (2001) asserts that the facilitator should wind things up after 90 minutes even if participants still seem enthusiastic, as it is discourteous to unnecessarily take up participants time, as this can also lead to premature departures which will alter the composition and dynamics of the group.

Alongside focus group interviews, nine individual in-depth interviews were also conducted as follow-ups aimed to further explore, gain clarity and detailed understanding on both the themes that were not made explicit during the focus groups and those themes that the researcher felt had not been well explored because it might be confidential to the participant.

### **3.4.1 Individual in-depth interviews**

A research interview is a conversation, usually between two people in which the researcher/interviewer is seeking responses for a particular purpose (Gillham, 2000). While conversation remains a basic mode of communication, the research interview is a professional and specific form of conversation which aims to obtain a nuanced and qualitative description and understanding of social phenomena from the lived world of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). A research interview relies on the understanding that perspectives from purposefully selected participants are an important part of generating joint knowledge of social processes and of the human condition (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Henning, Rensburg, & Smith, 2004). As a method, it is used to elicit respondents' perceptions of past experiences, scenes, events, as well as descriptions of the past that are mostly unavailable for observation (Lindlof, 1995; Silverman, 2013).

Four individual interviews were held at the University of Lagos, Akoka campus, while five interviews were held at Rhodes University. These individual in-depth interviews, which lasted between 20 and 35 minutes, were semi-structured and complemented the focus groups, thereby giving clarity and insights into relatively ambiguous themes. The interviews also brought to the fore an understanding of the motivations that underlie some of the assertions these participants made during the focus groups. This is in accordance with Ritchie, Lewis and Elam's (2003) assertion that individual in-depth interviews complement focus groups, as these enable the researcher to build on issues previously raised by participants in order to further enrich the data. These interviews also provide a chance for complex experiences to be addressed because of the depth of focus, opportunity for clarification and detailed understanding they afford (Ritchie et al., 2003).

The semi-structured interviews both at the individual and focus group stages, as conducted during fieldwork and discussed above, are consistent with phenomenological interviewing practised by IPA researchers which emphasises active listening<sup>30</sup>, the researcher's ability to build rapport and gain trust of participants/respondents, alongside the ability to ask open ended but specific questions that are free from hidden presumptions and that are in line with the aims of the project (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA, as a qualitative research approach that is participant oriented, has over the years regarded the semi-structured form of participants' focus groups and individual in-depth interview sessions as the exemplary method within the approach, as evidenced by a vast majority of studies published using IPA (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2009; Alase, 2017).

The individual in-depth interviews were also recorded using the digital field voice recorder used during the focus group interviews and after the entire data collection sessions, the researcher listened to all the audio recordings and thereafter transcribed them. Although the transcriptions were time-consuming, the researcher however decided to embark on the rigour of personally transcribing the recordings, without drawing either on transcription software or enlisting the help of transcribers, because it aided familiarity with the data, proffered the opportunity to relive the fieldwork experience and make initial analytic notes/comments while transcribing the recordings. Arksey and Knight (1999) corroborate this and assert that the researcher being the one to transcribe the audio recordings has undoubted advantages as this, among other reasons, reminds the researcher of the tones and intricacies that characterised the data collection sessions and the entire fieldwork, which then becomes helpful as the analysis commences.

After the audio recordings were all transcribed, the transcripts were read several times to become more immersed in the data and to glean new insights, to highlight distinct phrases in terms of similarities and differences in patterns across the transcripts, and to further develop

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<sup>30</sup> Active listening here speaks to the researcher's commitment during fieldwork to listen attentively, to understand what is being said by the participants, clarify meanings when things seem unclear or ambiguous and come up with appropriate follow-up questions that help to further explore what is being discussed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

into subthemes<sup>31</sup> the analytic notes/comments made during transcription. This was done to further understand the latent content of the data as Smith and Osborn (2008) assert that the IPA researcher after transcription, must aim to grasp and understand the content and complexity of the data through a sustained engagement with the data and the process of interpretation. The field journal where notes and codes were written during fieldwork was also referenced in extrapolating subthemes from the data, as this provided a means for the researcher to ensure that the subthemes captured the meaning units that came up during the data collection. Meaning unit, as used here, refers to a grouping of words or statements that communicate the ‘core essence’ or ‘central meaning’ of the lived experiences that the research participants are trying to convey during the focus groups and individual interview sessions (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Consequently, it was ensured that the subthemes developed after cycles of engaging with the field journal, analytic notes and transcripts, did not diminish or misrepresent the core meaning of the responses and lived experiences of the research participants. In analysing and discussing the data, the subthemes were grouped and presented, drawing on the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Two, as broad conceptual categories, and also by drawing on excerpts from the data to exemplify the subthemes and further ground the discussions.

The tables below present the biographical data of the participants for this study.

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<sup>31</sup> Subthemes developed after engaging severally with the transcripts, field journal and analytic notes as Van Manen (1997) posits are not objects or generalisations, but are more like web of knots/meaning units around which participants lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. Subthemes as used in this thesis are used to open up the data and are similar to the broader themes as they are “are only fasteners, foci or threads around which the phenomenological description is facilitated” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 90-91).

**Table 3.1: Biographical data of participants' from the University of Lagos, Nigeria**

<b>Focus group one</b>			
<i>Name (Pseudonym)/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Sam/Male	18	South-East	Industrial Chemistry/2nd year
Fatima/Female	19	North-Central	Accounting/1st year
Sola/Male	20	South-West	Geography/2nd year
Faith/Female	17	South-South	English Studies/2nd year
<b>Focus group two</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Seun/Female	16	South-West	Biology/2nd year
Kunle/Male	22	South-West	Mass communication/4th year
Joe/Male	20	South-East	Mass communication/3rd year
<b>Focus group three</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Kunbi/Female	23	South-West	Linguistics/3rd year
Simbiat/Female	24	North-Central	Biochemistry/4th year
Kay/Male	18	South-West	Physics/1st year
Akeem/Male	24	North-West	Linguistics/3rd year
<b>Focus group four</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Bayo/Male	18	South-West	Linguistics/3rd year

Taiwo/Female	17	South-West	Biochemistry/2nd year
Emeka/Male	17	South-East	Industrial Chemistry/2nd year
Halimat/Female	16	North-West	Geography/1st year
Cynthia/Female	18	South-South	Psychology/2nd year
<b>Focus group five</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Favour/Female	19	South-South	Mass communication/3rd year
Nneoma/Female	17	South-East	Accounting/2nd year
Ahmed/Male	19	South-West	Microbiology/2nd year
<b>Focus group six</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Olamide/Female	22	South-West	Psychology/2nd year
Pat/Female	19	South-East	French/1st year
Matt/Male	23	North-Central	French/3rd year
FT/Female	17	North-Central	Economics/2nd year
<b>Focus group seven</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course/year of study in the University</i>
Musa/Male	24	North-East	Economics/1st year
Obi/Male	20	South-East	International Relations/2nd year
Ruth/Female	18	South-West	International Relations/1st year
Salem/Male	23	North-Central	International Relations/2nd year
Gift/Female	18	South-South	Microbiology/3rd year
Eben/Male	18	South-South	Civil Engineering/3rd year

<b>Individual In-depth Interviews</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nneoma (focus group five)</li> <li>• Bayo (focus group four)</li> <li>• Musa (focus group seven)</li> <li>• Obi (focus group seven)</li> </ul>

**Table 3.2: Biographical data of participants from Rhodes University, South Africa**

<b>Focus group one</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course or Faculty/year of study</i>
Van/Female	20	Eastern Cape	Pharmacy/2nd year
Siya/Female	20	Eastern Cape	Pharmacy/1st year
Rito/Female	19	Limpopo	Humanities/1st year
Doreen/Female	18	Eastern Cape	Humanities/1st year
Jake/Male	23	KwaZulu-Natal	Pharmacy/3rd year
James/Male	22	Limpopo	Biological Sciences/2nd year
<b>Focus group two</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course or Faculty /year of study</i>
Linen/Male	22	Gauteng	Journalism and Media Studies/3rd year
Edward/Male	21	Gauteng	Journalism and Media Studies/3rd year
Sino/Female	24	Eastern Cape	Pharmacy/4th year
Tham/Female	22	Gauteng	Humanities/2nd year
Gab/Male	19	Western Cape	Chemical Sciences/1st year

<b>Focus group three</b>			
<i><b>Pseudonym/ Gender</b></i>	<i><b>Age</b></i>	<i><b>Province/region</b></i>	<i><b>Course or Faculty/year of study</b></i>
Vuyo/Male	19	Eastern Cape	Humanities/2nd year
Jeff/Male	18	Eastern Cape	Humanities/2nd year
Kim/Female	20	North-West	Humanities/1st year
Dave /Male	19	North-West	Biological Sciences/3rd year
Nosipho/Female	21	KwaZulu-Natal	Pharmacy/3rd year
Khaya/Female	21	Eastern Cape	Journalism and Media Studies/4th year
<b>Focus group four</b>			
<i><b>Pseudonym/ Gender</b></i>	<i><b>Age</b></i>	<i><b>Province/region</b></i>	<i><b>Course or Faculty/year of study</b></i>
Khutso/Female	21	Gauteng	Education/3rd year
Taps/Male	19	Mpumalanga	Biological Sciences/1st year
Tabang/Male	18	Mpumalanga	Biological Sciences/1st year
Rose/Female	22	Mpumalanga	Education/3rd year
Amanda/Female	18	Western Cape	Commerce/1st year
<b>Focus group five</b>			
<i><b>Pseudonym/ Gender</b></i>	<i><b>Age</b></i>	<i><b>Province/region</b></i>	<i><b>Course or Faculty/year of study</b></i>
Sharina/Female	19	Limpopo	Commerce/2nd year
Sarah/Female	18	Limpopo	Commerce/2nd year
Kwazi/Male	21	KwaZulu-Natal	Chemical Sciences/3rd year
Kuda/Male	20	Mpumalanga	Commerce/3rd year

Cindy/Female	19	Western Cape	Commerce/3rd year
<b>Focus group six</b>			
<i>Pseudonym/ Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Province/region</i>	<i>Course or Faculty/year of study</i>
Mercy/Female	22	Limpopo	Law/3rd year
Nonhle/Female	21	KwaZulu-Natal	Law/3rd year
Xolela/Male	21	Eastern Cape	Law/4th year
Sanele/Male	19	Eastern Cape	Humanities/1st year
Pius/Male	18	Gauteng	Humanities/1st year
<b>Individual In-depth Interviews</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jake (focus group one)</li> <li>• Pius (focus group six)</li> <li>• Gab (focus group two)</li> <li>• Jeff (focus group three)</li> <li>• Kwazi (focus group five)</li> </ul>			

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the sample sizes drawn from the two Universities, are consistent with the focus of IPA researchers, which is to utilise small samples that are purposefully and carefully selected in a quest to examine certain phenomenon in-depth. The focus is not to generate a theory to be generalised over the whole population or to proffer a shallow and descriptive analysis of a broader range of participants, as Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) contend that less is more with IPA. In line with this, Holt and Slade (2003) argue that validity of qualitative research should be assessed in terms of the applicability of the illustrated and analysed themes to similar situations and not on the number of research participants/respondents.

The concluding part of this chapter discusses the ethical measures taken during the fieldwork and the protocols followed in enhancing trustworthiness of the research project.

### **3.5 Ethical procedures taken to enhance trustworthiness of the research project**

This thesis is underlined by the researcher's understanding that ethical considerations and protocols remain an important component of research. These need to be taken into account throughout the study, beginning from the preliminary phase and formulation of research questions, to the sampling procedure, accessing of data, seeking the consent of research participants, data analysis and presentation of findings or when the findings are finally published (Ali & Kelly, 2004; Silverman, 2013). This, coupled with the understanding that the protection of human participants in a qualitative study remains the sacred obligation of the researcher (Alase, 2017), therefore ensured that before and during the study, ethical protocols were observed. Drawing from Sales and Folkman's (2000) text on ethical guidance, the researcher ensured that respect for the research respondents/participants and their autonomy as persons of worth whose participation in the research project remained their autonomous choice, was maintained throughout the study thereby earning their trust. Consequently, apart from ensuring that participants had detailed information about the research project which led to them willingly giving their consent without being coerced, trust was also earned and upheld by informing them of their right to withdraw from the research project whenever they felt uncomfortable or unwilling to continue as participants. Also, while their privacy and confidentiality were protected, the researcher made the transcripts and analyses available to them to crosscheck and confirm that their anonymity was indeed respected and their assertions were neither misrepresented nor distorted.

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the researcher completed all ethics approval processes and got ethical clearances from the research ethics committees of both Rhodes University and University of Lagos and was also certified by the collaborative institutional training initiative (CITI) programme after completing the specified online course on conducting research with human subjects. This, as rightly posited in relevant literature (see Arksey & Knight, 1999; Silverman, 2013), adequately prepared the researcher, because potential flaws in the research project were detected by trained and experienced researchers and were addressed before fieldwork commenced. As also asserted by Silverman (2013), this further helped in earning the confidence of the participants who seemed more comfortable with the researcher when they were informed of the ethical clearances gotten for the research project.

The ethical procedures taken ensured that the rights of participants were protected and not violated, while also exemplifying the path the researcher took to achieve trustworthiness – as Padgett (1998) contends that trustworthiness, which does not occur naturally, should be regarded as the result that emanates from rigorous scholarship that is based on the use of clearly defined procedures. By making the transcripts and analyses available to all research participants in order for them to confirm that their shared views and lived experiences were not distorted, the ‘member check’ requirement for trustworthiness whereby the researcher ‘takes the data back to the field’/feeds back the data and analyses to participants for them to either confirm or challenge the accuracy of the work was aligned with (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Tracy, 2010; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The fidelity of this thesis was also enhanced by the researcher’s adherence to the ‘thick description’ requirement of IPA and most qualitative studies, which entails that the researcher makes explicit in concrete detail the context within which the study was conducted, as well as the lived experiences of the participants, in a way that these become meaningful to others who are not part of the project. This enhances reliability as it enables an audit trail, that is, the possibility for members of the academic community to appraise/critique the qualitative research project (Hoepfl, 1997; Lietz et al., 2006; Koch, 2006) and it also conforms to the consensus among qualitative researchers (despite other areas of divergent opinions) that in qualitative research, participants’ meanings must be accurately presented in research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998; Keats, 1999; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Li, 2004).

Furthermore, the reliability of this thesis was enhanced by adhering to the fundamental concept of ‘bracketing’ in IPA, which was underscored by ensuring that the researcher’s experiences did not influence participants’ understanding of the phenomenon being examined and consequently their responses and contributions during data collection. As a device of phenomenological inquiry, bracketing entails the deliberate putting aside of one’s own beliefs, values or what one already knows about the phenomenon, prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation in order to mitigate the propensity of one’s bias reflecting in the data collected and to accurately describe and analyse participants life experiences (Ahern, 1999; Carpenter, 2007; Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

Alongside the researcher's understanding of what bracketing entails and commitment to adhere to it, he had a colleague present at the first three focus group sessions both at the University of Lagos and at Rhodes University. The colleagues at both universities were PhD candidates of their respective institutions who at the researcher's invite joined the sessions and quietly observed without any form of direct participation. The feedback from these colleagues at the early stage of data collection at both universities were useful in ascertaining that the researcher, as the facilitator of the sessions, was indeed able to stay committed to bracketing.

This enhanced fidelity as it assisted the researcher in carefully acknowledging his 'situatedness' during fieldwork and remaining self-reflexive throughout the research project. This helped with maintaining the necessary balance and objectivity with regards to the researcher's presence on the field during data collection as both a researcher *and* as an individual familiar with, and embedded in, these purposefully selected communities. Also referred to as reflexivity (Horsburgh, 2003), self-reflexivity as a process of critical self-reflection about oneself as a researcher and one's research project which was aided by bracketing, was also drawn on as I presented the research findings at a workshop hosted by the centre for postgraduate studies of Rhodes University and the 2019 annual conference of South African Communications Association. This is in line with the position of qualitative scholars who assert that such engagements with academics may contribute to deeper reflexive analysis by the researcher, reinforcing rigour in data analysis and consequently enhancing the trustworthiness of the research project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Krefling, 1991; Mauther & Doucet, 2003; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). While this entire chapter alludes to ways the researcher's methodological approach and techniques depict thoughtfulness and aids the credibility of the research project, these above instances which underscore the conscious decisions taken by the researcher to enhance the trustworthiness of the thesis further aids the credibility of the data and consequently the research findings. In the subsequent chapters, the data is presented, analysed and discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION I

### **Coke's cultural embeddedness and the historical 'brandscape' created by Coca-Cola; locating study participants' contemporary experiences in their past lived experiences/engagements with the brand and the product.**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, and in Chapter Five and Six, the data gathered during fieldwork on the University of Lagos campus in Nigeria and on South Africa's Rhodes University campus will be analysed and discussed. Within the context of the researcher's observations during fieldwork and drawing from the transcripts that emanated from the focus groups/individual in-depth interviews, the analysis and discussion presented in this chapter explores how Coke has become culturally embedded in the 'worlds' of the young African participants, as a particularly powerful 'brandscape'<sup>32</sup>. This chapter suggests that this serves as the foundation on which more current mass media marketing campaigns by Coca-Cola are received and engaged with by this study's participants. The following codes will be used for participants' quotes: Focus groups – e.g. focus group 1 (FG1); and the sites – University of Lagos (UL) and Rhodes University (RU).

#### **4.2 Study participants' earliest experiences of Coca-Cola**

The researcher's quest to establish and understand participants' earliest thinking about, and dispositions to, Coca-Cola suggests the absence of a conscious awareness<sup>33</sup> in how they

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<sup>32</sup> The concept of 'brandscape' usually refers to a range of brands available in a particular market or a subset of the market. However, in this study, the term is used more narrowly because of Coke's historical dominance in the SSB market in both Nigeria and South Africa, as a market leader and for all of its history in terms of market budget and share (see Lynn B. Upshaw, *Building Brand Identity: A Strategy for Success in a Hostile Marketplace*, John Wiley & Sons (1995), pages 48-49 for the original conceptualisation of the term).

<sup>33</sup> While there are different conceptualisations of 'consciousness' and what 'conscious awareness' means across philosophical and psychological treatises with no universally accepted operational definition, this thesis uses these concepts interchangeably to refer to an individual's realisation/cognisance/understanding of the existence of someone or something around him or her. Study participants ability to report/express conscious content,

began to engage with Coca-Cola and how they acquired much of their knowledge about the product and brand. While participants emphasised their fondness and their fairly consistent consumption of Coca-Cola since their childhood till date, the researcher was curious to understand the micro-cultural dynamics and meanings through which their foremost engagements with the brand and product were constructed prior to their present level of enthusiasm and continued consumption of Coca-Cola. This approach helps with critically examining the micro-cultural context that underlies study participants *current* reception of mass media advertising/marketing messages of Coca-Cola. In line with relevant literature (for example, studies such as Silverstone, 1990; Holt, 1995b; 1997; Thompson, 1996; Fournier, 1998 etc.), this will allow the study to avoid the often superficial descriptions of reception and consumption patterns of products that do not fully take account of the specific imbricated layers of cultural contexts and meanings that collectively influence consumer actions. It is also useful to examine the micro-cultural contexts that underlie current consumption patterns of Coke, as McCort and Malhotra (1993) and Luna and Gupta (2001) in particular, argue that these micro-cultural and even inter-generational contexts can profoundly influence individuals in terms of their current preferences and consumption practices.

It is interesting that a lot of the study participants had to think hard about their earliest encounters with Coke. The initial non-verbal gestures and sometimes periods of silence by these participants indicated an absence of a conspicuous and conscious awareness of how Coca-Cola has come to be an important ‘brandscape’ in their lives. As a selection of responses indicate, there is a certain sense that Coke has ‘always’ been around:

*Coca-Cola is part of our day to day activities and it’s been like that since God knows when. ... It’s almost an impossible task to trace back this stuff; I mean, do I even know?*  
**(Kunle, FG2; UL)**

*Well, I think I know what you’re trying to get at, but for me it’s not a conscious thing. I just know I’ve come to believe so much in the brand and I think it’ll be futile to even try to get me to recount how the whole thing began ... To me it’s like you’re asking me to tell you how/when my toe nails grow.* **(Faith, FG1; UL)**

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knowledge or experience about their engagements with Coca-Cola is thus drawn on in this thesis as consciousness/conscious awareness (Consciousness, n.d.; Tassi & Muzet, 2001; Runger & Frensch, 2010). In the same vein, ‘subconscious’ as used in this thesis refers to participants actions and engagements in relation to Coca-Cola that their minds are neither directly focused on nor fully aware of.

*I don't even know where or how it all started but what I do know is that Coca-Cola has been a part of me even before I consciously started engaging with their marketing things through the many forms of media as I do now. (Rito, FG1; RU)*

*Tobi, I'm with Rito on this, Coca-Cola is like an older family member to me that I just grew to know, it's way before me but I know it's family. (James, FG1; RU).*

*Although, there are things you know and not just feel, but that doesn't mean you can explain them because it's more like an unconscious thing that has just come to be a part of your being (Sharina, FG4; RU)*

The above excerpts from the data, alongside assertions from other participants during the focus group sessions, indicate that these set of young Africans who are keen about Coca-Cola are embedded, and grew up, in a 'world' where the brand to them started off, in their earliest days as a child, as more or less an unconscious phenomenon they have come to know and consume. This, in line with the theorising of the framework used in this study, provides insight with which the researcher could begin to grasp and unpack how these digital natives who are Coca-Cola enthusiasts make sense of the global brand within their varying local contexts. Coca-Cola, expressed as something 'always there', that is, an unconscious phenomenon by the participants corroborate the position of researchers (see Holt, 1995, 1997; Allen, 2002, Rokka, 2010) who affirm, drawing on their various research projects, that the cultural inclinations and social patterning constituted and sustained in social processes within which consuming subjects engage with market products are not necessarily a conscious phenomenon.

The process of data gathering showed that the enlisted participants, despite their earlier affirmation that they had a grasp of how their 'affiliations' with Coca-Cola began (as posited during preliminary chats that led to their enlistment for this study), could not easily articulate the earliest details of how this phenomenon which they consume regularly had come to become part of their everyday lives. James's reference to the brand as "*an older family member*" implied that the enthusiasm and deference to the brand as the first choice and main SSB consumed, is not necessarily a means of satisfying his need as an autonomous self or reflexive postmodern but speaks to an unconscious inclination to align with a 'known family member' rather than identify with 'unknown relatives'. Young Africans who have similar upbringings and self-understandings about Coca-Cola, as James does, have the propensity to have consumer goals, choices and behaviours motivated by this unconscious inclination that

stems from a loyalty to a phenomenon regarded as an “*older family member*” or, as Sharina puts it, a phenomenon that is “*more like an unconscious thing that has just come to be a part of your being*”.

The instinctive meaning that James and Sharina give to the phenomena (Coca-Cola) embedded within their cultural contexts is not a derivative of imposed/forced ideas or doctrines, this rather emanates from a set of ideas and symbols available to these young Africans from childhood. This is in line with Schudson’s (1989) assertion that individuals naturally select the meanings they need for particular purposes and occasions from the limited cultural menu they are provided with within their societies – without this menu being imposed on them. This perhaps evidences the position of researchers who argue that consumerism – which takes the guise of enhancing the individual’s agency and autonomy – actually brings about a gradual ‘loss of self’ underpinned by subtle forms of ‘cultural despotism’, which characterise the constitution of identities and interests (Thompson, 1996; Slater, 1997).

Coca-Cola, as conceived by these young consumers to be an unconscious and background phenomenon that predates them and has already been embedded in their upbringings, also affirm the notion of it being an inter-generational brand that spans across different age groups within which it is known and consumed. While this is expected considering that the history of Coca-Cola dates back to 1886 and to the 1930s and 1940s in Africa (Coca-Cola History, n.d.), it is however pertinent to underscore how this underlies the way Coca-Cola is ingrained in the sub-consciousness of consumers from childhood. According to the study participants, Coca-Cola, as will be further discussed, is an integral part of their way of life which has been unconsciously imbued into their day to day activities. This was likened by one of these participants to the natural growth of toe nails, which although is a known occurrence, the process that leads to it cannot be intelligently articulated or unpacked by humans who are not trained in the relevant scientific fields. This implies that the pursuit of common consumption interest among this homogenous group of postmodern youths who consume Coca-Cola as a global product in their varying localised settings, is cushioned by their particular African upbringings and cultural contexts that the brand has become a part of. This is consistent with CCT’s view of consumer experiences and performative identities, as first being a result of embedded dynamic and interactive processes which have the propensity to frame consumers’

differing horizons of conceivable action, feeling, meaning and thought patterns (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Bajde, 2014).

### 4.3 Study participants' childhood/formative experiences with Coca-Cola

It is worth disaggregating further, how Coca-Cola has over the years become embedded as a background or unconscious 'brandscape' within the cultural contexts of these set of young Africans and how this interplays with the interactive processes that characterise their everyday actions, feelings, meanings and thought patterns. These excerpts from the focus group sessions are worth quoting at length:

*While I can't remember or pinpoint how it all started, Coca-Cola has always been quite unique to me, as my experience with it while growing up is quite a fond memory of happy times that I really enjoyed. I grew up in one of the townships in this province and it was a drink I remember taking mostly on Saturdays after worship. (Sino, FG2; RU)*

*Though I'm not sure I can vividly remember my childhood days and memories with respect to Coca-Cola. But listening to Sino is really interesting as my experience growing up kinda relate to her narration because Coca-Cola was part of my Sunday afternoons after what seems to be a long and boring church service. ... The difference to me is just that hers is on Saturdays while mine is on Sundays. ... I also remember as a 6 year old I visited my Dad's office often and he always has a can of coke at a corner on his table ... I always wonder why coke though... I never asked him but I just think it's something cool to at least identify with. (Tham, FG2; RU)*

*Coca-Cola is something I also grew up with and I think this session, through the contributions of others, is beginning to help me think through and realise possible reasons why I've got some attachment to it. ... Apart from it being my favourite drink and brand, it is something that reminds me of my late granny who raised me in Aba (south-east Nigeria) because she is a coke person. Coke to me is the only soft drink out there, I don't do alcoholic drinks and it's the only beverage drink I take. ... This is because of the kind of initiation I unconsciously received into coke consumption by my grandma plus the fact that coke represents a modern brand at the same time an old brand that has stood the test of time, if you know what I mean. (Nneoma, FG5; UL)*

The childhood experiences by study participants from both Nigeria's University of Lagos and South Africa's Rhodes University, as exemplified in the excerpts outlined above, aided the recollection of certain instances in their past which they were not able to remember or thought were not related to the focus areas (as they later revealed). The excerpts above alongside my first-hand observations during fieldwork, reveal that the young Africans despite

their varying backgrounds and societal affiliations were able to relate to the experiences that others reminisced about.

Drawing on Slater's (1997) position, since these sets of youthful consumers do not make the goods through which they reproduce everyday life, they unconsciously operate within the confines of available commodities, as passed down to them from the older generation. This speaks to their consumption habits and value creation without recourse to the fact that the companies that own these commodities (in this case, Coca-Cola) are primarily interested in profit and economic values, rather than, say, prioritising their bodily health or upholding their cultural values as Africans. Nneoma's narration, as also later cited below, exemplifies this, as Coca-Cola to her resonates with the life and times of her late grandmother, although she was only able to attempt to start connecting what she says might be the underlining reason why she is so fond of the drink when she was listening to others share their experiences during the focus group. Nneoma has clearly always operated within the confines of Coca-Cola as a brand and according to her, as later confirmed during a follow up interview, she has never considered giving a thought to other SSBs around because Coca-Cola resonates with an elderly figure in her life that she holds in high esteem.

Similarly, other young Nigerians from other regions of the country who participated in the focus groups at the University of Lagos also shared their experiences, which mostly resonate with Nneoma's. One of the participants, from the northern region of Nigeria, highlighted how she, as a child, and her cousins always have Coca-Cola provided by their dad (her uncle) anytime she goes to live with them during the holidays. Furthermore, this is also exemplified in the excerpt cited above from Tham, who while drawing a correlation between Sino's childhood experiences with Coca-Cola and hers, also shared her childhood experience where she remembers herself as a six year old who discovered that whenever she visits her dad's office he "*always has a can of coke at a corner on his table*" – drawing on this, she concluded that this particular SSB is "*something cool to at least identify with*", while also asserting during a follow up interview that she never consciously knew of the existence of other SSBs, like Pepsi, until she was about 11 years old, as coke was the only SSB in their household. This self-understanding about Coca-Cola being a brand to identify with is a derivative of what she believes is her dad's position about the product, as the SSB is not just in their household but also in a different space and setting, that is, the dad's place of work. This self-understanding Tham has about coke, drawing on her dad's disposition to the

product privately at home and publicly at his place of work, validates Coke to her all through her childhood days until now, and proffers the propensity for this product to be the predominant SSB that will characterise her actions and thought patterns with regards to SSB consumption.

#### **4.4 Coca-Cola's symbolism as a marker beyond physical consumption**

The focus groups/interviews transcripts and my observation during fieldwork suggests that by having regular Coke consumption interspersed amongst various activities that characterised the childhood days of the homogenous group of young Africans purposefully enlisted for this study, Coca-Cola goes beyond just being present in their day to day activities. This multinational SSB brand resonates symbolically amongst this study's participants, as markers that signify value that is beyond the actual physical consumption of Coke. Here are three instances amongst many others:

*I'm an Adventist and the drink has somehow found a way into our family. Though I don't know how it all started but I do know it's part of our afternoon meal on Sabbaths and I really do look forward to enjoying those moments of having lunch with my family. Back then, the few times we didn't have Coke wasn't really a great time for me and I think it was because my late dad didn't have enough money on him during those times or something. (Sino, FG2; RU)*

*It seemed to me then, as a child that having a chilled bottle of Coke as part of my Sundays was a reward my siblings and I get for being a good girl and staying attentive during service unlike some other troublesome kids. How I so much looked forward to these Sundays as a kid. (Tham, FG2; RU)*

*I think the way Grandma sees things is funny considering how Coke, to her, symbolises some sort of reward for diligence. When she wants to tell me I've done something she's pleased about she'll buy me Coke! (Laughs)... and I think it's quite funny that I still unknowingly do that most of the time. Thinking about it now, I kinda realise that I buy Coke once I feel I've done something worthwhile ... there are times when I remember her while having Coke and memories of her come so strongly to me. (Nneoma, FG5; UL)*

Sino's reference to the Sabbath afternoons where Coke was absent as not being great times, Tham's understanding of the same SSB as a reward for being a good girl that stayed attentive during Sunday services, alongside Nneoma's conception of the SSB drawing on her grandmother's perception as a reward you get for being diligent, reveals that Coca-Cola to these young consumers goes beyond the actual physical consumption. This suggests how

Coca-Cola has been symbolically embodied and ‘institutionalised’ amongst the cultural layers that underlie their current consumption of Coca-Cola and reception of the brand’s advertising and marketing messages. This ‘symbolic embeddedness’, being an integral part in the lives of older generations in the families of these young Nigerians and South Africans, has been unconsciously passed down to their generation and accepted by these sets of young adults.

Consequently, in congruence with Featherstone’s (1990) assertion on consumer preferences and life style practices, the enjoyment, satisfaction and different modes of identity formation that these young Africans, alongside their enthusiastic counterparts who consistently consume Coca-Cola derive from this product, is crucially linked to how value is being created within their respective cultural spaces. Beyond consuming a can or bottle of Coca-Cola, for instance, there is the propensity for young Africans with similar experiences to operate predominantly within a thought pattern, where Coca-Cola has over time been subconsciously regarded as a marker that symbolises enjoyment with loved ones, and a reward for good behaviour and diligence. For instance, Tham and Sino’s narrations imply that during their childhood years Coca-Cola played a part in their weekends and this attests to how this brand is embedded in their activities and symbolises enjoyable family time which comes after the daily religious activities on their Saturdays and Sundays respectively. That this specific SSB brand is deemed fit as a reward for good behaviour during religious practices, which the households of Tham, Sino and Nneoma for instance hold in high esteem, indicates how their current enthusiastic consumption of Coca-Cola is underlined by the structuring influence these childhood experiences had on them. This is in line with CCT’s anchoring proposition, that to understand consumers’ positions and choices within a plethora of products available in the marketplace, we need to examine and understand the long existing relationship(s) between these consumers and the ‘structuring’ influence embedded within their respective cultural spheres, as they define themselves consciously or unconsciously by these positions and choices (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Annamma & Li, 2012).

This structuring influence has had a penetrating effect amongst this young group of Coca-Cola consumers, who were not only surprised to realise during the various focus group sessions in which they participated, the similarities between their childhood experiences and

that of their counterparts with respect to the consumption of Coca-Cola, but also wondered why the similarities were so striking. These similarities evident in the experiences of these participants whether Nigerian or South African suggest the pervasive effect of Coca-Cola beyond physical consumption which seems to transcend social class, gender, background, province/region or country. The structuring influence that Coca-Cola holds as a marker beyond physical consumption thus suggests a response to Arnould and Thompson's (2007) research project, where they question whether individuals can use consumer culture to transcend erstwhile socialisations and groupings based on class, gender, ethnicity and other dimensions of social structuring.

Unlike alcoholic drinks, which from the data gathered, not all the participants consume and were absent in the earliest part of their lives, these sets of Coca-Cola enthusiasts purposefully enlisted in this study, share a common sense of excitement with respect to this SSB and brand in such a way that diffuses societal moulds and constructs that emanate from socialisations along the line of class, gender, ethnicity etc. Consumption of tobacco, for instance, also exemplifies, with reference to participants for this thesis, how a marketplace product, unlike Coca-Cola, can maintain certain societal constructs. From the transcripts, it was clear that for these young Africans, tobacco consumption does not unify their households and communities owing to various reasons; ranging from brief narratives about how their older relations who, during their childhood days, smoked after deliberately sending them on errands, to a parent who smokes despite the displeasure of the other parent, to some of the participants who started smoking in university as a newfound habit, but without the parents knowledge either out of respect or because they doubted if they would approve of it.

The excerpts below from the transcripts exemplify this:

*Coke is constant k in my family till date. It's been with us like since forever. You know what constant k means in physics, right? ... Coke's what lifts our mood as a family especially those times that we had every one home for weekends or for special events/ceremonies ... at least that's the way I met the family, Coke is a tradition that is beyond my generation. ... Unlike smoking and alcohol that only my Dad indulges in although I now do too but no one knows back home and no one must know for now; Coca-Cola is one thing that unites us all. (Emeka, FG4; UL)*

While the above excerpt from Emeka's narrative, in similarity with those cited earlier, also further underscores how Coca-Cola is regarded as a marker for enjoyable family time, it also

suggests, to some extent, how this multinational SSB brand came to be as part of the ‘cultural landscape’ embedded in the day to day activities of this study participant. Perhaps more importantly, this provides a useful insight into the deep background ‘canvas’ on which the modern day marketing campaigns, especially those that are disseminated on digital, social and mobile media platforms, presently operate. Emeka’s reference to Coke as a “*tradition*” that is beyond his generation, does not only reveal the subconscious self-understanding of this young African and how this “*tradition*” that unites his family serves as a marker that symbolises quality family time which ‘lifts the mood of his family’. Alongside these, Emeka’s family “*tradition*” proffers a useful insight into how this “*tradition*” serves as the backdrop on which more contemporary Coca-Cola commercials and campaigns are received and engaged with by this young consumer. The latter part of the narratives by Emeka and Nneoma, cited below, also proffer more insights into the deep background ‘canvas’ that underlie their current regular consumption of Coke as contemporary young Africans:

*I even now clearly remember the day I won a debate competition in primary school back then; I was given a bottle of Coke and two textbooks as a gift, it was a great feeling to have worked hard and then be rewarded with my favourite soft drink. Guess what? When I got home and told my Mom that I came first in the debate competition, she was impressed and gave me another bottle of Coke, (laughing), since I didn’t tell her about the first Coke I’d in school. It was really a big deal for me being rewarded, as a champion, with two bottles in a day. (Emeka, FG4; UL)*

*I remember the day I gave a recitation in church and my presentation was named the best, my grandma was so thrilled and excited about it as she kept on talking about it for days and of course that day when we got back home from church I had Coke alongside my plate of jollof rice, fried plantain and meat. ... That was a celebratory meal I always have with my grandma and I always looked forward to having it. (Nneoma, FG5; UL)*

The recollections study participants from both universities were able to describe during the focus group sessions/individual in-depth interviews, thus suggest that Coca-Cola has a potent set of symbolic meanings that got passed down in their families from an older generation to the generation these young Africans belong to. This set of symbolic meanings which proffer insights into background events about Coca-Cola, is in line with CCT which posits that meaning remains a fundamental aspect of symbolic consumption and lies at the heart of consumer culture as it is not only real (that is, it can be discovered and interpreted) but the understanding gleaned from this forms the primary gestalt within which consumers exist (Thompson et al., 2013; Lanier & Rader, 2017). Drawing on this and the assertions made by

this study's participants, thus bring to the fore the concept of the intergenerational 'hegemonic brandscape' – a highly sought after apex for any consumer product to establish. Within the families of this study's participants, from one generation to the other, Coca-Cola seems able to systematically exert influence on the members of the family for multiple years, let alone generations, without a conscious or deliberate intention on the part of these households to engage with the brand. In this sense, the multinational brand has been naturalised within the local settings of the young Africans enlisted for this study, with symbolic meanings that span beyond physical consumption.

From the foregoing analyses and discussions, it seems African youths from similar households perhaps consume this brand right from childhood not from an objective, impersonal or neutral position, as might have been the case in their earlier generations when the brand was a new phenomenon, but mostly from unconscious and subconscious engagements with the brand from which these postmodern consumers see Coca-Cola as a means to an end. That is, a means to earn a reward for being diligent, get rewarded for excelling at organised events, earn the approval of older family members in their households and enjoy the conviviality that comes with this. The hegemonic sway that Coca-Cola presently holds amongst the young postmodern consumers enlisted for this study, which, from this study's analysis, seems to date back to their childhood days, where unconscious and subconscious engagements with the brand Coca-Cola started, informs the dedication and cohesiveness evidenced by these young Africans.

#### **4.5 The role of cohesiveness in Coke's cultural embeddedness**

Cohesiveness, discussed in Chapter Two, refers to how the culture of consumption infers social order that is adhered to consciously or otherwise by consumers as a result of the bond that has overtime been built by the structuring influence of the brand. The data obtained from the transcripts suggest that the consumption of Coke as a household practice informs participants' decisions not to deviate from their usual practice of Coke consumption when among peers in settings different from their households or immediate environments where Coke consumption is neither a priority nor a norm:

*I'm not sure but I do think Coca-Cola being part of us is already a normalised way of life before we were born so much so that one just takes it as a given ... I remember my siblings and I going for a birthday party of a family acquaintance when I was nine. They had some sort of funny and inferior cola drinks all over the place which they offered us, we just quietly ignored the drinks and ate the food ... I later saw others, who already had the other cola drinks, also requesting for Coke ... no one hates a drink like Coke ... I wonder why the birthday organisers would offer us another drink besides Coke, but I think they knew Coke was the best they were only trying to hoard it and serve the inferior ones first. (FT, FG6; UL)*

*When I was 11 we once had a debate amongst the three of us about Coke and Pepsi, trying to see which was the best, and I won the debate (laughs) ... one was more of a Pepsi person while the other one can take absolutely any fizzy drink. ... It was funny but I think they must have seen reasons with me and switched over to my brand even though I don't remember saying anything meaningful but I just told them that compared to Pepsi and the other fake fizzy drinks, there are much more older folks, who has been around long before we were born and know better than us, that will rather take Coke, so we certainly can't go wrong with it ... ever since then Coke became their thingy and it became something we regularly socialise with as friends. (Pius, FG6; RU)*

The above excerpts from the data present samples of childhood experiences shared by this study's participants from both universities which suggest that the young Africans enlisted for this study evangelise, that is, they spread the word around, about Coke when they are in other households or communities different from the ones where they live. Data from the transcripts suggest that these actions encourage others to drink Coke, while they themselves also maintain their regular consumption of, and preference for, this SSB despite the noticeable availability of other types of cola drinks. This suggests cohesiveness as exemplified in the interpersonal bond FT and her siblings have with Coke, hence their insistence not to take the other cola drinks they were offered which they referred to as "*funny and inferior cola drinks*".

Cohesiveness, as drawn on by CCT theorists and researchers within the strand on marketplace culture, can also be understood in terms of the sets of beliefs about a product which inform the stance consumers take and their loyal and regular consumption and view of the product (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Canniford, 2011). This is useful in understanding Pius's stance which he is so convinced about that he sets out to debate with his friends about Coke being the best brand without having been a consistent consumer of other similar SSBs, like Pepsi, which he insists Coke is superior to. In a follow up question, he

pointed out that the day he debated with his friends was the first time he had Pepsi and that his comments after having the drink led to the debate.

Two other participants in the same focus group with Pius who also insisted Coke was far better than Pepsi, with one of them insisting that “*there is no basis for comparison*” (Sanele, FG6, RU), also emphasised that they had only had it on a few occasions and that it is not their favourite brand. The data from the transcripts suggest that the cohesiveness that underpins their views about Coke is not unrelated to their childhood experiences with Coca-Cola in their households, as they come from families where they regularly had Coke and it was the only SSB they grew up socialising with. There is therefore the tendency for the structuring influence that comes from regular consumption of Coke in their families to result in cohesiveness whereby they unconsciously, or even consciously, maintain a preference for Coke even when they are not within the confines of their households. It is this cohesiveness that continually binds them to the brand and informs their continual consumption of Coke thereby resulting in their dedication to the brand which in accordance with literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Belk & Costa, 1998; Bonsu & Belk, 2003) comes as the resultant effect of long term engagements with Coca-Cola. It is on this basis, which started from a state of unconscious/subconscious engagement with Coke, that the participants for this study operate predominantly within a thought pattern whereby they remain steady and loyal fans of Coca-Cola and spontaneously seek it out even when other SSB products are offered.

Resistance to change, which is referred to by CCT theorists as the deviant status of consumers who resist other products and maintain allegiance to their favourite product and ruggedly rely on such products (Hebdige, 1979; Cohen, 1980; Wheaton, 2000), helps to underscore the stance of participants with regards to their rejection of other SSBs. FT’s narrative depicts resistance, as she and her siblings resisted the other cola drinks and rather preferred not to have soft drinks at the birthday if Coke was not available. Pat, another participant in FT’s focus group, reacting to her narrative, relayed how she was at an event as a primary school girl where everyone was having Coke and at some point when the bottles of Coke available had all been consumed, they started offering other types of cola drinks which she rejected because she felt ‘slighted’ thereby resolving to rather take bottled water. While cohesiveness and dedication has been challenged to be less rigid and more dynamic and fluid

as allegiance to marketplace offerings are constantly shifting in today's contemporary world (as discussed in Chapter Two), the data gathered for this study suggests that young adults are still capable of maintaining allegiance to a particular product while neglecting other cheaper variants of the same product.

#### **4.6 Study participants' receive and engage with Coke (a multinational SSB) as a local/indigenous SSB: A pointer to Coca-Cola's cultural embeddedness**

Data from the transcripts and my observation while in the field, suggests that study participants regard Coca-Cola as an African product and, not in a direct and obvious way, as a western brand that comes from the global north. Responsible for this is, perhaps, the subliminal modes through which childhood engagements with the brand, as unpacked so far in this chapter, have come to be as an established part of the day-to-day activities of these participants. This has the tendency to inhibit perceptions of the brand as being 'foreign' by these young Africans whose self-understandings of Coca-Cola is consistent with what D'Andrade (1990) refers to as a 'cultural model' through which consumers feel, think and act. The 'internalisation'/'naturalisation' of Coca-Cola has over time made the brand a reliable cultural model to these participants through embodied habits, social practices and interactions which have provided constellations of objectified meanings, such as those cited earlier in this chapter. This has conveniently turned Coca-Cola into a cultural brand that these participants recognise primarily as one of their own and not as a foreign brand headquartered in the global north. Exemplifying this is the participant who as earlier cited referred to Coca-Cola as a "*tradition*" in his household and later reiterating this during the focus group, also argued that the brand has long become a local one and it is wrong to insist that it is foreign. Also, none of the study participants in Nigeria or South Africa were deeply aware of the particular history of Coca-Cola, either as an American product *per se*, or its penetration of African markets. For instance, the year Coca-Cola was established or the names of any of the business people linked to the ownership were not known by the young Africans, while only less than half of the participants from both countries knew either the country or city where the brand's headquarters is located.

*Coca-Cola is definitely far from being foreign to me. Like what do you even mean by foreign? In my mind, I see my family when I talk about Coke and not any foreign country or company. I don't even buy into that stuff because, like I said earlier, this thing is tradition to me ever before I knew it was associated with any other race or*

*continent. ... It's been part and parcel of my life before I even started consciously watching television which we didn't even have until I was 13 as that was the medium through which I think I later got to know it's a global brand associated with other races and continents. (Emeka, FG4; UL)*

*I've never even had cause to consciously think Coke is not from here. I don't even know anything about it being foreign or global. ... If it's not from here then it's from where? (Laughs). I think I'm with Emeka on this I mean it's like studying Hausa language in the university. Yes, I know the university education system as we operate it comes from the western world but the language is mine, it's ours as a people and not from any other distant continent. (Halimat, FG4; UL)*

*Well, it's not that straightforward because we, as a people, now identify with the brand so it's not just about where it came from or what not. See Coke is our thingy now and it's been like that way before my generation even though I don't know what year or century that is. ... I'm sure you know origin is different from identity so the fact that Coke originated from the western world doesn't mean the identity of the brand must take the shape of where it came from. The Coke that I know and identify with isn't a foreign thingy but a brand that belongs to us here which we take every now and then ... I can't be bothered about where it originated from. (Vuyo, FG3; RU)*

*Coke has a history with the US or wherever it started from, but that's what it is, history and nothing else. It's here now and it's ours, we met it here with our parents, and even grandparents, who consume it during several cultural events and ceremonies. See guys, it might be funny but I didn't even know Coke is even in other countries not until last year while I was watching a TV show, I've always seen it as a local brand and that remains my truth ... everything mustn't be about foreigners or the abroad. (Jeff, FG3; RU)*

The above excerpts from the data show how the young Africans who consume Coca-Cola appropriate the global brand within their contexts. Study participants could only make sense of the brand, that has long been incorporated into their lives and they have grown up to recognise and identify with, as one of theirs and not as a foreign brand, as Jeff insists that “*everything mustn't be about the abroad*”. Jeff's assertion here implies that there are other ‘things’ that are already about the global north (which he refers to as the abroad) and he is not ready to accept that the product he has identified with since childhood, even before he knows how far-reaching the product is, is now going to be seen as being foreign. The above assertions and the similar ones that were recorded during fieldwork bring to the fore how these set of enthusiastic consumers of Coke in today's contemporary and digitally driven marketplace, re-define a global brand to fit into their local and cultural context of what they feel the brand should be, without recourse to the possibility of alternative perspectives.

The assertions of these young Africans are consistent with the position of scholars (Robertson, 1995; Hannerz, 1996; Miller, 1998a; Thompson & Arsel, 2004) who affirm that consumers in appropriating global brands do come up with new perspectives. Through these, they creatively come up with a heterogeneous set of new meanings, drop incompatible ones and transform others to fit into their local, cultural and lifestyle patterns. This is evident in Jeff's assertion, where he disregards the 'foreignness' of Coca-Cola as being "*history and nothing else*", and also in Vuyo's stance, where he claims that he "*can't be bothered*" about the origin of the brand, thereby regarding this as incompatible with his long held perspective about the brand. Emeka's stance also aligns with this as he asserts that when he talks about Coke the picture that comes to his mind is that of his family "*and not any foreign country or company*". In making sense of Coke as a brand, study participants' insistence that Coke cannot be a foreign brand comes from the way the brand has been an integral part of their cultural practices, which fits perfectly with their lifestyles and traditional identities without eroding it or being antithetical to their way of life as a people. This explains the sense of camaraderie with the brand and affirms the critiques and complexities in the definite claims of the cultural homogenisation thesis, as one of the explanations which in literature (see Ritzer, 1993; Falk, 1999) depicts global capitalism as being culture eroding or colonisers of local culture.

#### **4.6.1 Coca-Cola as a 'local' brand: An affirmation of the critiques and complexities inherent in the definite claims of the cultural homogenisation thesis**

Contrary to the cultural homogenisation thesis, the youthful consumers of Coca-Cola enlisted for this study still hold on to their unique traditions and youthful adventures while appropriating the brand as a SSB, which overtime has been subsumed within their cultural experiences. This is evidenced in the narratives that further ensued during data collection, where participants narrated local festivals and traditional events held in their various communities, recently and when they were much younger, that had the presence of Coke as the main SSB consumed during the events. As a result of the decades of Coca-Cola's interpenetrations across several communities and cultures, the brand has exerted a structuring influence within local markets and consumption practices in such a way that these participants, in response, consequently appropriate the brand within their cultural practices. These decades of interpenetrations have given rise to a culture of Coke consumption where the brand, rather than eroding the culture and traditional lifestyles of generations of African

consumers, has rather gone through a nuanced process of ‘indigenisation’. It is through this process that it becomes a rational decision for the present hub of African youths, who are enthusiastic consumers of the brand, to insist that Coca-Cola is a local brand they unconsciously grew up with and became accustomed to, thereby constructing their identities within the framework of the symbolic resources the brand offers or affords them. This is consistent with Strelitz’s critique of the essentialism inherent in the cultural imperialism or homogenisation thesis where drawing on Massey (1992), he argues that places should no longer be seen as internally homogeneous, bounded areas, but should rather be seen as ‘spaces of interaction’. These spaces are where local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources which should be recognised, even though such resources may not be local in their origins. This, alongside the self-understandings of the participants as unpacked so far, is in line with Cayla and Eckhardt’s (2008) assertion that globalisation is beyond just a western-oriented one or two-way street, but rather a multiplicity of streets with intertwined cultures.

The ease with which study participants identify with Coke and rationalise their positions about the locality, and their ‘ownership’ of the SSB and brand, as I observed during fieldwork, is in line with the consumer identity projects of CCT. These theorise, about how consumers as empowered identity seekers, forge a sense of themselves through co-constitutive and co-productive ways. Coca-Cola, over the decades, has interacted within study participants’ communities and cultural spaces and become intertwined with their cultural norms and values. The recognition that the indigenised version of the brand gets, almost naturally from these young Africans, stems from the mutually constitutive and productive ways the SSB and brand has featured in their lives since childhood – hence their spontaneity in rejecting narratives that point Coca-Cola in the direction of being a foreign brand headquartered in the global north.

The study conducted by Yenika-Agbaw and Mhando (2014) on a cross section of African youths is in congruence with the position of the participants of this study, who throughout the data collection phase of this thesis maintained that even though Coca-Cola, as they have come to know it now, has a global reach, it is not and will never be, a foreign brand to them. Yenika-Agbaw and Mhando’s (2014) study revealed how the African version of a reality show that was an offshoot from a western original, played out on the continent and was

appropriated by these youths as though it was originally conceived in Africa – thereby indicating that they had agency whereby, “they were acting on the market forces as the forces acted upon them simultaneously” (p. 4). Similarly, the young Africans that participated in this study had agency that was exerted in their decision and insistence to recognise Coca-Cola as a local brand and not a foreign brand. However, while they had agency, which is in line with what Botelho and Rudman (2009) refer to as the ability to “read multiple discourses as well as holding contradictory discourses” (p. 119), this was still with the lens of the structuring influence within which they were raised. This then, though unconsciously, underlies and informs their positions and the conscious actions they take in identifying with Coca-Cola.

#### **4.6.2 Study participants insistence on Coke being a local SSB**

The earlier decades of dedicated engagements and marketing of Coca-Cola on the continent (which resonated with, and impacted on, the older generations in the study participants’ households and communities, as evidenced in their narratives), have prepared the platform for these present hub of young and enthusiastic consumers to exert agency, basically within the confines of the structuring influence within which they grew up. The confines within which they exert their agency propel them to take up performative roles and consumption choices that have the propensity to advance the profit and economic value of the multinational corporation whose product they identify with. The agency of these young Africans is confined within the discourses of Coca-Cola, which conforms with the value layers (that is, aims) of the Big Food company. The more the notions or claims of Coca-Cola being a local brand is held on to, the lesser the tendency for these young consumers to hold a contradictory discourse or an oppositional code/meaning (drawing on Hall’s (1980) model highlighted in Chapter Two) to anything that has to do with the brand. Operating rather between the dominant (or hegemonic) code/meaning and the negotiated code/meaning suits Coca-Cola, as this comes with the tendency for the Big Food company to remain grounded in business on the African continent – with regards to the continued consumption of these young participants, other young Africans who function within similar modes of self-understandings, and potentially those that come within their spaces of interaction such as peers, future partners and wards/children.

*To say the truth, it's kinda awkward to hear you ask me if Coke is a foreign drink or a local soft drink. Something that I didn't even know had a global reach until I was around nine years old, as I'd no form of social media or what not prior to that time so I didn't even know and I never got to know via TV since there were few local channels we had access to then ... my grandma who was a health worker drank Coke, my parents do, my favourite teacher in secondary school do, my siblings do and I do, and of course my future spouse and kids will do too ... Coca-Cola is ours and I'm totally sold out to the brand. Let me give you an example that came to my mind when the discussion around this started; see, my church originally came from penygroes in the UK, so it's a global thingy but it's been in Nigeria as an indigenised denomination with autonomy for over a 100 years now, so to us it's not a 'foreign' denomination but a local one with the headquarter in Lagos ... you see what I'm saying, about Coke now huh? (Sola, FG1; UL)*

*Well ... Coke is our brand. I'm sure you know that too, you're only just trying to be professional, right? From my little nephew, to my oldest aunty to my unborn daughter (laughs) we all drink Coke and we are cool like that. ... It's either the brand Coca-Cola or nothing else, we don't do other soft drinks apart from those produced by Coca-Cola, most especially Coke! So if it's not Coke which is my most favourite, then it's Sprite or Fanta, in that order but definitely not those other awkward fizzy drinks. (Mercy, FG6; RU)*

The excerpts from the data, as cited above, exemplify the propensity for participants to always exercise their agency within the confines of the dominant and negotiated codes/meanings, imbued in them unconsciously by the voices in their respective households and communities that have long embraced the brand. In today's contemporary world 'glocalisation', as drawn on by CCT researchers, is drawn on by multinational corporations, Coca-Cola inclusive, in order to forge ways for consumers to think and act (Thompson & Arsel , 2004; Annamma & Li, 2012) – whereas, in the case of this study, it is evident in the self-understandings of the youthful consumers of Coke enlisted for this study. This is seen as an offshoot of the structuring influence that emanates from the trusted voices in study participants' families/households and local communities, which has unconsciously induced and informed their SSB consumption since childhood. Sola's claim, as cited above, that his grandmother, parents, siblings, and others consume Coke and his projection into the nearer future that in continuation of this consumption pattern his future spouse and kids will also consume the SSB, suggests how this structuring influence informs his position and loyalty to this brand he refers to as theirs.

Having the self-understanding that Coke is a local brand stimulates patronage, consumption and commitment to the brand, thereby enabling the brand's continued relevance in the

‘worlds’ of young Africans with self-understandings similar to that of Sola and Mercy, owing to the growing tendency for Africans to identify with products that resonate with their cultural history and heritage. This is consistent with assertions that Africans through forms of black cultural discourses such as songs, folktales, traditional stories and narratives, are increasingly seeking ways of appropriating products and reaffirming themselves and their cultures even decades after the passage of the civil rights act in the 1960s and declaration of independence in many African nations (Ondrus, 2014; Yenika-Agbaw & Mhando, 2014).

#### **4.7 Is the ubiquity of Coca-Cola’s signage a further reinforcing factor of the brand’s cultural embeddedness?**

From the data from the focus groups/individual interviews, it has become clear that there are other forms of unconscious and subconscious engagements with Coca-Cola that build on the foundation of the structuring influence already in place from the participants’ families/households and communities. These are the presence of the brand’s signage, like see-through refrigerators, bill boards, wallpapers etc. in the communities where the participants’ grew up and presently live, which also in a subliminal way inform multiple discourses in favour of the brand and lessens the propensity for contradictory or oppositional meanings. For instance, the discussions that ensued around the see-through branded refrigerators, which were conspicuously situated at the venues, in the two university campuses, where the focus group sessions were held, show the absence of a conscious awareness of the refrigerators amongst the participants who perceived this as a norm. Their initial dismissive responses before they were probed further, indicated that they would have been rather surprised if they visited a mall and the branded refrigerators were not there. Affirming that they grew up seeing this every now and then and that it beautifies the spaces wherever it is sighted thereby bringing a welcoming presence of the brand into their communities, suggests that these participants are primarily connected to the aesthetics that these signage bring while neglecting, and at times being oblivious, of the advertising and marketing dimension these stand for.

During the focus groups at the University of Lagos, participants shared about how they prefer the branded refrigerators in kiosks and malls, rather than the unbranded ones. To these young adults, this does not just imply that the particular store has Coke, but that it brings a convivial atmosphere to the space. It also allows you to see the contents of the branded refrigerator and

readily take note of the specific size of coke you want, even before approaching the refrigerator to pick up your SSB.

These young adults also stated their pleasure with the Coca-Cola branded spot where the focus group sessions were held, as the discussions which showed their self-understandings about the place, imply that they see the place as Coca-Cola's way of collaborating with the university community. The participants, after chatting amongst themselves about the Coca-Cola spot, agreed that it was very useful because it not only beautifies the campus but also adds value, as it provides a space to briefly unwind in-between classes, have snacks, catch up with friends, wait for taxis, among other things.

One of the participants at Rhodes University indicated during the discussions that the see-through branded refrigerators are a "*pleasing sight to behold*" and that cafes and malls that do not have it might just be dull in outlook, while others during the sessions also alluded to this line of thought with no contradictory stance. While five of the participants at Rhodes University picked up the advertising and marketing dimension of these signage and none of their counterparts at the University of Lagos made reference to this, they referred to the advertising and marketing of Coca-Cola through these signage as a necessity. These participants claimed that those who are yet to make up their mind about the brand, need to see these signage and make up their minds in order to be part of the "*thrilling experience*" that the brand, drawing on their personal narratives, brings.

The emphasis of study participants on the aesthetic dimension that Coca-Cola as a brand brings, by narrating how it beautifies not only the malls in the cities but also the kiosks/tuck shops that are naturally old and worn out in remote areas and communities, is useful in understanding how they see the brand as a cultural resource that contributes to the community. The five participants that managed to connect the advertising and marketing dimension of Coca-Cola signage in rationalising it as a necessity, asserted that there is nothing out of place in inviting those who are not part of the brand to come aboard, as the brand has remained useful in enlivening the neighbourhoods and communities ever since they have known the brand. This underscores Holt's (2002) prediction, that in years to come postmodern consumers will perceive and identify with brands not necessarily because of the brand's authenticity, in terms of how useful or beneficial the products are, but because of the

brand's ability to contribute as a cultural resource. This suggests an explanation for the perception of Coke enthusiasts at the University of Lagos, whose self-understandings of the Coca-Cola branded spot is that of a needed collaboration between the university and the multinational SSB company. They perceive the brand as a cultural resource whose partnership with the university adds value to the university community, without recourse to the usefulness or health benefits of the brand's products.

The structuring influence Coca-Cola already has on the participants from their families/households, as the SSB consumed at home and during cultural events in their communities, already prepares the platform that enhances the recognition of the brand as a cultural resource that beautifies the kiosks and malls the way it 'beautifies' their homes. In that way, it adds value to their family time and makes it a "*thrilling and refreshing experience*" as Khutso and Amanda point out. Drawing on this, as exemplified in the excerpts from the data cited below, brings to the fore the propensity for participants to always allude to the brand as a cultural resource and unconsciously respond to the advertising and marketing dimension that the signage represents.

*The branded refrigerator is a normal and basic thing ... it's only seemingly abnormal when a kiosk or store doesn't have one of those because you'll likely know something isn't in place. ... The eatery where I have lunch Mondays to Fridays on campus has one of those so I just go there to have my amala or pounded yam with a chilled can of Coke after my classes, knowing fully well from the branded refrigerator that they have Coke. They already know me so even days that I don't have enough money they still let me have my normal meal and Coke ... no matter how well prepared the meal is, it doesn't go down well without Cke, which to me is like the icing on the cake ... my lunch times remind me of those childhood days of having Coke with my folks at home. (Bayo, FG4; UL)*

*No big deal about that refrigerator thingy ... it only becomes a big deal if you own a store and you don't have it because there's a level of aura you'll be missing out on because it kinda beautify the space. ... As someone who enjoys drinking Coke right from childhood, it makes my life easier as I can easily know the sizes available once I see the branded refrigerators afar off, grab one for myself and gulp down after a hot afternoon under Lagos sun. (Ahmed, FG5; UL)*

*It's certainly nice. The signage I see around makes even tuck shops that are old and worn out look nice and presentable ... it's good marketing, necessary for those who need to come and be part of the thrilling and refreshing experience we have been having on a consistent basis since childhood. Seeing these Coke refrigerators reminds me of the refreshing experience I'll be missing if I don't go for one ... even when I don't*

*have so much money and think I shouldn't, I sometimes just go for it knowing the nice feeling, energy and vibe that comes with having a can of Coke. ... It's difficult to see myself in-front of that refrigerator and say no to Coke, before I know it, I'm already having one even if I'm not really thirsty. (Amanda, FG4; RU)*

The above excerpts exemplify how the signage is regarded as a cultural resource that comes with “*a level of aura*” that brings a “*thrilling and refreshing experience*”, which in congruence with Coca Cola’s mission to ‘refresh the world in mind, body and spirit’, lures the participants to regularly identify with such *experiences* even if they cannot afford to be part of such. While the hot sun in Lagos as referenced by Ahmed and others during the focus groups gives them a reason for their daily coke consumption and a reason to continually crave for it; the choice for coke and not the other available SSBs comes from the structuring influence of Ahmed’s (and others) childhood days, aided by the see-through branded refrigerator which ‘assists’ him to choose coke, enjoy his favourite SSB and reminisce about his childhood experiences.

The above excerpts and other similar narratives from the focus groups and individual in-depth interviews sessions, bring to the fore the propensity for study participants, and young African consumers with similar experiences, who have moved to other university communities different from their own households and hometowns, to stay dedicated to Coca-Cola. This is as a result of their mostly unconscious interactions with Coca-Cola signage and aesthetics, which as they regularly see them in public spaces, come with the likelihood to keep active in their sub-conscious, childhood memories of their experiences with Coke. This is exemplified in Amanda’s narrative, where she affirms that seeing Coca-Cola’s branded refrigerators reminds her of what she will be missing if she does not go for the SSB knowing, “*the nice feeling, energy and vibe that comes with having a can of Coke*”. While Amanda is more conscious of the beauty the signage brings to the neighbourhoods where these are cited, and also picked up on the usefulness of the signage as a marketing resource, her narration and that of other participants suggest a seemingly latent link between the signage, their foremost childhood experiences with Coca-Cola and their decision to always choose Coke despite the availability of other SSBs. This speaks to dedication, which as a quality within CCT’s marketplace cultures (discussed in Chapter Two) refers to the possibility of consumers’ interests gradually leading to long-term engagement with specific products. While this has been challenged to be of a temporary form and a phenomenon witnessed only at weekends

when consumers enjoy more leisure time together (Kates, 2002; Beverland et al., 2010), the data from the transcripts suggest that dedication to Coke can be sustained among study participants as a result of the unconscious interactions with the brand's signage and the plethora of aesthetics they regularly come across, coupled with the fond memories and the structuring influence they have had from childhood. This comes with the tendency to enhance the cultural embeddedness of Coca-Cola as it enables consumers to always retain a subconscious knowledge of the brand beyond weekends or when they are with their friends and relations, thereby sustaining their childhood memories and fantasies about Coke. In this way Coke remains their first SSB choice and the soft drink they go for whenever they crave for soft drinks irrespective of the day, time or location, as asserted by this study's participants.

#### **4.8 Study participants' emotional attachment to Coca-Cola: An aftermath of foremost/childhood experiences with the brand**

From the excerpts cited so far from study participants' narrations, one of the key aspects of the foregoing analysis or discussion is the emotional attachment to Coke, whereby the drink is not just consumed as a result of the study participants' hunger or thirst but also because it resonates with their emotions which go beyond when they are hungry or thirsty. This, amongst other instances, can be exemplified by the narrative of the young African who after sharing her fond childhood memories of Coca-Cola later, during the focus group, said that it is difficult for her to find herself in-front of a Coca-Cola branded refrigerator on campus and say no to Coke – as she finds herself taking and drinking a can of Coke before she knows it, even if she is really not thirsty.

This narrative and other similar narrations shared by study participants correspond with Holt's (1995) analysis of consumption practices where, drawing on the CCT framework, he asserts that consumers purchase and consume products mainly because of the emotional connection and sensory gratification that has been derived over time and that have become practices embellished with their subjective experiences. Participants' identifying with everything Coca-Cola represents, can therefore be understood from Holt's (1995) position as they all have their subjective but similar experiences about Coca-Cola to which they are emotionally attached.

The emotional connection to eating and drinking behaviour captured in literature (for instance, Snoek, Engels, Janssens, & Van Strien, 2007; Newman, O'Connor, & Conner, 2007; Nguyen-Michel, Unger, & Spruijt-Metz, 2007) enhances the cohesiveness and dedication of the study participants to coke, and also further illuminate the dynamics of the hegemonic sway that Coca-Cola has on these young consumers. This is evidenced in the data by participants whose narratives show that, over the years, they drink coke based on different emotional phases; from those that drink coke when they are happy/excited with their achievements for the day or week, to those whose family take coke during joyous occasions like family reunions, to those who drink coke whenever they feel fagged out, upset etc.

Coca-Cola has thus become a brand that at some points in their lives has been a reward for good conduct and excellence in academic endeavours. Coca-Cola, as a brand, has thus been positioned in today's contemporary marketplace in line with the assertions of some CCT researchers (Tybout & Carpenter, 1999; Dholakia & Firat, 2003) who argue that a brand's success in today's marketplace is dependent on how they continuously help consumers to satisfy their personal needs and reconcile their conflicting goals of 'self-indulgence', in ways that allow them to act out their fantasy identities in their leisure time.

The data analysis and discussion in this chapter has so far shown how Coca-Cola, through different forms of unconscious and subconscious engagements has become a renowned cultural capital and historical 'brandscape' amongst the study participants. It is within these broad background contexts that these young Africans purposefully enlisted for this study engage with, and make sense of, mass media marketing messages, especially the digital media marketing campaigns and promotional messages which they are actively involved in, as unpacked in the next chapter. Drawing on study participants' childhood memories of Coke and their earliest forms of lived experiences with the multinational SSB, Coca-Cola is seen as a cultural capital, similar to Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) assertion, where he categorised cultural capital within three dimensions. Firstly, as personal experiences and credentials that inform the accumulation of certain cultural tastes; secondly, as social background whereby cultural tastes are passed down through socialisation from parents' experiences; and thirdly, through cultural tastes and dispositions themselves. Within this background of Coca-Cola being a form of cultural capital which the study participants' unconsciously and subconsciously engage with, and a SSB they consume regularly, the next chapter discusses their more

conscious engagements with mass media (traditional and especially digital, social and mobile) marketing/promotional messages and materials.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION II**

### **Study participants' reception of, and engagements with, Coca-Cola's recent media marketing campaigns**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides analysis/discussion for study participants conscious reception of, and engagements with, Coca Cola's mass media marketing messages, especially the digital, social and mobile media marketing campaigns of the brand within the context of their more recent lived experiences. The analysis/discussion presented in this chapter is within the background of the nuances and insights of how Coca-Cola has come to be as a hegemonic/historical 'brandscape' and a cultural resource in the 'worlds' of study participants, as discussed in Chapter Four. As an overlay on this background 'canvas' of study participants' childhood memories', foremost lived experiences and unconscious/subconscious engagements with Coca-Cola, this chapter underscores an interplay between these background nuances and insights and participants more recent conscious engagements with the brand's mass media marketing messages and campaigns.

To do this, this chapter begins with a presentation of sections where analysis and discussion of the newer forms of mass media marketing/promotional messages and campaigns that participants in their various focus groups referenced and identified with. The chapter builds up to sections on participants' engagements with the 'Share a Coke' campaign, being a global marketing campaign that enlisted participants all have in common as they all referenced it and identified with it irrespective of their countries. The chapter also includes a section where the correlation between study participants' foremost experiences and engagements with Coke, and their recent experiences and engagements with the SSB is specifically delineated and foregrounded. Also, the nexus between traditional and digital, mobile and social media marketing campaigns, as evidenced in participants' narrations is discussed. The chapter concludes with a highlight of the word of mouth marketing (WOMM) dimension evidenced in the data from the transcripts.

## **5.2 Do study participants consciously engage, and align more, with Coca-Cola's mass media marketing campaigns that seem to resonate with their cultural/local inclinations and day to day lived-in experiences?**

Participants, during the focus group sessions, recalled and outlined different mass media marketing campaigns by Coca-Cola that they enjoy watching amongst the plethora of the brand's commercials'/advertising messages that they have come across in their day to day endeavours. While some participants pointed out how complex it seemingly is to share their most enjoyed advertising and marketing messages of Coke – considering there are many they have come across which they think they like from the past four to seven years – these set of participants, subsequently, started coming up with narrations of those they found interesting after discussions started from the marketing campaigns shared by their counterparts.

The excerpts outlined below alongside other instances from the transcripts, suggest that the young Africans from the University of Lagos enlisted for this study were conscious of Coca-Cola's mass media advertising and marketing messages/materials that had characters they could easily relate to and identify with. For example, Coca-Cola's mass media marketing messages that feature public figures that are of the same country and belong to the same generation as the participants, were a common feature of all the Coca-Cola commercials that participants referenced during fieldwork and discussed amongst themselves. My observation and the conversations that ensued during fieldwork at the University of Lagos, suggest that this hub of youthful Coke consumers purposefully enlisted for this study, identify easily with Coca-Cola's advertising/marketing materials and messages that project individuals that resonate with their everyday lives:

*There are too many nice adverts out there, it's tricky to remember so many of them all at once but I remember one Coke advert that I saw two years ago and I can't get tired of seeing it. I saw the advert and I was like wow ... I'm sure you guys know that ad where Banky W was stranded in the elevator and he started sweating profusely and the lady they were both in the elevator offered him Coke which came as a relief to him. (Ahmed, FG5; UL)*

*There are too many of those ad stuffs out there! From TV and radio to social media platforms and so on. But the one with Banky W really stands out for me and also the one with Austin Jay Jay Okocha. Those guys inspire me big time and it of course makes sense for me to identify with them and appreciate them when I see them feature in my brand's adverts, so I think I did the right thing by identifying with these ads and sharing it with my friends, that's the least I think I can do. (Obi, FG7; UL)*

The above excerpts offer examples of the type of Coke's mass media marketing messages that the young Nigerians participants consciously align with, as those they enjoy watching and do not get bored viewing, as they perceive these as relatable and inclined to their lived-in experiences. For instance, The Banky W (stage name, Olubankole Wellington as formal name) that Ahmed, Obi and five other young Nigerian participants made reference to is a Nigerian songwriter, singer, rapper and actor whose songs these young adults enjoy and grew up listening to, and whose movies they say are some of the best in Nigeria's Nollywood, as they subsequently affirmed during the focus group sessions. Ahmed also shared how excited he was when he met the singer and actor when he came to his local community to speak on the importance of youth participation in Nigeria's democratic process, which proffers another pointer to why he perhaps enjoys the specific Coke commercial ahead of other advertising messages. This perhaps positions Ahmed and other Nigerian youths with similar realities, to readily respond to Coca-Cola's marketing messages where he is featured, just as Obi asserts that he is inspired by Banky W and that, "*it of course makes sense*" for him to "*identify with*" the artiste and "*appreciate*" him.

Similarly, data gleaned from the transcripts also suggest that young adults enlisted from Rhodes University, like their counterparts from the University of Lagos, were also conscious of Coca-Cola's mass media advertising and marketing messages/materials that had characters they could easily relate to and identify with. The narrations they gave, as exemplified below, suggest their inclination to also align more with Coca-Cola's mass media marketing campaigns that feature characters that belong to their generation and racial category:

*What comes to mind, for me, is Coke's advert that has two siblings having coke ... not the foreign version of it but the one with two black brothers. It's a brief advert but it really makes sense to me because it's everyday thingy they replicated there and it's really relatable ... older siblings naturally watch out for younger ones as portrayed in that ad ... actually something similar to that happened between my sister and I when we were growing up ... I enjoy watching this particular ad and I can't get tired of seeing it. Also there's this share a sound thingy by Coca-Cola that is really so lovely and on point. (Cindy, FG5; RU)*

*Wow, you actually spoke my mind ... the first time I saw the share a sound thingy, I loved it straight away, it's so straight to the point and relatable. Coke actually doesn't disappoint with their ads ... drinking Coke isn't a waste of time, you stand to gain a lot by associating with them. (Kuda, FG5; RU)*

The ‘share a sound’ campaign mentioned by the two South African young adults, and four other study participants from other focus group sessions, is anchored by a young man, who understands South African indigenous languages and the inherent sounds, and belongs to the same racial category as the participants, thereby presenting it in an endearing way that makes it relatable to these Coke enthusiasts. This proffers a likely explanation for Kuda’s assertion that she *“loved it straight away as it’s so straight to the point and relatable”*, while also, as a result of this, affirming that drinking Coke, for her, *“isn’t a waste of time”* as *“you stand to gain a lot by associating with”* Coca-Cola. Cindy’s reference to the advertising that uses Coke to depict the bond between siblings and her specific mention that the one she enjoys most is *“not the foreign version of it but the one with two black brothers”*, alongside the affirmation by the four other participants in the focus group who also stated their preference for this specific version, further suggests study participants’ tendency to align with Coke’s marketing messages which they find relatable and easy to identify with.

The marketing/promotional messages of Coca-Cola outlined by the enlisted study participants from both universities, as highlighted and discussed in this section, allude to the position of researchers and that of CCT which affirm that advertising/marketing and other forms of promotional messages that are congruent with the dominant cultural norms of the society where the messages are targeted, are more persuasive than those that do not reflect the cultural values of the society in which the advertising/marketing messages are disseminated (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Taylor et al., 1997; Cho et al., 1999; Choi et al., 2005). This consequently provides a useful lens that proffers insight into why it seems this hub of young Africans enlisted for this study consciously align more with Coca-Cola’s mass media marketing campaigns and promotional activities that resonate with their lived-in experiences.

### **5.2.1 Highlighting other ‘features’ embedded in the media marketing campaigns’/promotional activities that participants consciously engage with, as captured in their narratives**

Preliminary analysis and the coding processes suggest that Coca-Cola’s mass media marketing messages which study participants narrated during focus groups and individual in-depth interviews – as those they enjoy and consciously engage with, amongst the many they have come across over the past four to seven years – do not only make an impression on them because of the characters in the commercials but also comes with a persuasive tendency and

eagerness to consume Coke. The persuasive feature is exemplified in the instances cited below:

*Seeing that advert with Banky W that evening made me buy two bottles of Coke which I hadn't budgeted for! That was one time I remember seeing a Coke ad and I immediately acted on it by buying Coke straight away and not even one but two. (Ahmed, FG5; UL)*

*That advert that depict the affection between siblings isn't just nice and relatable, there's something about it that just makes me start craving for Coke anytime I view it; I think it's quite silly of me though. (Cindy, FG5; RU)*

The tendency to consume Coke, which seems inherent in the brand's mass media marketing messages that made an impression on this study's participants, seems predicated on the 'familiar' faces that resonate with their lived-in experiences, as they find these faces 'relatable', as discussed in Section 5.2 above. The spontaneous decision to buy two bottles of Coke or the craving for the SSB after viewing media marketing messages which the participants find enjoyable and relatable, suggests that personalities that echo the symbolic meanings and imagery in mass media advertising/marketing processes that are related to the self-understandings and lived-in cultural experiences of the receivers, have the propensity to not just make an impression on them but to persuade them to contemplate taking actions that they see these personalities take in the viewed media marketing messages. According to the theoretical postulation cited in the first section from CCT, the persuasiveness comes with those advertising/marketing messages that reflect the dominant cultural norms of the society where the messages are targeted. This is unlike other advertising and marketing messages that do not fall within this category of media marketing messages, as they do not come with relatable personalities as exemplified in the specific Coca-Cola commercial which Cindy (see Section 5.2) refers to as the "*foreign version*" which she does not find enjoyable or relatable.

There seems to be a correlation between the study participants' self-understandings about Coca-Cola being a local brand, as unpacked in the previous chapter, and the foremost kinds of advertising/marketing messages that they readily identify with and consciously acknowledge to have enjoyed and found useful and educative.

*I do like the share a sound one, which I've been following lately. What I've discovered that I like about it is just the educative aspect. ... It doesn't only advertise Coke but it educates in an entertaining and relatable way which to me is the least they can do anyway considering it's one of our best SSB brands out there. (Sanele, FG6; RU)*

*I think I like Coke's share a sound thingy mainly because it helps one to appreciate our culture as a people because our language is integral to our culture and this brief coke thingy gives tips on how to get the sounds and pronunciations of South African names right. Even the sounds you think you knew before, the brief share a sound clips lets you know you've been pronouncing someone's name wrongly all this while... It's been a good way to assess myself to know how South African I am...it's also a good way for a South African brand to give back to its people. (Cindy, FG5; RU)*

Sanele's assertion that Coca-Cola is one of 'their' best SSB brands out there, suggests that his perception of the brand stems from the self-understanding that the brand is local, as it seems he draws on this to rationalise why the brand's media marketing message that he loves is relatable and educative. What Sanele refers to as the educative aspect is also inherent in Cindy's narrative, where in her focus group she also made reference to the same media marketing message as Sanele and asserted that, "*it helps one to appreciate culture*" in that it "*gives tips on how to get the sounds and pronunciations of South African names right*". The four other participants in Cindy's focus group, who have all seen Coke's 'share a sound' promotional campaign, also spontaneously agreed that they found it useful and educative. These assertions, and other mass media marketing messages that the young Africans enlisted for this study narrate as those they identify with, enjoy and consciously engage with, can be better understood by drawing on the assertion by researchers (Ondrus, 2014; Yenika-Agbaw & Mhando, 2014), that Africans has the propensity to continually identify with different forms of black cultural discourses through which they reaffirm their beliefs and appropriate products within their contexts. This is useful in thinking about, and making sense of, the possible underlining reason(s) why this study's participants tend to rate specific kinds of media advertising/marketing messages about Coke ahead of others, in terms of educational content and how relatable they are.

CCT's conceptualisation of the consumer as a social actor who engages with media marketing messages differently, alongside Straubhaar's (1991) notion of cultural proximity also proffers a useful explanation for the seeming tendency of participants to align with Coca-Cola's media marketing messages that have the specific features highlighted above. The notion of cultural proximity theorises about the desire and preference of consumers of mass

media products for nationally or locally produced media programmes and messages that are more reinforcing of traditional beliefs, values and identities (Straubhaar, 1991). This further explains the participants' tendency to align with mass media marketing messages from Coca-Cola that seem to resonate with their cultural ideals/beliefs (which for example, sees Coca-Cola as a local brand, as discussed in the previous chapter). This offers a useful explanation for the enthusiasm, noted during the focus group sessions, with which participants shared stories about their reception of such media marketing messages and 'sheds more light' on why the Nigerian participants felt inspired to identify, first and foremost, with Coke's media marketing message that featured a locally recognised artiste that they admire.

### **5.3 Study participants' reception/conscious engagements with Coca-Cola's mass media marketing campaigns/messages and the attendant visual imagery and aspirations for family time and values it evokes: An overlay on their foremost unconscious/subconscious engagements with the brand and product**

This study's participants, it seems, consciously engage with the category of Coca-Cola marketing messages that resonate with their beliefs and their self-understandings. As highlighted in earlier sections, they develop visual imagery and become aspirational not just to consume Coke, but in their desire to fully replicate that which they see in the media marketing messages/campaigns that they engage with. There is an interplay between this visual imagery/repeated displays of aspirations by participants and their foremost unconscious/subconscious engagements with Coca-Cola, as discussed in Chapter Four. The reference young Nigerians instinctively made to Coca-Cola's *MamaDiMama* marketing message during the focus groups, and the enthusiasm with which they described and rationalised why they identify with this marketing message exemplifies this. This marketing message, built around the family of an award winning Nigerian contemporary music artiste named Innocent Idibia (with Tuface/2baba as his stage name), whose spouse is also a prominent actress in the Nigerian entertainment industry (Umukoro, 2013) was part of my schedule, as it was initially planned to make participants view it during the focus group sessions in order to examine what these sets of young Nigerians made of it. Here is one out of several remarks made by the participants:

*Annie Idibia's MamaDiMama Coke ad is really another phenomenal one that I can't get tired of watching as this shows the brand places value on family time just like most of us do. ... The ad centring on Annie, the Mama in the house, and how she shares a Coke with her family during their meal just brings back a floodgate of memories of my Mum and her sacrifices to always ensure that we were well fed while growing up and also the meal times we had while growing up which is no longer the case today. ... I particularly miss the dinner on Saturdays because it comes with Coke. (Favour, FG5; UL)*

The above remarks from Favour point to the seeming underlining connection between the *MamaDiMama* marketing message and her childhood memories of Coke. This is, perhaps, because the marketing, using the famous couple, centres around family time whereby the couple and their kids enjoy their mealtime together. This mealtime becomes more exciting when the mother/wife comes with a bottle of Coke with the name 'Mama' on it and serves the SSB to the hubby and kids who happily then enjoy the drink alongside their meal. This, as is the case with other participants too, resonates with Favour's childhood experiences and is therefore relatable to her, hence the reason she says she "*can't get tired of watching as this shows the brand places value on family time just like most of us do*".

This exemplifies how the old childhood memories of study participants serve as the foundational 'canvas' on which the new layer of Coca-Cola's contemporary media marketing message is laid. It also proffers another useful insight into why similar marketing messages and campaigns resonate with the young adults purposefully enlisted for this study. While the 'features' (discussed in previous sections) are also exemplified in this marketing message and pointed out by participants as one of the reasons they identify with it, the layering of a newer form of Coke's mass media marketing on old memories and foremost engagements about Coke (which are unconscious/subconscious engagements as discussed in the previous chapter) explains the basis on which participants' aspirations are fuelled.

*I remember when I first saw the ad I watched it over seven times, I loved it straight up simply because I kinda saw myself in that short clip and the family value that it strongly depicts. I really look forward to when next we can have a family mealtime at home like we always do as kids and just enjoy Coke alongside as always. It's really been years we last enjoyed that. ... And I think I should buy my Mum a pack of the Mama branded Coke so that we'll share it together on Mother's day like Annie did with her kids in that ad. (Favour, FG5; UL)*

Favour's assertion and a host of other similar narratives gathered during fieldwork at Nigeria's University of Lagos, further illustrate how the familiar faces of a couple can evoke fond memories that will lead to a young adult viewing a specific marketing message "*over seven times*". CCT's theorising on how consumers engage with mass media advertising/marketing campaigns and pursue identity and aspirational goals through dialogue, in the forms of interactions, with the frames and content of the marketing campaigns in which they see themselves, help to understand study participants' remarks and eagerness to identify with this marketing message and other similar ones. This offers a useful explanation for participants' ability to identify versions of themselves (either as a child, young adult or as potentially a married adult with a partner in the future) in a media marketing message, as acted out by those they see as their "*favourite celebrity couple*" (using Eben's words, cited below). This explains Favour's stance, whereby through 'dialogue' with the marketing message – which she says she watched over seven times – she saw and identified herself, while also creating a fantasy oriented version of herself. This also helps to make sense of how it seems participants easily perceive these personalities, featured in the marketing messages they identify with, as kith and kin that hail from the same cultural background as theirs, and how this enables unfettered identity play and modes of self-creation that become aspirational to these young adults.

*For me Coca-Cola's ad that features 2Baba's family comes with a longing for something similar, if you know what I mean. ... It is really really inspirational or do I say aspirational. ... Having this powerful couple together on the same advert is cool ... they're my favourite celebrity couple and I almost can't get tired seeing this ad. I so much desire to have a family like that and be a good Dad and boo to my bae in the nearer future (laughs). It just creates that feeling in me anytime I see it! I can even visualise it already ... and of course, it reminds me of Sundays in my house, when growing up, where as a norm we'd eat together, and have chilled Coke as a family.*  
**(Eben, FG7; UL)**

The excerpt above further exemplifies how participants for this study aspire to replicate what they see the couple do in the marketing messages they view, the interplay with the unconscious/subconscious part of their upbringings in the households where they were raised, and the seeming emotional attachment to the SSB (see Section 4.8). The above excerpt from the data, alongside close observation of study participants' reactions as they watched Coca-Cola's media marketing that features the celebrity family of Innocent Idibia, shows that the aspirations this evokes is not unrelated to the emotional attachment that comes from the

foundational layers of their foremost experiences with the brand ,which creates a visual imagery in their imaginations.

This is seen in Eben's assertion that the marketing "*just creates that feeling*" of having a family similar to what he is viewing in him "*anytime*" he sees it, and that he "*can even visualise it already*" as this resonates with his childhood mealtime experiences on Sundays. The visual imagery and childhood aspirations participants glean from Coke's marketing message speak to the position of CCT researchers, that though consumption patterns within youth subcultures are unstable and can be unpredictable as they are without rigidity, the meanings youthful consumers make of market products are however expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and forms that resonate within aspects of their collective cultural memory (Lipsitz, 1990; Maffesoli, 1996; Thompson, 1997).

My observation during fieldwork on Rhodes University's campus and the data from the transcripts also suggest this interplay between participants' visual imagery and aspirations for family mealtime and their foremost unconscious/subconscious engagements with Coca-Cola. While a media marketing message by a famous couple was not viewed during fieldwork on Rhodes University's campus, excerpts from the data that align and corroborate with the discussion in this section are cited and highlighted in Section 5.6.

#### **5.4 Study participants' conscious engagements with Coca-Cola's promotional campaigns about sports**

Transcripts from the focus groups and individual in-depth interviews and my first-hand observations suggest that the young adult participants, and consciously engage, with Coca-Cola's promotional campaigns and sponsorship of sporting events that represent and embody the prevailing urban youth culture which they are used to, and which are in consonance with their foremost beliefs and cultural inclinations.

Amongst the Nigerian participants, for instance, mention was made in five of the focus groups about Coca-Cola's sponsorship of sporting events, specifically football, which was referred to by the young adults as the company's way of encouraging that which they claim is not just of interest to them, but to hundreds of thousands of young adults in the country. The initiated conversations around Coca-Cola's sponsorships of sporting events by me during the

other two focus groups in Nigeria where this was not originally mentioned by the participants, also indicated that they had the same self-understandings with their counterparts:

*I must admit that I've seen so many Coke ads in this my 18 years on earth ... but a major part of those that stand out for me are those about football... the COPA Coca-Cola video where Jay Jay Okocha was in disguised costumes during one of the sponsored Coca-Cola football tournaments was really inspirational for everyone that was in that stadium, from the guys in the competition to their supporters and even everyone that later saw it on all the available media channels. ... And that is one of the things I love about this our brand; it genuinely inspires the younger generation! Coca-Cola has been the sponsor of several football events in this country, even before I was born, and that is quite thoughtful of them because identifying with who we are and what we love as Nigerians means the brand is in tune with what we're passionate about and is not just about profit making like other fake cola brands out there. (Bayo, FG4; UL)*

The reference Bayo, and other participants from the University of Lagos, made to the former mid-fielder and captain of Nigeria's football team (known as the Super Eagles), Augustine Okocha, suggests the perspective these young Nigerians hold about football as 'Jay-Jay Okocha' is known and made mention of because of the sport he represents. While these young adults were younger when the former footballer was actively playing the sport, they draw on the times they have seen him play live, the recorded matches of the past they have viewed and the goodwill and recognition he enjoys across the country from older generations. The reference to the ex-footballer by Bayo and other counterparts can be better understood drawing on Nike football design director's (Dan Farron) statement, that the latest official jersey made by Nike for the football team fulfilled the aim to connect to Nigeria's attitude and culture, as the company discovered trends in attitude and energy that connect athletes in the country to popular culture in terms of music, fashion, etc. (Mail & Guardian Sport Report, 2018). This seems useful in understanding the participants' connection to the former skipper and the role he plays in using Coca-Cola's commercials to connect with the attitude and energy of the young adults who revere him, thereby sustaining and enhancing the admiration, dedication and value they have for the brand, which has long been incorporated into their way of life since childhood.

In praising Coca-Cola's sponsorship of sporting events, participants made repeated reference to the brand's promotional campaigns about football which centre around a personality (like the ex-footballer cited above) who is not only recognised internationally, but, more importantly to these participants, is locally recognised within their contexts. While these

campaigns align with the category of Coke's media marketing messages discussed in the earlier sections (in terms of featuring a known personality that resonates with participants' everyday lives), these campaigns suggest that Coca-Cola (just like the Nike design team was able to connect to young Nigerians attitude and culture) is able to connect with this hub of urban youths through this notable ex-footballer, hence the repeated reference to him during focus group sessions on the University of Lagos campus. This is, perhaps, better illustrated through Bayo's attempt at exaggeration (as cited above) where he asserted that such sponsorships of football tournaments by Coca-Cola, which brought the renowned ex-footballer to the stadium, is one of the things he loves about the brand, as "everyone" (both at the stadium that day and those that saw it through the media channels) were "genuinely" inspired through the tournament and the presence of the ex-footballer. This proffers the basis on which Bayo affirms that Coca-Cola is not all about profit making like other cola brands, which he refers to as *fake*.

*Football is our culture in this country ... if you don't like football you'll have a boyfriend or girlfriend, son or daughter, father or mother that does ... apart from, maybe, Coke (laughs), football is the only other positive thing that I know that we have in common and, unites us all as a country... and I think it's been like that for a while now, because I grew up to meet the unity football fosters amongst us, tribe, religion or societal status notwithstanding ... and I think it's absolutely in order for Coke to continuously identify with football in the country. Coca-Cola is our brand so what we love must be fully supported by the brand... I enjoy watching Naija football games with my boyfriend especially those Coke ads of footballers that they show during half time.*  
**(Favour, FG5; UL)**

The above assertions by Favour that "football is our culture in this country" and that the sport enhances the unity of the country irrespective of tribe, societal status or religious affiliation, was supported by the other two participants at the focus group and also corroborated during other focus group sessions. This further exemplifies the place of football in Nigeria, as understood by young Nigerians enlisted for this study. This fits into the assertion of Gianni Infantino, FIFA president, who on a visit to Nigeria in 2016 stated that while he was told that football is a passion, a love and a religion in the country, he has come to discover that it is actually more than that as he posited that football for Nigerians is life (Forbes Africa, 2018). Drawing on this, alongside observations during fieldwork on the University of Lagos campus and data from the transcripts, it suggests that Coca-Cola's promotional campaigns align with Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) concept of cultural capital (as

outlined in the previous chapter). Coca-Cola seems to maintain this positioning by identifying with and sponsoring events that consumers hold dear and are religious about, thereby making it seemingly difficult for them to turn a critical eye toward the brand which is already deeply infused into what they regard as culture. This helps to make sense of Favour's self-understanding where in a follow-up interview, she insisted that non-consumers of Coke who enjoy football games are unlikely to criticise the brand but are rather likely to admit that the brand has made positive impact in the world of football, let-alone those who, over the years, enjoy drinking Coke. This also proffers understanding into how Favour, despite her conscious engagement with Coke's contemporary marketing/promotional campaigns (like the *MamaDiMama* marketing message cited in the previous section), maintains her erstwhile belief that Coca-Cola is a local brand, as data from the transcripts show that other participants also do, due to how these Coca-Cola campaigns lie in consonance with her belief. This is evidenced in her assertion that "*Coca-Cola is 'our' brand so what we love must be fully supported by the brand*".

Similarly, I sought to know how the sponsorship of sporting events or tournaments by Coca-Cola, as a way of marketing the brand and their products, is received and understood amongst the category of young South Africans who were enlisted for this study. The data indicates that the participants, like their Nigerian counterparts, are aware of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of sporting events and opined that it was a natural thing to do by any brand that truly wants to stand out, even though through close observation, I gathered that they were not as fanatical about football, which they referred to as soccer, compared to their Nigerian participants. However, nine of them identified with both soccer and rugby, 11 had only soccer as their favourite sport, while others were indifferent as they referenced other Coke commercials that they enjoy. Here is one of the several responses:

*Any brand that's worth its onions should generally identify with events, sports inclusive, to create more awareness and get customers and that's what Coke consistently does and I think that's been on now for decades, way before many of us here was born. I enjoy both soccer and rugby. ... If those fizzy drinks that taste like poison are even being advertised how much more Coke that's original... But then what I am also beginning to fancy for now is the Coke studio concept which is just amazing and I'm beginning to follow it closely; there's this particular one that has Boity, Lioness and Nazizi and the hip-hop track they did was simply off the hook. It's a new dawn for African ladies in the entertainment and creative industry. Everyone on that stage were all ladies and that made it special for me. It's litty having African female*

*rappers come together as sisters to make good music and Coca-Cola made that happen. (Khaya, FG3; RU)*

The excerpts above illustrate how young South Africans who are Coke enthusiasts make sense of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of sporting events and other events. This also illustrates how their self-expressions inform their sense of solidarity with Coca-Cola, as they selectively associate with any of the brand's sponsored events and marketing messages that catches their fancy. This is exemplified above in Khaya's narrative where she acknowledges the brand's sponsorship of sporting events and other events, sees this as a natural activity that any brand "*worth its onions should generally identify with*" and mentioned she has seen a few live matches while also pointing out the Coke studio concept which she says is just amazing.

Later revealing that she only just started following the Coke studio shows when her friend told her about it, Khaya maintains that the level of support for African female artistes that she sees demonstrated in the shows is the main reason why she currently identifies with Coke studio Africa. This is now, until further notice, also one of her favourite Coca-Cola sponsored events alongside soccer and rugby which she, alongside her siblings, have always since childhood identified with as their foremost Coca-Cola sponsored programmes.

The South African participants, like their Nigerian counterparts, are also not critical of Coca-Cola's promotional and marketing messages and see it as normal and expected, and also identify with that which resonates with their cultural practices and formations. Khaya's narrative and that of other participants is in congruence with the CCT domain that sees consumer agency as key and theorises on how consumers sift between different mass media advertising and marketing messages to suit themselves, as they develop solidarity and social relationships around their favourite brand and preferences (Nairn et al., 2008; Annamma & Li, 2012). This is useful in making sense of Khaya's solidarity with African female rappers, hence her decision to start following the Coca-Cola sponsored programme that speaks to this, while also maintaining her support and enthusiasm for the brand's sponsorship of soccer and rugby which is underlined by foremost childhood experiences of enjoying the sports with her siblings.

Another young adult who narrated how his younger self was so thrilled when South Africa hosted the World Cup in 2010 and the team songs from the tournament that he enjoys and

still listens to till date, made reference to how Coca-Cola came through as one of the major sponsors of the tournament. He used this as a basis to rationalise his assertions that the brand was local, without recourse to the obvious fact that the multinational brand's sponsorship of sporting events is across several countries and is not peculiar to South Africa. From the foregoing analysis and discussion, it does seem that Coca-Cola cleverly provides these youthful consumers with different kinds of positions they can choose to inhabit as they deem fit within the historic 'brandscape', as this secures the attention and patronage of this hub of consumers despite the seeming ambiguities and inconsistencies that researchers (see Thompson et al., 2013; Barker & Jane, 2016) have posited characterise the consumption practices of young adults.

### **5.5 Study participants' engagements with Coca-Cola's digital, social and mobile media marketing/promotional messages and campaigns**

During the focus group sessions conducted on the campuses of the university of Lagos and Rhodes University, as part of the scheduled plan for the semi-structured sessions, I specifically asked participants about the media platforms through which they receive and engage with the category of Coca-Cola's mass media marketing messages/campaigns which they say they enjoy, identify with, narrated and built conversations around during the sessions, such as those analysed and discussed in previous sections. While they all alluded in one way or the other during the participants' recruitment process to their use of digital media platforms (as this was a key part of why they were purposefully enlisted for this study), they also, in the course of their narrations during the focus groups, had made several references to digital media platforms while giving accounts of their experiences with regards to Coke consumption, even before the researcher asked specific questions about their usage of digital, social and mobile media in engaging with Coke's marketing campaigns. However, they were again urged, to discuss more specifically amongst themselves about the media platforms they have used regularly in recent years, to engage with Coke's marketing campaigns and why they think they use these platforms. The series of remarks and discussions that ensued around this on both campuses, as evidenced in the data from the transcripts, suggest the key underlining position of digital media platforms in the engagements this hub of young Africans have with Coke's mass media marketing/promotional messages. Additionally, my first hand observation of the palpable familiarity, void of any sense of vagueness or

cluelessness, with which these youthful consumers of Coke discuss their use of digital media also indicate that they see this as a norm.

*How do you think I viewed the Coke's ads that I've been talking about? Of course they are mostly through digital media platforms which isn't a big deal... if you're not online you're nowhere and if you're aren't in sync with advancements in the tech world you're missing out on really cool stuffs and you should just know that you're lost and you aren't different from the old ones ... it's no brainer. (Khaya, FG3; RU)*

The above assertion exemplifies the study participants' position with regards to their use of digital media and more specifically, in using it to engage with Coke's media marketing/promotional messages and campaigns. The reference to digital and social media platforms as not being "a big deal" and as "really cool stuffs" is not peculiar to the participant alone, as others also alluded to this in different ways that depict that they enjoy the offerings of digital media platforms. This, as posited in several literature seems to align with the taken-for-granted era of digital media among young adults (Montgomery & Gottlieb-Robles, 2006; Loader, 2007; Buckingham & Willet, 2013; Barker & Jane, 2016), as digital media platforms for this study's participants are part of their social and cultural fabric of learning, playing and social communication. This amongst other things are also indicated in the excerpt below:

*Left to me, TV and radio are somehow more of occasional stuffs for me ... TV is mostly when there's a football match I want to watch with my friends or maybe I've got people visiting, while radio is maybe when I'm driving. Although these things are quite important no doubt as they have their unique roles, but digital media platforms are the most important as they're really basic thingys that are enjoyable and fascinating, considering the unlimited access to the world they offer you. ... It's something I need daily ... those platforms are not wants but needs to me and I can't do without them. All the specific Coke ads I've talked about today are all what I consciously engaged with via digital media platforms and not the traditional media. (Bayo, FG4; UL)*

By referencing digital media platforms as "really basic thingys", the participant is asserting that all the marketing messages of Coke he has consciously engaged with are through digital media platforms. This assertion and other similar narratives by this hub of young adults from the developing world, allude to the prediction that we are arriving at the expected time when awareness of technology is becoming outdated, as the things that were once thought of as technological become naturalised into daily life and are so easy to use such that they are no longer easily noticed in most societies (Davies & Eynon, 2013). This, alongside participants

self-understandings of social media platforms, which they see as a given, is also consistent with research projects that indicate that youths occupy the centre stage in the digital media world as they stay abreast of the changes in the operations of corporations and platforms such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, eBay among others, who have emerged as major players in today's economy (Castells, 2007; Jarvinen et al., 2012; Phillips, 2015, Kannan & Hongshuang, 2017). During fieldwork, some of the focus groups in both countries veered off from the core of the discussions to conversations about digital media, Internet access, technology, and new computer applications and packages, as study participants' exchanged ideas about latest computer applications and software, YouTube videos, etc. This, alongside other observations gathered during fieldwork, further suggest that these youthful Africans see digital media and the plethora of application packages that the world of technology provides as basic tools that give access to all forms of social progress which engender success, pleasurable lifestyles and an opportunity to express themselves, while also being useful in their various academic pursuits.

Despite obvious constraints in Internet access due to weak and unreliable networks, expensive networks and Internet subscription plans, continuous digital divides on the African continent etc. which is evident in literature (see Counted & Arawole, 2015; Gillwald, 2018) and also alluded to in various ways by study participants, young Africans however, exemplified by these Coke enthusiasts, continually consume digital media products and offerings alongside their counterparts in other developing and developed countries around the world. This is consistent with the literature that shows African youths are at the forefront of Internet adoption on the continent and is also in congruence with the research report that shows that not less than 71% of the over 453 million Africans who are connected to, and use the Internet are below the age of 25 (International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Report, 2017; Gillwald, 2018; Pew Internet Project Report, 2018; Internet World Stats Report, 2018).

More specifically, study participants in both campuses made frequent references to YouTube as one of the main digital media platforms that they use in engaging with Coke's media marketing messages and campaigns:

*I seriously doubt if I can function without those digital and social media apps. ... If my memory serves me well, then YouTube should be one of the main ones I use in regularly viewing and sharing the Coke ads I spoke about the other time. (Cindy, FG5; RU)*

*That Annie Idibia's MamaDiMama Coke ad that I said I watched severally was via YouTube, so that should tell you about my usage of those digital and social media apps. Even though I first saw it on TV, I later went back to search for it on YouTube, kept re-watching it and later started sharing it with my friends. (Favour, FG5; UL)*

The above excerpts indicate YouTube's prominence as a useful and accessible platform through which this study's participants engage with Coke's marketing messages, as other participants, during focus group sessions, also narrated how they deliberately visit YouTube to check for Coca-Cola's commercials that catch their fancy or have been shared with them by others. Also, there were participants who made reference to how they have used YouTube for educational purposes, as they used the platform to access, and be part of, training tutorials and webinars. This is consistent with the literature that shows that since YouTube's establishment in 2005, it has remained the world's most significant user-driven video content provider and sharing platform which has since been recognised as a useful commercial platform (Wattenhofer et al., 2012; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Similar to Favour's assertion (cited above) that she first saw Coke's marketing message that featured the couple renowned in Nigeria's entertainment industry on television before she went to re-watch it on YouTube, there are also other participants from both South Africa and Nigeria who alluded to seeing a Coca-Cola promotional/marketing message on traditional mass media and then out of the desire to see the message again went on digital media, especially social media on smartphones, to view the promotional/marketing message.

## **5.6 Is the use of digital and social media platforms on smartphones different compared to that of other devices?**

While the data from the transcripts suggest that a significant part of Coca-Cola's promotional/marketing messages and campaigns – which study participants say they engage with – range from YouTube (as discussed in the previous section) to Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, I sought to unpack and examine participants' lived experiences with specific emphasis on their use of social media platforms on their smartphones to engage with Coke's promotional/marketing messages. This, as outlined in Chapter One, is in line with the study's

aim to ascertain if SMSP indeed offers a specific set of affordances that bring Coke's marketing 'closer' to the study participants:

*I view and share Coke ads and other similar stuffs to my social media pages mostly from my iPhone ... social and digital media apps on smartphone is where all the fun is, it's a blessing; I can't go a day without it just like I don't think I can go a day without Coke (laughs). (Bayo, FG4; UL)*

The excerpt above exemplifies the remarks gotten from the hub of young adults that participated in this study from both universities (in Lagos and Rhodes), as my first hand observation during fieldwork also shows that they all had smartphones which they seemed obsessed with, as they viewed and typed on these devices intermittently during focus groups/individual in-depth interviews. Bayo's remark that "*social and digital media apps on smartphone is where all the fun is*" and that "*it's a blessing*" which he jokingly likens to his regular consumption of Coke which he says he "*can't go a day without*", suggests that he sees SMSP as fun-filled. Other remarks from the data also suggest that the young African participants derive a similar sense of enjoyment from their use of SMSP. One of the participants, similar to Bayo's remark, says that viewing, chatting and sharing videos on her smartphone (Coke's commercials inclusive) is "*the real vibe*" that she knows she '*can never get bored of*', as she says she gets to enjoy this from the comfort of her bed. These remarks, alongside the enthusiastic conversations study participants had amongst themselves about computer software, different versions of the digital and social media applications they had installed on their smartphones etc., can be further unpacked drawing on Kozinets's (2008) resultant 'ideological nodes', as outlined in Chapter Two.

Drawing on these 'ideological nodes' which are broadly categorised as technophilic (that is, consumers' appreciation of digital and mobile media technology and its use which they regard as social progress and advancements) and technophobic (consumers' self-understanding of contemporary technology as destruction of nature and tradition), the study participants seem to be technophilic going by the foregoing discussion. Their narrations suggest that they see digital media technology as a means of enjoyment that is void of any form of aversion or phobia. This is also indicated in the excerpt cited below of one of the participants who remarks that her smartphone is one of her "*most useful toys*":

*Social/digital media apps on smartphone is super comfy ... for me my smartphone is one of my most useful toys ... I get to relax more when I'm on my phone, interact on a personal note with people, share stuffs and easily just plug into the online vibe unlike when I'm on my laptop ... since the smartphone is handy you can do stuffs on the go and see things up close and personal like the Coca-Cola thingy about two siblings having Coke that we chatted about, I kinda think I appreciated it more after seeing it a couple of times on my phone compared to when I first saw it on TV. (Cindy, FG5; RU)*

Cindy's reference to her smartphone as a "toy" and her remarks about social and digital media applications on her smartphone being "super comfy", suggest her self-understanding about the mobile device and her preference for SMSP. While this indicates that she belongs to Kozinents' (2008) category of technophilic consumers of mobile technology, her remarks about being able to "see things up close" on her smartphone thereby better *appreciating* what is being viewed, alongside similar assertions made during a follow-up interview with her, provide useful insight into how visual imagery is evoked and sustained amongst study participants, similar to the discussion presented earlier in Section 5.3.

Drawing on the data from the transcripts which suggest that study participants all access the digital and social media platforms they use mostly through their smartphones (even though they also access, and socialise on, these platforms through other devices, like laptops, tablets, desktop computers, etc.), the seeming subtlety their proximity to the screen of their smartphones hold in evoking and sustaining visual imagery can perhaps be better understood.

Unlike traditional media and even the desktop computer for instance, proximity to the screen of smartphones coupled with increasing screen time amongst young adults, comes with the tendency for them to engage in greater depth with the visuals and sounds embedded in whatever commercials or videos are being viewed which according to literature (see Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2006; Krishna, 2012) aid consumers picturing and reworking of these commercials and videos through inner conversations. This over time solidifies their positive feelings, thoughts and opinion about the product and brand and again alludes to the earlier discussion on study participants' emotional attachment to Coca-Cola, which in turn comes with the propensity to influence product consumption. This thus offers an explanation for what Cindy means when she says she thinks she "*appreciated*" Coke's marketing message more after viewing it a couple of times on her smartphone, as she first saw it on television. It is on this basis that she remarks that the relatable marketing message which resonates with her childhood experiences makes her "*start craving for Coke anytime*" she views it. Also,

going by study participants' narrations as captured in the data from the transcripts, the much newer marketing messages and campaigns of Coke that they narrated and that conversations were built around as those that resonate with their foremost childhood experiences and memories with the SSB and brand, are those that they engaged with not just through digital and social media platforms, but more specifically through SMSP.

Participants' assertions that they enjoy accessing social media platforms on their smartphones because the mobile device is "*handy*" points to the ubiquity of smartphones. This, as evidenced in the transcripts where nine young Africans from both universities (at Lagos and Rhodes) made direct mention of this. Others also alluded to this in their conversations, offers added insight into participants' experiences with respect to the marketplace, as mobile technology do not just mediate their social interactions but hook them up in real-time to the latest happenings in the world of the marketplace. This is perhaps what is implied by one of the participants who asserts that he prefers to access the Internet and his social media pages on his smartphone because "*smartphones are handy and are mobile and portable machines*" with which he "*can reach the world anytime any day*". Similarly, this is also another participant's remark that "*just a finger swipe on your smartphone is the distance between you and your desired product*". These assertions can be understood, in this vein, by drawing on research projects that have used CCT as a framework to unpack how against the backdrop of major sociocultural transformations that have eroded traditional bases for sociality, interactive forms of engagements and communication through digital media platforms have been used by consumers to stay abreast of – and participate whether fleetingly or permanently – in consumption practices within marketplace communities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cova & Pace, 2006; Kozinets, 2000; Varman & Belk, 2009; Kozinets et al., 2010). This, unlike the generations of their parents and grandparents who mainly operate(d) in a traditional marketplace offline, seems to enable Coca-Cola, as further discussed in subsequent sections, to draw on participants' proximity to their smartphones and the ubiquity of this mobile device to creatively 'encourage' them to engage with their offerings.

### 5.6.1 The notion of SMSP within the context of participants narratives of their lived experiences and engagements with the ‘Share a Coke’<sup>34</sup> marketing campaign

Data from the transcripts suggest that the young African participants all took part in the ‘Share a Coke’ marketing campaign and were part of both the digital/online and physical/offline conversations and activities that ensued while the campaign lasted. This aligns with the reviews that show that the campaign gained currency among young adults across all the over 70 countries where it has been launched. As observed during fieldwork (right from when participants recruitment processes began), the young adults purposefully enlisted for this study seemed keen and excited – compared to other themes discussed during the focus group sessions – to share their experiences about the campaign which they all rated as the Coca-Cola marketing/promotional campaign that they have enjoyed the most. I therefore brought the theme around this specific marketing campaign up for discussion after conversations had been held on most of the other themes that led to the analysis and discussion in the previous chapter and earlier sections of this chapter. This was in order to avoid this study’s participants losing interest or being reluctant to continue with the conversations but rather to sustain their interest and build up the focus group sessions to the parts of the discussions they seemingly enjoy.

*That Share a Coke campaign can’t be faulted, all other marketing messages to me are secondary to this. Even those who aren’t really Coca-Cola fans like some of us are cannot fault the uniqueness of the campaign ... it came with an ecstatic feeling that I doubt I can fully comprehend myself. (Matt, FG6; UL)*

*‘Share a Coke’ was really really a fun thing to do, I enjoyed both the online and the offline aspects of it right from day one that I heard about it on social media. I’d be lying to say otherwise. (Jake, FG1; RU)*

The “*ecstatic feeling*” that Matt refers to and the emphasis in Jake’s remarks that the ‘Share a Coke’ marketing campaign “*really really was a fun thing to do*”, exemplifies the plethora of remarks that study participants eagerly outlined about their self-understandings of the

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<sup>34</sup> ‘Share a Coke’ is a marketing campaign initially launched in year 2011 by Coca-Cola in Australia with the aim to strengthen the brand’s bond with young adults, create a personal relationship with them and inspire in them shared moments of happiness in the real and virtual world. The marketing campaign which has since been launched in more than 70 countries replaced the company logo on bottles/cans of Coke with consumers names and encouraged them to get these personalised Coke cans/bottles with their names or those that held personal meaning to them and share them on social media platforms using the hashtag #ShareaCoke.

campaign. There were participants that cited instances of those who they knew “aren’t really Coca-Cola fans” (as Matt puts it and is cited above), but participated in the euphoria that came with the campaign to justify their assertions that the campaign has been the best they have seen.

*Though it sounds funny but I wouldn’t have been happy if I didn’t have a good phone during the time the campaign was trendy, cos that’s where the fun is ... that’s the most portable digital device that can access the social media apps that I use on the go ... or is there any easier way to take selfies/videos with your personalised Coke bottle and upload straight up on your stories on social media? (Jake, FG1; RU).*

The assertion above by Jake which was corroborated by the five other participants in his focus group, highlights what was “really really fun” about the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign, as he later remarked during the focus group session that having a good phone when the campaign was “trendy” was “where the fun is”. Other participants during the subsequent focus group sessions in both countries, also made reference to how owning a smartphone made being part of the campaign more enjoyable for them, as they asserted in their similar narrations that having their names customised on the Coke cans/bottles was more fun-filled if they are able to take instant selfies, make videos and share it on their WhatsApp statuses/profiles, Facebook and Instagram stories etc. This, in corroboration with the discussion outlined in the last section, suggests that the notion of SMSP holds currency amongst this hub of study participants, as the process of coding the data and preliminary analysis also indicate that the participants’ stance that they enjoyed being part of the campaign stems from the ‘platform’ to express themselves “on the go” which was afforded to them during the campaign through their usage of SMSP.

*How do you even find your name on your favourite soft drink and you won’t take selfies and share it while you’re on the go on your social media stories?... of course I shared stuffs via my smartphone and connected with my guys online, otherwise the fun won’t be well rounded ... it’s easier to keep up on social media using smartphones for obvious reasons. (Matt, FG6; UL)*

While the above also suggests that participants hold preference for SMSP, the ‘techpressive’ dimension of Kozinets’ (2008) technophilic ideological nodes which emphasise how CCT researchers can unpack individuals’ perceptions of their digital, social and mobile technology consumption as pleasure and a means of self-expression, can be drawn on to further make sense of their assertions. The ‘techpressive’ dimension which summarily speaks to how

consumers get excited, pleasure themselves and get expressive through their use of contemporary digital technology, proffers insight into Matt's assertion that "*the fun*" of having a customised version of his "*favourite soft drink*" and not taking "*selfies*" which will be shared "*on the go*" on his "*social media stories won't be well rounded*". This is also useful in understanding the stance of participants who prefer SMSP because of their desire to be able to instinctively express themselves on social media platforms whenever they wish to and "*on their own terms*" (being the exact words of eight of the participants from different focus groups).

These perspectives held by participants about their use of SMSP suggest that these young Africans do not just live in the age of digital technology where they merely use digital, social and mobile technology, but they operate within the 'techpressive' dimension whereby they enjoy, derive pleasure and express themselves through these platforms, as also evidenced in one of the participants earlier cited, as saying her "*smartphone is one of my most useful toys*". This and other similar ways by which participants reference their smartphones, perhaps provide context into how and why these study participants and other African youths with similar self-understandings engage with their smartphones as a delightful endeavour they never get bored of. Unlike viewing programmes on traditional media with friends or acquaintances or family members, the smartphone, as referenced by participants proffer the freedom for them to independently surf the Internet and digital media platforms and solely determine what they view amongst a number of available options on the Internet, without being directly instructed to do so or under the obligation to ask for permission. This also speaks to participants' desired autonomy to be in control of their lives without being bossed around by others whom they have to listen to and obey for various reasons. It is this desire, drawing on the discussions they had in the focus groups, that makes SMSP more endearing to them as they all allude to being in control of who they chat with online, as well as the videos and commercials they decide to watch, while also determining when, how and with whom they do this. This evidences the position of researchers (see Steinberg, 2007; Davies & Eynon, 2013), who over the years have argued that becoming an autonomous person, that is, a self-governing person, remains one of the fundamental development tasks of young adults.

So, while the eagerness to become autonomous endears these study participants to their smartphones, which in their submissions have become part and parcel of their daily activities

ahead of other digital devices, the ubiquitous nature of mobile technology keeps them almost permanently in the marketplace. This is because their smartphones are always with them on the go and they can turn to the Internet for almost everything, from checking out and downloading the latest music, movies and shows, to gathering information about the latest news, to checking out clothes and other products, etc. – a mix within which Coca-Cola seems ‘cleverly’ located. Participants’ engagements with the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign through their self-expressions on smartphones, within the ‘techpressive’ dimension, thus has the propensity to continually enhance the persuasiveness of the brand’s strategic marketing campaigns amongst these young Africans. This is consistent with extant research projects and theorising that suggests that users of mobile technology tend to process brand-related information received on their mobile devices more deeply and for a longer period of time, which typically rouses the propensity to purchase the product (Sundar & Kim, 2005; Schmitt, Zarantonello, & Brakus, 2009; Calder et al., 2009; Bellman et al., 2009; Cauberghe & de Pelsmacker, 2010).

Furthermore, study participants’ preference for smartphones as the device for primarily accessing their social media platforms also hold the propensity to enhance their symbolic consumption of Coke. This seem deducible through participants’ assertions that they enjoy taking selfies/videos on smartphones as they had done with their personalised cans/bottles of Coke one time or the other. This, alongside the ease that comes with uploading/sharing these selfies/videos on social media platforms through their smartphones while “*on the go*”, thus proffer a reason for study participants to be more inclined to using these “*portable*” and “*handy*” devices rather than others. While some participants say they only upload and share their selfies/videos on social media occasionally when they feel excited or when there is an event, others say they do it regularly as social media platforms to them is, amongst other things, a digital album they own so it only “*makes sense*” to update their digital albums once there is new content. Irrespective of the rationale for uploading and sharing content on their social media pages, Coca-Cola, through this global campaign offered the participants a reason to do this, have fun and derive satisfaction while at it, through the symbolic resource the campaign offered.

## 5.7 Layering on childhood experiences/memories of the product and brand: the case of the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign

Data from the transcripts suggests that the underlining reasons why study participants rate the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign as the best experience they have had with Coca-Cola’s marketing/promotional activities, go beyond the tendency for young adults to desire to be a part of the euphoria and the popularity that characterised the ‘name on the can’ campaign globally. This was evidenced in the publicity the marketing campaign itself got from mass media news stories and reports, and reviews by bloggers, etc. There seems to be a clear resonance between this campaign and participants’ childhood memories and foremost experiences of the SSB.

*I’d thought I’ll never locate my own customised Coke so I just stuck with the virtual ones I made which I’d shared on my status on WhatsApp and stories on Facebook and Instagram ... I remember visiting one of the malls in Lekki and boom I saw my own customised Coke with my name boldly written on it, o boy, I was super elated ... you know names mean a lot to us in this part of the world, unlike some other climes where I understand they’ll tell you it’s just a name, so it’s really a big deal for me having my name on Coke and not just any other drink ... the campaign was really intimate.*  
**(Kunle, FG2; UL)**

The above narration from the data provides a sample, amongst several instances, of how study participants keenly shared their experiences about the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign. The narration depicts how participants say they felt when they first came across Coke cans or bottles, as Kunle’s remark that he was “*super elated*” is similar to that of other participants who used adjectives such as “*happy*”, “*overjoyed*”, “*delighted*” “*ecstatic*” “*amazing*” etc. in describing their feelings. These suggest that the instant feelings that this hub of young Africans had the first time they came across Coke cans or bottles with their names on, immediately began a process of aligning them with the purpose of the campaign, which according to Coca-Cola is “*to create a more personal relationship with consumers and inspire a shared moments of happiness*”.

A close look at Kunle’s remark that “*names mean a lot to us in this part of the world, unlike some other climes where I understand they’ll tell you it’s just a name*”, gives a useful insight into why he asserts that “*the campaign was really intimate*”. This also proffers a way of perhaps making sense of why young Africans with self-understandings similar to Kunle’s, felt “*overjoyed*” when they got their own personalised Coke cans or bottles, as one of the

participants also remarked that her “*name is very special*” to her “*and seeing it on those bottles just connected*” to her “*in ways*” she is “*not sure*” she “*can explain*”. This, alongside a plethora of similar remarks in the data, coupled with Coca-Cola’s purpose of creating the campaign which is “*to create a more personal relationship with consumers*”, suggest that this comes as a digital, social and mobile marketing campaign targeted to layer on an already existing relationship the global brand has with consumers, and not on a blank ‘canvas’ of a non-existing relationship.

The ‘Share a Coke’ campaign seemingly shares a link with the other commercials that are in comparison not global in reach, as study participants were not only conscious of the marketing campaign but they engaged with the campaign while it lasted and spontaneously shared their stories as they reminisced and expressed their satisfaction with the campaign. They seem to find it relatable because it connects with their names which is at the core of their personal identities and is in congruence with their belief that Coca-Cola is first and majorly theirs and not a foreign brand.

*I was at two of the malls and also later at one other vending activation centre where we were allowed to mention the names we wanted to see on our Coke and we had it done! That to me still remains amazing and like I’m sure I did mention earlier on that this brand maybe everywhere but there’s no denying it that it’s ours, no stories whatsoever can change that. (Jeff, FG3; RU)*

The assertion above, which is also corroborated by similar narrations from other study participants, suggest that Coca-Cola using the ‘name on the can’ campaign proffers motivation for these participants to express themselves by allowing them to put their names on their Coke bottles or cans both offline and online. This thereby gave them the ‘authority’ to ‘own’ the brand – reinforcing their belief that the brand is theirs – and allowing them to also be creative with it on their “*own terms*”. This speaks to the CCT domain that examines how multinational companies creatively exploit their consumers by ceding ‘control’ of their brands to these consumers, in order to increase the direct participation and engagement between the consumers and their brands. It thus seems, going by participant discussions during focus groups as evidenced in the data, that Coca-Cola, at the height of the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign, achieved this, as these young adults, motivated by their given autonomy to ‘control’ what names are inscribed on their cans or bottles, engaged more with the brand, as some also assert that they consumed more Coke during these times.

The initial creation of hundreds of Coke cans and bottles with indigenous African names on it and then giving consumers the go-ahead to replicate this virtually and also at physical vending activation centres, did not just give this set of consumers a sense of belonging, but connected with them at a more deeper and intimate level than other campaigns – hence the assertions in the excerpts from the data outlined above. This suggests that Coca-Cola co-constitutively works together with the participants to help them forge a sense of themselves in accordance with their already formed self-understandings about the brand. Having personalised cans or bottles which reinforce their belief that the brand is majorly and firstly theirs is in sync with literature (Douglas, 1994; Thompson, 1997) as highlighted in Chapter Two, that assert that service promotions and marketing efforts that will be effective should be situated in representations of social roles and behavioural patterns that affirm specific cultural beliefs and constructions held by consumers.

The ‘name on the can’ Is this not the SHARE-A-COKE campaign: I’m getting confused here campaign thus caters for this and is therefore appreciated by the purposefully selected young Africans who as Coke enthusiasts enjoyed the campaign as Coca-Cola gave them a sense of autonomy, while also allowing them to maintain their individualities in their engagements during the campaign. Coca-Cola by so doing aligns with the assertion of Bocoock (1997), who had long ago emphasised that contemporary ways and patterns of consumption in the globalised world will constantly give rise to newer kinds of individuals who are anxious to maintain their autonomy and individualities in order to avoid “being levelled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism” (p. 17).

Furthermore, the data from the transcripts indicate study participants’ reference to the responsiveness of Coca-Cola’s social media administrators during the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign, with one of the participants saying the “*non-mechanical*” response that she gets after asking questions through coke’s Instagram and Facebook pages stand as one of the things that excites her about the brand, and to her it confirms what she has always known about the brand being a “*well-grounded and number one ‘local’ brand around*”. It is this level of interactivity online via social media, that another participant also alluded to in his remark that Coca-Cola listens to their customers and makes them (himself and other Coke consumers) “*feel like shareholders*”. While this participant’s response to Coca-Cola’s interactivity, which he says he has witnessed thrice on social media, produces a somewhat

exaggerated reaction, this however translates to a positive outcome for the multinational firm as the participant in his narration commits to “*remain loyal to the brand*”. This suggests that he has always been loyal to the brand, considering the participant’s assertion of the brand being ‘theirs’ and narrations of foremost lived experiences about the SSB.

The brand’s responsiveness online may not be as consistent as these enthusiastic consumers perceive it to be, since they themselves do not go online every day to specifically ask questions about the brand but simply to daily socialise and interact mainly through social media features; however, it thus seems that the brand’s interactivity online contributes towards the further enhancement of the goodwill the multinational SSB already has with this hub of young adults, prior to the launch of the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign and during the campaign itself, as this builds into the campaign’s purpose “*to create a more personal relationship with consumers*”.

### **5.8 ‘Share a Coke’ global campaign’s notion of friendship as a digital, social and mobile marketing ‘layer’ that builds on previous experiences/memories of the brand**

The coding processes and preliminary analysis indicate how study participants during the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign engaged with Coke and the brand amongst their friends both physically or offline and online (through social media platforms), the interplay between these dimensions and how these seem to resonate with participants’ childhood experiences and memories of Coke.

*I remember during my 16th birthday how my uncle got my 11 friends and I personalised cans of Coke that had our names on it. We were all so so excited because none of us saw that coming. Having Coke with my name on the bottle on my birthday made it the best birthday I’ve ever had so far! (Nosipho, FG3; RU)*

The above excerpts show one of the several ways study participants engaged with the global campaign in their various parts of the world. Beside birthday celebrations, participants also made reference to occasions where friends had, to their surprise, in the early days of the campaign in their respective countries, presented them with personalised Coke cans/bottles that had their names on. One of the participants mentioned how she had apologised to her boyfriend with a personalised Coke after a disagreement that led to them not being on

speaking terms. The boyfriend was unaware that it was possible to get his local name on Coke was pleased at the “*peace offering*”.

Nosipho’s remarks (as cited above) about her 16th birthday, which in retrospect she references as “*the best birthday*” she has “*ever had so far*”, is founded on the uniqueness of her birthday that year due to the personalised Coke cans that she had tried getting for herself and friends but could not as the town she lived in then had no Coca-Cola vending activation centre and the stores also had a limited number of customised cans of Coke. The euphoria that accompanied the arrival of the personalised cans of Coke for Nosipho and her friends is in congruence with Coca-Cola’s purpose, which is to, “*inspire shared moments of happiness*” which is evidenced in her remarks that she and her friends “*were all so excited*”. It is these “*shared moments of happiness*” that seem to be *inspired* by the presence of personalised cans of Coke for the celebrant and her friends that fuelled the self-expressions through SMSP that Nosipho and her friends later had, as she mentioned during the focus group session that she had always been eager to be part of what she referred to as the “*irresistible buzz around #ShareaCoke*”.

*My 16th birthday was the perfect opportunity not just to take lots of pictures and selfies on my iPhone with my best friends but to do this with our personalised cans of Coke ... we shared our lovely photos and selfies on FB and through WhatsApp so that others can also know we were also part of the buzz around the #ShareaCoke trend. So the party which started offline continued online for hours after we were done offline (Laughs) ... I even got over 35 new friend requests on FB after that day, mostly friends I’ve known all along offline which I guess the #ShareaCoke bug brought us together.*  
**(Nosipho, FG3; RU)**

The above excerpts from Nosipho’s narration exemplify how notions of friendship – which gathered data indicate that the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign engendered – interface both offline and online dimensions; the online dimension being similar to participants use of SMSP (via the ‘like’ and ‘share’<sup>35</sup> functions), as discussed in section 5.6.1 above. The “*shared moments of happiness*” among friends which started offline in a physical location between 12 young

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<sup>35</sup> While the ‘like’ feature on social media platforms has been earlier defined in Chapter Three, the ‘share’ feature also a ‘paralinguistic digital affordance’ of social media that facilitates communication and interaction simply refers to online social sharing where social media users disseminate content from their online platform to their social media connections (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Hayes et al., 2016).

ladies and continued virtually online using #ShareaCoke is also evident in the narrations of other participants, as one of the young adults asserted that he was a major part of the then trending #ShareaCoke in Mzansi which he says further created “*a cheery aura amongst youths of colour*” in his local community, as his contemporaries according to him “*became more friendly*” as they socialised around the campaign.

According to this participant’s long narration, the “*vibe*” the campaign brought into his neighbourhood saw young adults clamouring to have personalised Coke and even getting them for their friends while hanging out, while also taking selfies/photos which they then shared on social media, making them their profile pictures and becoming “*chatty*” online. The participant posited that “*fun-like thingys*” like the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign is also capable of “*uniting*” young adults, apart from other things he refers to as “*hectic and deep political things*”. While the participant was not available after the focus group to further unpack what he was referring to as “*hectic and deep political things*”, the active use of social media platforms for activism such as the 2011 uprisings of the Arab Spring and the riots in the United Kingdom where smartphones were blamed for enabling sudden mass gatherings of uncontrolled young people, comes to mind. These, alongside the more recent Rhodes Must Fall protests on social media by South African youths in 2015, perhaps speak to the *deep political things* being referred to by this participant who, using his smartphone like his counterparts, happily took Coca-Cola up on its offer of a platform to exercise his autonomy and self-indulgence in a fun-filled way amongst friends in his neighbourhood and local community.

Furthermore, a link between the apparent “*shared moments of happiness*” participants had with personalised Coke among friends (offline and online) and their childhood experiences and memories with the brand and Coke was noted, as indicated in the data from the transcripts.

*Guys, you know what that whole enjoyable vibe kinda reminded me of? My years in primary school when I took Coke and snacks to school on my birthdays to share with my friends and teachers during break time (laughs). (Nosipho, FG3; RU)*

The above excerpts suggest that the point of reference that resonates with Nosipho’s experience with the multinational SSB was from her childhood and specifically her yearly

birthday that Coke featured in as the beverage drink that was served to friends and teachers. As she narrated how enjoyable those birthdays were and how she could not help but feel nostalgic now that she is reminiscing about those times from her childhood up to her 16th birthday, the emotional attachment to the brand seemed palpable as was the case, though in varying degrees, when others also gave similar narrations. Additionally, emotional immediacy which is recognised by CCT researchers as one of the ways corporations sell their products and brands to consumers, seemed evident in the data from the transcripts. This was also observed and highlighted in the field notes of both me, and other doctoral researchers who were present in some of the focus groups.

While it is perhaps pertinent to highlight that a clear definition of what emotion is remains elusive in extant literature, despite the increased emphasis in focus and research over the past two decades, it has however, over the years, been acknowledged to be a complex multidimensional concept that involves and informs consumers feelings, behaviours and their affective experiences with products, brands and services as well as their loyalty (Plutchik & Kellerman, 1980; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Coulter & Ligas, 2000; Maguire, 2016).

It is these kinds of affective experiences and feelings that the set of youthful consumers of Coke that participated in this study had about Coke from their childhood to teenage years, that underlie the emotional attachment and immediacy that characterised their reception and self-understandings of the #ShareaCoke campaign as outlined in the above instances. These past experiences and feelings about Coke which informed their emotional attachment prior to the launch of the campaign, alongside the urge for autonomy and self-expression that in varying ways characterise the youthful phase, explains the emotional immediacy and attachment alongside the spontaneity with which they connect with Coca-Cola's 'name on the can' campaign. This can be further unpacked drawing on Thompson's (2003) theorising on contemporary consumption practices, discussed in Chapter Two, where he conceptualises *re-enchantment* as a type of *hyper-modernist* consumer goal which underlies how postmodern consumers construct their identities. They do this by nostalgically drawing on past events by identifying with, and being captivated by, the advertising and marketing of products that invoke past ideals and images associated with these past events. It is the re-enactment of this nostalgic feeling and past emotional attachment to Coke as a product and brand that was observed during fieldwork and in the non-verbal cues of the participants the instant

discussions turned to their reception of the #ShareaCoke campaign activities and their lived experiences and engagements during active days of the campaign.

### **5.9 Further connections between past and present Coke's media marketing/promotional campaigns and messages**

Drawing on the foregoing analysis or discussion in this chapter, the correlation between study participants largely subconscious engagements with Coke – as explored in Chapter Four which characterise their childhood experiences or memories with Coke – and their more recent conscious reception of, and engagements with, the newer forms of Coke's marketing/promotional campaigns and messages, as embedded in their lived experiences, emerges clearly from the data. As alluded to in the cited excerpts from the data and the theorised analysis presented so far, the unconscious or subconscious engagements with Coke by the young African participants during their childhood years proffer the background 'canvas' which informs how they receive, and engage with, Coke's mass media marketing messages. These engagements, as evidenced in the data from the transcripts, they do mainly through digital, social and mobile media marketing on their smartphones.

These earliest forms of participants' experiences and memories of Coke which have been referenced by these young adults as a "*norm*" or "*tradition*" – and has played out before them as kids, over and over again, at the instance of both the older generations in their respective households and larger community in their cultural spaces – has consequently set the background 'canvas' of ideological instructions and inducements that has been unconsciously or subconsciously passed down to, and received by the generation of these young Africans. These ideological inducements or instructions, which as posited in CCT is encoded in cultural ideals or norms, come from the interpersonal bond that this study's participants have with Coke, whereby the brand – through their family traditions of consuming Coke – has, from their childhood, become an integral part of their day to day lives thereby holding a structuring influence on the study participants. This background 'canvas' of ideological instructions or inducements passed down to this study's participants, are conveyed through 'voices' and 'actions' of the older generation that they trust, as Coke during their childhood days has been presented to them as an important part of family meals and relaxation time, birthdays, hangouts, weddings, reward for hard work and good behaviour. This thus serves as the platform on which Coke's digital, social and mobile media

marketing and promotional campaigns are received and the lens with which they are viewed. These fundamental ideological instructions and inducements underlie the plethora of narrations in the data, where participants referenced and identified with newer forms of Coke's media marketing messages and campaigns which align and resonate with their foremost beliefs, childhood experiences and memories about Coke and its brand.

Consequently, these fundamental ideological instructions and inducements which spur nostalgia and solidarity among participants, remain the underlining denominator of all the media marketing/promotional campaigns and messages of Coke that the young African participants identify with – from promotional campaigns of sporting events to campaigns and messages that feature relatable personalities that are of their generation, race and ethnic backgrounds – as unpacked so far in the ongoing analysis and discussion. Identifying these fundamental ideological inducements and instructions within which participants were raised as also being the denominator that underlie narrations of study participants lived experiences and engagements with the global 'Share a Coke' campaign, lends credence to the place of this background 'canvas' amongst the newer forms of Coke's media marketing message which participants' reference and identify with. This is because this background 'canvas' does not only characterise and underlie marketing campaigns that are more renowned within a particular region or country and amongst a specific set of study participants who reference and identify with them, but also underlines Coca-Cola's 'name on the can' marketing campaign that has a global audience and that all study participants reference and identify with, irrespective of their region or country.

The 'following' and 'liking' of Coca-Cola's page on social media by the participants (as alluded to in sections above and also verified by the researcher during fieldwork) show that they identify with the brand as they desire to stay updated about the brand and be a part of the content being shared on the page. This is underlined by the ideological instructions and inducements within which these study's participants were raised, as the sustained symbolic consumption of Coke's digital media marketing messages hinge on memories and experiences that come to their minds and inform their emotional attachment and immediacy as exemplified in the relevant sections. The 'techspressive' ideological node earlier brought to the fore as the dimension within which study participants operate, is itself an overlay on the underlining inducements and instructions encoded in the cultural ideals of what Coke

represents to these participants from their childhood days, when they unconsciously and subconsciously engaged with Coca-Cola in their households and neighbourhoods. This, as already alluded to in the analysis and discussion in this chapter, is evident in the congruence between the *fun* times participants recounted that they had while they were reminiscing about Coke consumption in their childhood days, and the *fun* times they had with the #ShareaCoke campaign.

The intimacy, interactive and immersive affordances of SMSP that Coca-Cola draws on in this campaign and used to market their brand as they ‘steered’ participants’ to seize ‘control’ of the brand and have *fun* while doing so, aligns with the memories of intimacy and interaction these participants had while growing up in their respective households, as evidenced in the relevant instances cited in sections above. One such memory was posited by a participant, who says that the #ShareaCoke campaign continually stands out for her as it “*wakes up fun memories of good times*” she had while growing up. This offers an explanation for why study participants say they do not ‘follow’ pages of other SSBs on social media, for instance Pepsi’s social media page. While they say they do not ‘follow’ and engage with other SSBs on social media because they do not like the SSBs and do not enjoy the commercials these other SSBs churn out, the absence of the underlining denominator which over the years has formed the structuring influence that determines what resonates with them, proffers the main reason why they do not identify with other SSBs.

Going by the analysis provided in this chapter and the previous chapter – alongside the assertion that media consumption choices and the meanings consumers take from mass media messages are shaped by their lived cultural experiences (Strelitz, 2008) – the propensity for participants to reference and identify with other SSBs could have been more probable if these SSBs, like Pepsi for instance, had also been captured as part of the background ‘canvas’ of ideological inducements and instructions with which they were raised by the older generations of SSB consumers.

Drawing on Thompson’s (2003) theorising of contemporary consumption practices and his conceptualisation of *communal consumption* – which speaks to how postmodern consumers identify with products in the marketplace through nostalgic feelings of an ineffable organic community they once had, or heard of, in the past – the correlations between study

participants' childhood memories and experiences of coke consumption can be further foregrounded. It is the desire for this *communal consumption* that is evidenced amongst the young Coke consumers, who in making sense of newer forms of Coke's marketing messages and campaigns spontaneously link them to their past experiences and memories of Coke and its brand in the course of their narrations. According to Thompson (2003), the organic community he conceptualises in *communal consumption* is embedded with intimate feelings which the postmodern consumer is connected to, and is therefore spurred by this connection to consume more of marketplace products that aids his or her efforts to simulate a magical, mystical and communal solidarity once had or heard of in the past. This thus links to and foregrounds the analysis and discussion so far, as it usefully explains the data from the transcripts about participants' unconscious engagements with Coca-Cola and the communal solidarity that emanates from this. These unconscious engagements alongside the conscious via digital, social and mobile media where participants in engaging with Coke's media marketing campaigns and messages gravitate towards those that best resemble the *communal consumption* they are used to.

#### **5.10 The nexus between traditional media and digital, social and mobile media in study participants' reception of, and engagements with, Coke's media marketing messages/campaigns**

The data from the transcripts indicate an intersection between the traditional media marketing and digital and social or mobile media marketing of Coke. This is exemplified, for instance, in a previously cited excerpt from the data where one of the participants narrated how she had seen a Coke media marketing message she liked on television and that made her search for it on YouTube and watch it again several times. Similar narrations were also given by other participants who had seen Coca-Cola's sponsored show on television and thereafter went online to search for it, download it and watch it again. This is useful in highlighting the synergy between Coca-Cola's traditional and digital media marketing messages, as the traditional media informs further engagement of these young Africans with Coke's marketing messages. The instances the participants cited that demonstrate this synergy, suggest that while Coca-Cola in recent times has channelled their focus into the use of digital, social and mobile media for marketing on the continent, traditional media marketing messages are still being used by the multinational SSB company and these are actually getting across to young Africans.

Study participants who made reference to their reception of Coke's commercials through television, indicated that that was the first time they had seen the marketing messages on any existing mass media, either traditional or digital. This is useful in delineating the continued currency of traditional mass media in conveying marketing messages, even to the digitally inclined generation. This is quite pertinent, being a point that comes with the tendency to be easily ignored by those with a technologically determinist stance who, according to Buckingham (2008), tend to neglect the historical views that indicate the fundamental continuities that exist at the level of form and content and interdependencies between new media and 'old' media. Television and radio, as major forms of traditional mass media, are increasingly being blended online with participatory interaction and services being proffered, as the emergence of newer forms of digital technologies continually blur the erstwhile distinctions widely known between various media. Yet, these traditional mass media forms are likely to persist as discrete and relevant entities for years to come.

This is consistent with the data for this study and existing literature (see Herring, 2008; Morris, 2017) that is wary of the oversimplification and exoticism seemingly attached to scholarly engagements about new media or technologies, today's Internet-connected gadget-laden contemporary world notwithstanding. Study participants, for instance, made mention of how they watch television with their friends and course mates in their hostel common rooms on campus and also when they are home with their parents and siblings. Even though these young adults indicate that it gets monotonous and boring at times watching television with family members especially older relatives, they however say they look forward to being home again and enjoying family time while watching television. It is at times like these when they were watching their favourite programmes together, that participants who say they saw Coke's marketing message on television would have seen it, and later searched for it on YouTube in their spare time. This suggests that the television, as a form of traditional media, plays a role within the different setups that these young Africans operate and live in and also indicates that in disseminating Coca-Cola's mass media marketing campaigns and other promotional activities, both traditional and digital media platforms are used complementarily. This complementary use of both traditional and digital media in disseminating their commercials and promotional activities, continues to enhance the ubiquitous nature of Coca-Cola on the African continent. This is evidenced by this study's participants, who in their

countries have engaged with a plethora of media promotional/marketing messages and campaigns from Coca-Cola.

Many also socialise with are those they have mutual ‘friends’ with online, and those they know and presently have, or once had a relationship with offline. These ‘friends’ range from participants’ family members, course mates, childhood friends and other acquaintances which they have, or once had physical connections with, prior to their social media ‘friendship’ and also prior to when they started to socialise together courtesy of the #ShareaCoke campaign. This can be exemplified through Gab’s narration about his experience of the #ShareaCoke campaign and his social media engagements while the campaign was actively on. He asserts that *“the #ShareaCoke vibe on social media is just like an online version of what my guys and I already have going on physically on Fridays and Saturdays on campus”*. Gab, similar to what other participants also allude to, says that even though he has hundreds of friends on FB and IG and he enjoys, and basks in this awareness, he feels more connected to those he knows beyond social media and knows physically offline and relates with in ways that are beyond social media ‘likes’, ‘shares’, status updates or comments.

This was reflected in his subsequent narratives where he shares how his friends were eager to get their personalised Coke cans after seeing him physically or offline with his own personalised can. This motivated them to also eagerly share the selfies/photos they took with their customised Coke cans on social media, which then generated ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and comments and other forms of social media engagements or behaviour amongst these friends.

Additionally, the excerpts from the lived experience of Nosipho who shared about her 16th birthday (see Section 5.8) also exemplifies the nexus between offline relationships participants have with their friends and their usage of social media platforms which these same friends. Nosipho’s earlier cited assertion alludes to this, as her birthday party which she and her friends *“started offline continued online”*, with the same set of friends through their chatting and sharing of photos/selfies with their personalised Coke cans on FB and WhatsApp. She later added during a follow up interview, that those she chats with on social media are those she knows physically or offline and that even though she accepts friend requests from those she really does not know, as long as they share mutual friends online, she

does not really engage with them compared to the way she freely relates with those she knows beyond the virtual world.

These instances discussed above alongside others embedded in the data from the transcripts, indicate that those this study's participants have a relationship with physically or offline also form part of those they comfortably relate with online, and thus form a part of their social network online. While the Internet and social media platforms have made it possible to overcome geographical restrictions and build 'friendships' worldwide, physical proximity plays a part in the online social networks of the young Africans enlisted for this study. While they allude to having 'friends' that they do not know personally – with some of the participants having hundreds of such 'friends' – they often chat and engage with these 'online' only 'friends'. This gives new meaning to Thompson's (2003) theorising of *communal consumption* outlined in the last section, which is also useful in making sense of why these young Africans enlisted for this study are naturally inclined, and feel more connected, to social media 'friends' that they know, or once knew offline or physically, as compared to those that are distant geographically and are not in this category. While they are enthusiastic about their use of these relatively newer forms of digital, social and mobile technology – and see it as being socially progressive, a means to express themselves, have fun and reach the global world – these set of youthful consumers respond more readily to those that are of their organic community whether online or not as they share more things communally. This is similar to the way they are readily disposed to identifying and engaging with the online marketing of Coke, ahead of the online marketing of other SSBs, as Coke specifically bears a semblance of the organic community they had as kids in their neighbourhoods or households and have become used to over the years. Data from the transcripts consequently indicates correlations between participants' spaces of interaction offline and online, whereby offline interactions and communal consumption practices serve as a springboard and influence for the online dimension of interactive engagements and consumption. This to the study participants is normal, as they do not see their use of social media platforms or digital technology as exotic or out of the ordinary, but rather see their day to day activities both offline and online as infused together, as one informs the other. This is probably aided by their seeming lack of sufficient historical and comparative perspective, whereby they could be enabled to draw vivid comparisons with pre-mobile phones and Internet times.

### 5.11 ‘Word of mouth’ marketing and reception of Coke’s media marketing messages/campaigns

The data coding processes, and preliminary analysis, suggest that there is a salient and prevalent role that WOMM, enacted by consumer’s product promotion, plays in drawing other potential consumers to identify with a product in the marketplace, both offline and online. From the instances cited by study participants where they successfully prevailed on their peers to choose Coke ahead of other SSBs – as exemplified in the case of the participant (see Section ) who convinced his friends after a round of debate to start taking Coke and forget about other SSBs in the marketplace – WOMM, in the form of a keen consumer promoting Coke is seen here as an offshoot of the ideological instructions and inducements that underlie the consumer’s childhood memories and experiences.

Another instance of WOMM is also seen in the actions of participants whose narrations reveal that their activities during the #ShareaCoke campaign, spurred their peers to join them in the fun of creating virtual Coke cans on social media, getting physical Coke cans with their names on it, taking selfies and sharing them on social media etc. Amongst several similar examples of these is that of Gab discussed in the last section, and also Edward who states that:

*I took quite a number of selfies with my personalised Coke can, uploaded and shared them that same day; first with my friends, siblings and cousins and later on FB and IG. This, quite surprisingly, also got these guys too to do the same thing and also share it on social media which then became a thing among us all, both those who really don’t do Coke and those of us who can’t go a day without it. (Edward, FG2; RU).*

WOMM is seen in the above excerpt from the data, as the narrative from Edward indicates how a consumer’s interest in a product and activities in relation to the product has the propensity to generate chats or conversations that promote the product within the consumer’s space of interaction. Further, it shows how that can spur those within the said ‘space of interaction’ to engage with the product both offline and through social media platforms. This is consistent with extant literature (see Kozinets et al., 2010; Barreto, 2014; Subramanian, 2018) that show that consumers are much more likely to trust the advice and opinion of their peers, over commercials that come directly from the company through various media. This also demonstrates how consumers, like Edward and his counterparts who are all enthusiastic

Coke consumers, can influence the offline and online activities of their peers thereby playing a role in their marketplace engagements.

CCT researchers have over the years brought to the fore how consumers exert agency and pursue identity goals through something more like a ‘dialogue’ with advertisements or commercials that business corporations churn out via modern digital technology and traditional mass media. However, data gotten from Edward and other participants indicate the role of friends or acquaintances of potential consumers in positioning them to ‘dialogue’ with the advertisements or commercials. There is the tendency for this to reflect organically either directly or otherwise while socialising with peers on their various campuses. This tendency is especially noticeable when there is an ongoing marketing campaign such as #ShareaCoke, as these friends or acquaintances have grown up in households where Coke is the predominant SSB consumed and have been ideologically induced from childhood to believe that Coke is all there is to desire in the world of SSBs. WOMM, which at the turn of the digital or ICT age is being gradually re-conceptualised to accommodate the changing marketplace and incorporate written forms of WOMM – such as online product reviews and commercials by bloggers and celebrities and ‘sharing’ of products with specific friends on social media – is also evident in the data and alluded to by aforementioned instances in this chapter.

This chapter has strongly suggested that the reception of digital media marketing messages by the participants are not exclusive of their prevailing cultural contexts. Despite the exoticism, interactivity and other affordances of digital, social and mobile media which give Coke’s marketing messages/campaigns via these platforms the potential to penetrate deeply into study participants’ daily lives, the households, organic community and communal consumption patterns that these young adults are accustomed to from childhood which are underpinned by ideological instructions and inducements, inform how they receive and make sense of the media marketing messages/campaigns. These physical or offline spaces of interaction – which are also a subset of what is obtainable in their online spaces of interactions and informs how these young adults engage with the digital, social and mobile media marketing messages within their online spaces of interactions – are instructive in acknowledging that the success of Coca-Cola’s digital media marketing messages/campaigns are hinged on the alignment of these marketing messages/campaigns with the prevailing cultural beliefs, contexts and the underlining ideological instructions about Coca-Cola that

these participants were raised with. This is responsible for the ‘reservoir of goodwill’ that Coca-Cola enjoys and maintains amongst these purposefully selected young Africans and it is within this purview that they make sense of the health concerns that are attributed to habitual Coke consumption, as analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Six specifically discusses study participants’ self-understandings of their continued Coke consumption from childhood until now, their understandings of the health implications and their long-term susceptibility to being diagnosed with diet related NCDs as a result of this continued consumption.

## CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION III

### Cognitive Dissonance? Unpacking study participants' views on their continued Coke consumption and ill-health

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter, within the context of the in-depth analyses and discussions in Chapters Four and Five, explores at participants' self-understandings about the attendant health implications that can arise as a repercussion of their habitual consumption of Coke. As part of the aims/goals of this study, as outlined in Chapter One, this chapter also brings to the fore how participants 'make sense' of the interplay between their foremost unconscious engagements with Coke, their reception of Coke's media marketing, especially the digital, social and mobile media campaigns that they consciously engage with, their continued consumption of Coke and the likelihood of being diagnosed with diet related NCDs.

#### 6.2 Study participants' disbelief of assertions that link habitual Coke consumption to diet related NCDs

Data from the transcripts indicate that many participants do not believe that their regular and often habitual consumption of Coke poses health risks. As observed by me, they were mostly indifferent and dismissive of conversations around this through their verbal and non-verbal expressions, while some of the participants queried the implied notion that Coke contains too much sugar.

*Well, these type of concerns as you put it don't bother me; if you must know, this is not an interesting thing to talk about, we might as well call it a day because I don't understand why Coke containing too much sugar should be an issue ... how do we even confirm or know that coke truly has too much sugar... That you think you've taken too much sugar doesn't mean I've also taken too much sugar, what's unhealthy for you might just be what I need to function properly ... if you're talking about those nasty viral diseases like Ebola, then I'll know there's really something ... but diabetes is not something I can get from Coke, I'm so certain of that... (Halimat, FG4; UL)*

The above excerpts' from the data exemplify study participants general indifference to the long-term dangers of being diagnosed with diet related NCDs, as some of them opined just

like Halimat that they do not understand why “*Coke containing too much sugar should be an issue*”. Participants’ rationalised their habitual Coke consumption and sugar intake that comes with this, by insisting that sugar being too much is relative, depending on the person(s) involved, as they argued that sugar intake from their habitual Coke consumption is in no way a threat to their well-being. Participants, as exemplified above in Halimat’s narration, also seem to be more wary of infectious diseases that are contagious than they are of diet related NCDs which they conceive as somewhat within their control.

*These health thingy’s about Coke are at best fairy tales ... what are even diet diseases or whatever you call them, I know obesity and diabetes though and that’s not a challenge. My life and the good health I enjoy despite drinking Coke almost every day and even more than once whenever I feel like is more than enough proof ... that’s why I know that these things are plainly taken out of context and just unnecessarily exaggerated. ... At least we’re not dealing with measles or any of those hectic things.*  
(Jeff, FG3; RU)

While the above excerpts from the data further suggest participants’ disbelief that their habitual consumption of Coke could lead to too much accumulation of free sugars in their bodies thereby heightening the propensity to be diagnosed with diet related NCDs, it also indicates their lack of sufficient understanding about what these NCDs are. This is evidenced in the several references to obesity and diabetes by participants on the two campuses during fieldwork, while other conditions such as heart disease, chromium deficiency, tooth decay, fatigue, accelerated ageing, headaches etc., were not referenced. This is further exemplified by Jeff’s seeming scepticism where he queried: “*What are even diet diseases or whatever you call them?*”. The self-understandings of this study’s participants with regards to diet related NCDs can be further delineated drawing on the cited excerpts above, where, like other participants also alluded to in their similar narratives, Jeff asserted that obesity and diabetes are no *challenge* for him since these cannot be likened to “*any of those hectic things*” like measles.

Jeff’s reference to his personal experience of being an “*almost every day*” consumer of Coke, who even at times also drinks it “*more than once*” daily and remains in “*good health*” (this consumption pattern notwithstanding), gives a useful explanation as to why he argues, like other participants who were also not really keen about this theme, that the health concerns that accompany habitual consumption of Coke “*are plainly taken out of context and just unnecessarily exaggerated*”.

As further understood through a follow up interview with this participant, the “*context*” he refers to, is his personal experience of having grown up drinking Coke, a SSB that has been indigenised within his space of interaction as discussed in Chapter Four, and yet he enjoys “*good health*”. This personal experience of continued consumption of Coke which to study participants has become a norm – the *fun-filled* memories that come with different times of consumption and the underlying ideological inducements and instructions discussed in Chapter Five – make it seem difficult for participants to come to terms with the possibility of being at the receiving end of diet related NCDs as a result of their consumption practices.

This serves as the basis on which Jeff again insisted during the follow up interview, that health concerns which he says “*people come up with*” about habitual Coke consumption “*are plainly taken out of context*”. That is, the “*context*” of his lived experience of Coke consumption which connotes fond memories and exciting times of shared happiness and that of the ideological lens that underlie the way he and other participants relate with their favourite SSB, which has confined their perceptions within the hegemonic code that sees Coke as the soft drink they can continue to ‘*trust*’.

Drawing on the theory of cognitive dissonance, this *context* informs participants’ cognition, as far as Coke and its consumption is concerned. Cognition is a process of knowing based on personal belief systems that have mostly been acquired and accumulated through various perceptions of reality (Akpan et al., 2018), is the personal belief system study participants have always known and held on to throughout their childhood years and still hold on to now as young adults. This personal belief system explains participants’ seeming indifference towards any contradictory stance/cognition that does not align with their *context* as indicated in Halimat’s (earlier cited) assertion that it “*is not an interesting thing to talk about*”. Beyond participants’ indifference, their personal belief system which has become their long standing cognition about Coke, is also useful in making sense of their disbelief in such a contradictory stance or cognition that engenders conversations about the health risks inherent in continuous/habitual Coke consumption. As evident in the data from the transcripts, participants response to this contradictory stance/cognition, ranges from participants that argue that claims about Coke’s link to unhealthy dietary patterns because of its sugary content are totally untrue and debatable, to those that insist that these contrary cognition(s)

are “*unnecessarily exaggerated*” – as they argue that even if there are verified instances, these should not become a broad stroke applicable to all Coke consumers.

The conversations during fieldwork around the health risks that accompany habitual Coke consumption seem to herald dissonance within the belief system of participants and this perhaps explains why they were not keen about these conversations, as the hub of young adults enlisted for this study were mostly indifferent and dismissive about these themes, as earlier highlighted. Dissonance as used here, draws on its conceptualisation within the theorising for cognitive dissonance as reviewed in Chapter Two, that is, a state whereby new information (which suggests that erstwhile thoughts, feelings, belief systems, as well as the behavioural patterns it sponsor are unwise) becomes available and stands in apparent contradiction to existing cognition(s) (Stone & Fernandez, 2008). This thus comes with the tendency for those experiencing the dissonance to make efforts to reduce or eliminate the dissonance, which usefully explains why participants insisting that their continued consumption of Coke has no propensity to impact adversely on their bodily health came up, with different reasons aimed at rationalising their habitual consumption and dedication to Coke.

### **6.3 Childhood lived experiences/memories built around Coke consumption as a rationale for continued consumption -- and disbelief of the attendant health concerns**

Within study participants’ assertions of not being bothered about the likelihood of being diagnosed with diet related NCDs despite their habitual consumption of Coke, are narratives about their childhood lived experiences and memories of family times/events, picnics and other social functions built around Coke consumption, as discussed in Chapter Four. While participants’ reference these narratives that some of them had shared earlier during the sessions alongside similar ones that also came from others during this phase of the sessions, these narratives were drawn on by this study’s participants to rationalise both their continued consumption of Coke and disbelief of the attendant health concerns.

*My parents who are gradually getting close to the septuagenarian club, as they’re both in their late sixties, have been drinking Coke even before I was born and they haven’t been diagnosed for once of any health condition that comes as a result of too much Coke or say excess sugar intake. So certainly these health stories aren’t an issue for my family and for me. Coke is the only soft drink I grew up with as a child, it’s a drink we*

*have at every social gathering you can ever think of ... I dare say it's a tradition in my home too like one of us mentioned the other time ... I drink Coke every now and then since childhood till date with loads of lovely family time and events where this soft drink has been a constant feature. (Taiwo, FG4; UL)*

The excerpts above exemplify how participants reference the experiences/memories they have of the habitual consumption of Coke by their parents, older siblings and relations, teachers etc. in reinforcing their disbelief in the health concerns that could come from their continuous Coke consumption. The above excerpts and other similar childhood memories and experiences, as narrated by these young Africans and cited in Chapter Four, are useful in highlighting the influence of the voices of family members and loved ones from older generations because the disposition of these individuals who are prominent within participants' spaces of interaction, can enhance their continued consumption of Coke and their propensity to ignore/neglect the sugar content of the soft drink. Taiwo's instance (as cited above) illustrates this, as her parents, in their late sixties, continue to regularly consume Coke which is a usual practice that she grew up with and has become a part of. Taiwo's parents' Coke consumption gives her the needed nudging/encouragement to also keep up her Coke consumption and neglect the health concerns, as she asserts, considering her parents 'clean bill of health' despite their regular consumption of Coke over the years, that *"certainly these health stories aren't an issue for my family and for me"*.

Participants drew on past experiences and memories, similar to Taiwo's, that are not just about their individual Coke consumption but that of generations ahead of theirs, who they say have consumed more Coke in their lifetime than they have, in order to reduce the dissonance that this phase of the discussions brought to the fore. Participants argue that if the health concerns being discussed are really true, older generations, like Taiwo's parents, should be battling with diet related diseases at this stage of their lives, considering how much Coke they have consumed. This is also evidenced in the insistence of one of the participants, amongst several others, who argued that if the *"gogos are there getting excited and refreshed with Coke even when they are comfortably in their eighties then there's no logic behind the noise that too much sugar in Coke can get one sick"*. The participant cited here made this remark in reference to her old grandmother whose favourite SSB is Coke and who, according to this participant, still drinks it and appreciates those who come to see her bearing Coke as part of the gift items purchased for her. Participants in their efforts to counter the dissonance

caused through conversations that are not in sync with their long standing cognition on Coke consumption, thus, during the focus group sessions, repeatedly referenced older generations of Coke consumers whom they have known over the years within their spaces of interaction, as they, (just like Taiwo who says, “*there’s no logic behind the noise that too much sugar in Coke can get one sick*”), query the logicity of the health concerns that accompany habitual Coke consumption.

#### **6.4 Other rationales for continued Coke consumption**

Similar to the discussion in the last section, reference was also made by the young Africans purposefully enlisted for this study to medical professionals who are within their spaces of interaction. This is in order to further rationalise their disbelief in the repercussions of excessive consumption of free sugar, which their habitual consumption of Coke is capable of contributing to, while also attempting to get rid of the dissonance caused by conversations around this theme. This is exemplified in the case of the remarks made by Taiwo (cited in the last section), as this participant further argued, during the focus group session, that her disbelief in the health claims being discussed is not just hinged on the “*clean bill of health*” she and her parents enjoy despite their continued consumption of Coke. This participant remarked that the basis of her stance is also because her dad is a medical doctor who she is sure would not continue Coke consumption or even raise her and her siblings to get used to consuming Coke if there were indeed valid health concerns.

*Dad’s a medical doctor who has his private practice and he has never for once told us that Coke is bad or what not. If this whole hype about how too much Coke consumption contributes to one kind of sickness or the other is indeed true, then he won’t have been watching my siblings and I drink this specific soft drink every now and then and it definitely won’t be part of our regular meal schedule. (Taiwo, FG4; UL)*

The narration above, alongside other similar accounts from participants where medical/public health professionals were referenced, seemingly embolden the resolve of these young adults, as observed during fieldwork, to hold on to their long existing cognition, as narratives similar to Taiwo’s align with their ideological leanings which they have been induced with over the years by distinct personalities similar to that of Taiwo’s dad. During the focus group sessions, it was observed that participants who did not come up with narrations similar to that of

Taiwo, seemed to also eagerly latch on to these narratives as they referenced and emphasised them in justifying their stance to me as a logical one.

*I remember a particular time in the hospital when I was ill and my Mum was complaining to the nurse that I wasn't eating, the nurse told my Mum to buy me Coke and that I should use it to swallow my pills. Eventually that was the only thing I could take as I vomited every other thing I tried eating. The nurse later told us that Coke is food on its own and that I shouldn't be forced to eat yet if that is the only thing I can take, she even said I should be given Coke again in the afternoon and evening ... even up till now, I use Coke to take my pills and that's the only thing I take when I'm very sick ... I just hope this conversation is certainly not an indirect way to suggest that the nurse was wrong because despite all my steady consumption of Coke I'm 100% healthy. (Nonhle, FG6; RU).*

The excerpt above, in line with the foregoing discussion, also exemplifies the narratives participants gave of how medical officers have directly and otherwise encouraged them to consume Coke. Drawing on these narratives, participants insisted on the 'rightness' of their stance as they pointed out that the medical officers who are within their spaces of interaction are those they know and trust well, ahead of others who belong to distant lands and whom they just get to hear about on the Internet through what a participant describe as "*news that is mostly fancy and illogical*". Corroborating and emphasising this line of thought, participants in Nonhle's focus group also made reference to how they also regularly use Coke to swallow their pills and how they have always known Coke to be useful when they are ill and have lost their appetite. The emphasis participants gave to these narratives that references medical officers, do not just embolden them to hold on to their stance but, drawing on the theory of cognitive dissonance, it thus seems as observed during fieldwork, that this significantly reduces the importance of the dissonant belief that is at conflict with their long existing cognition. The indulgence to consume Coke as many times as they want by trained and licensed medical officers, who by the virtue of their profession should be in a good position to advise these young Africans on the need to regulate their Coke consumption by explaining the adverse effects this could cause, seemed to proffer them with a 'valid' and 'logical' point that weakens the dissonance, hence the eagerness with which they emphasised these narratives and regularly referenced it during this phase of the sessions.

While there are CCT research projects that explicate the increasing struggle of multinational brands and corporations to remain authentic in the use of cultural texts that are void of the tainted commerce and profit perception, Coca-Cola, with respect to the young Africans

enlisted for this study, seem able to do this – as these set of consumers have esteemed elders of older generations amongst whom are professionals’ in the field of medical science that consume Coke and encourage them directly and otherwise to follow suit. Drawing on study participants narratives that they use Coke to take their pills – as one other participant also affirmed that she has always known that Coke is medicinal (being the information she was raised with my her aunt who is a nutritionist/public health professional) – their reception of Coke commercials within this *context* thus has the propensity to create an impression that the brand is out to provide a meaningful service that is refreshing and satisfying beyond the singular motive of making profit, let alone being a threat to their bodily health. The presence of active consumers of Coke amongst the older generations who knowingly or otherwise engage in WOMM, consequently comes with the propensity to exclude Coca-Cola from ‘authenticity extinction’, being one of the postmodern contradictions of the media marketing messages churned out by multinational corporations’ in the marketplace, as theorised by Holt (2002) and reviewed in Chapter Two.

### **6.5 Study participants claim other cola brands are as much to blame for having excessive sugar content in their SSBs**

The young Africans enlisted for this study also referenced other cola brands as being the producers of SSBs that are culpable of increasing the rate of sugar consumption and not Coca-Cola. Drawing on my field notes and observations during fieldwork, this suggests that participants were at some point quite desperate to rationalise their stance and eliminate the dissonance caused by this part of the focus group sessions where Coke’s implication in diet related NCDs is being discussed. This seems to be the case, as data from the transcripts also indicate that these young adults in one breath argue that Coke’s sugar content is perfect and in the same breath concede that even if it is not perfect and contains too much sugar, it is not a threat to them, while at the same time ‘othering’ other cola brands as being the producers of SSBs with excessive sugar content that poses health risks. This can possibly be explained by the theorising about cognitive dissonance that states that an already chosen object or course of action that has led to a cognition that has been held onto and sustained over time, is always more attractive to the individual ahead of newer alternatives. This, alongside the ideological inducements and instructions participants have been raised with as far as Coke consumption is concerned, further explains why they were desperately eager to do away with the

dissonance, which has been theorised to be accompanied, most times, by a mounting pressure on those experiencing it.

*It doesn't in any way add up to say Coke has too much sugar, it's more of speculation ... and even if Coke comes with excess sugar, it's definitely not a threat to those of us that have been taking it for years and are even healthier rather than falling ill. I'll tell you guys what, those other fizzy drinks should be the ones to blame, try tasting those funny cola drinks that are imitations to the original Coke that's when you'll know where the real sugar is ... mere tasting those crazy drinks you'll know they're extremely sugar concentrated and that's where you can get diabetes from not from Coke. Please let's leave this issue here and talk about something else. (Akeem, FG3; UL).*

Participants' fascination with Coca-Cola, conditions them to believe the multinational Big Food, and find other SSB producers to blame as seen in the case of the cited participant who sees blaming other cola brands as the convenient way out of a dissonant conversation. The 'othering' of cola brands as being "*imitations to the original Coke*" demonstrates participants resistance, as earlier discussed in Chapter Four, where other similar instances are cited from the data and analysed. This 'othering' of cola brands also indicates the deviant status of these young Africans whose allegiance is solely to the multinational SSB company and not to other cola brands which they are not emotionally attached to, and with whom they do not have any contending cognition to uphold. This allegiance to the multinational SSB company also explains Akeem's claim that, "*even if Coke comes with excess sugar, it's definitely not a threat*". This assertion which exemplifies the position of this study's participants, can however be further understood drawing on the theorising on cognitive dissonance that posits that the deliberate reduction of the importance of the dissonant belief, is one of the three ways individuals who experience dissonance navigate their ways through such situations. Akeem in the above instance, thus aligns with this, as he seeks ways to reduce the perceived importance of the dissonant belief being discussed by claiming it is not a threat and providing that "*other fizzy drinks*" which "*should be the ones to blame*".

Furthermore, study participants in support of their decision to continually consume Coke and in a bid to rationalise their disbelief of the health concerns being discussed and also reduce the dissonance being experienced, made reference to the variant offerings of Coca-Cola such as diet Coke and Zero Coke, as they see this as a demonstration of the company's pristine reputation.

*There's a rivalry going on between soft drink brands and that might just be what's responsible for this too much sugar noise. Those cola brands especially are guilty of always trying to be like the main Coca-Cola and that's why they are trying to paint it in a bad light. What they might just be forgetting is that we trust everything Coca-Cola represents and stands for ... it's possible for Coke to contain too much sugar depending on who you're asking and that's why there are different variations of Coke depending on the one you think suits you. If zero Coke or diet Coke is what suits you, you can go for it and let those of us that love our regular Coke have it in peace. The soft drink company by having variants of the original Coke show that they are responsive and they are not careless about the health of their consumers. All these exaggerations about Coke should stop already ... those other cola drinks do not have variations in their offerings and those are the ones that come with a truckload of sugar and are harmful but certainly not Coke. (Linen, FG2; RU)*

The above assertion, amongst other similar ones from the transcripts, indicate participants' self-understanding of the variants of regular Coke, which they seem to draw on as a pointer to the rightfulness of their decision to remain dedicated to Coca-Cola. Even though none of the young Africans enlisted for this study consume these variants, as they say they prefer the specific Coke they are accustomed to drinking from their childhood days, these participants see the provision of these variants as a measure of Coca-Cola's responsiveness to consumers and an indication that the brand prioritises their bodily health. A quick perusal of available news stories online about corporations in the SSB industry in Nigeria and South Africa provide a possible insight into what Linen (cited above) refers to as the "rivalry" going on amongst the brands, which he says might be responsible for what he calls the "too much sugar noise".

Also, in line with Linen's assertion, are other similar narrations in the data such as that of the participant who argues that the claims of unhealthy sugar content in Coke "has to do with some level of politicking among big guys in the industry". The rivalry and politicking referred to, drawing on relevant news stories and further clarifications I sought from participants, speak to the tensions that have mounted over the years amongst SSB companies in both countries, with Coca-Cola and Pepsi being the major SSB giants in the mix, fighting for market share and continued relevance. With the increasing number of locally owned SSB companies in both countries, the competition is becoming stiffer, hence the aggressive media marketing embarked on by Coca-Cola, as reviewed in Chapter One, as each SSB corporation continually (re)strategises to get their pricing, volume and campaign activities 'right'. The pieces of information about the SSB brand 'wars' latched on to by the participants, alongside

their emphasis on other cola brands not having offerings that are tagged ‘sugar free’, thus provide a means for them to get their favourite soft drink off the list of SSBs considered to contain an unhealthy amount of sugar. This informs Linen’s position, as he points out that all the “*exaggeration about Coke should stop already*”, whilst not taking note that he has also been caught up in exaggeration in his bid to eliminate the dissonance being experienced, as he states that cola brands that do not have ‘sugar free’ offerings like Coca-Cola has, are those that produce SSBs “*that come with a truckload of sugar and are harmful*”.

## **6.6 The ‘energy balance’ thesis as a means of absolving Coke of the health risks posed by excessive consumption of free sugars**

Alongside the discussions outlined in the sections above, is the ‘energy balance’ narrative which participants draw on in further reiterating their disbelief that habitual Coke consumption can pose health risks. As highlighted in Chapter One, the ‘energy balance’ thesis lays emphasis on the need to pay attention to bodily exercise and contemporary issues such as urbanisation, which has reduced the rate of bodily exercise people undergo on a daily basis – while tactically ignoring the place of unhealthy dietary patterns, which habitual consumption of Coke contributes to.

*People must learn to hit the gym and take up any of the sports out there rather than blaming a brand that is legit for their woes. I do think there’s really no point listening to some nameless researchers or shady medics on the Internet who might be having issues with the brand or just want some dose of popularity and fame like Coca-Cola. ... A good dose of consistent exercise will help keep obesity at bay. (Matt, FG6; UL).*

*If my Uncle who’s 79 is still having a swell time with Coke then I’ll appreciate being spared the BS flying all around about Coke posing a health risk. If Coke is really bad then my uncle and most of us should be long dead by now, but here we are still balling. I’m young and I’m having my best life with Coke, even while I’m grooving on Saturday’s I mix my alcohol with my Coke to have the perfect blend ... people must just let Coca-Cola be and check their individual lifestyle especially those of us in the big cities who never have meaningful exercise. (Kim, FG3; RU).*

The self-understanding held by study participants, that Coca-Cola is a local brand that they know too well and trust as highlighted in previous chapters, seems useful in explaining Matt’s remark that “*a brand that is legit*” should not be blamed by people who should rather “*learn to hit the gym and take up any of the sports out there*”. This also is useful in understanding his audacity in referring to researchers and medical professionals as “*some*

*nameless researchers or shady medics on the Internet*” since, unlike Coca-Cola that he is emotionally attached to, they are unknown to him and behind the pieces of information that are causing the dissonance being experienced. Participants emphasis on bodily exercise and the need to keep fit, thus provides another probable way of absolving their favourite SSB of dissonant conversations that are not consistent with the hegemonic code within which they were raised. This seems to be the case considering the excerpts cited above, alongside other similar assertions that are replete in the data, which further indicate that the energy balance thesis holds sway amongst participants, despite the scrutiny the multinational Big Food is facing from nutritionists, public health officials and other academics in relevant disciplines.

The narrative that a healthy weight is maintained by getting more exercise and worrying less about cutting calories, which Coca-Cola is putting efforts into sponsoring as a ‘science-informed’ solution to the obesity crisis, seems to appeal to the sensibilities of this study’s participants – they are not just operating within this cleverly disseminated narrative, but are propagating this as the ‘gospel’ amongst those that come within their spaces of interaction. During fieldwork, one of the participants at the University of Lagos shared about how he had engaged in a discussion about Coke consumption with some individuals he had met at a bar in one of the popular suburbs on Lagos Island. He recounted how he ‘*schooled*’ them on how Coke’s sugar content has been exaggerated, as he told them how everyone in the country should have been dead already if Coke’s sugar content was really that high and injurious to bodily health – this, due to the fact that Lagosians and Nigerians by extension, cannot hold an event, be it weddings, funerals, birthdays etc., without making Coke available for their guests at these mostly weekend events, which have become a norm in Lagos and other Nigerian cities.

Further recounting his experience, the participant says he explained to his newfound friends, how lack of consistent exercise that should be taken seriously by everyone is the problem. He further explained that even if Coke consumption is halted, many will still be diagnosed with diabetes and related illnesses, as the city lifestyle is devoid of consistent exercise which the body needs. This participant’s self-understanding as depicted in the experience he recounted, is similar to that of South African’s Kim (cited above) who opines that if Coke was really that bad then her uncle and many others, including herself, should be long dead by now considering their consistent consumption. Kim’s subsequent narration, alongside that of the

participant from the University of Lagos highlighted above and other participants, indicate that the conversations about Coke, which they hold within their spaces of interaction with those who are indecisive about Coke consumption, come as forms of WOMM for the brand, as discussed in the previous chapter.

While this perhaps indicates the depth of their persuasion about the rightness of their long standing cognition, their alignment with Coca-Cola's energy balance thesis serves as an increase in the number of consonant cognitions, which alongside those discussed in the previous sections help these participants to reduce the magnitude of the dissonant conversations. This is based on the theorising on cognitive dissonance that posits that the number of consonant cognitions coupled with the sense of importance attached to it, will lead to a reduction in the magnitude of the dissonant cognitions, provided the dissonant cognitions remain constant both in number and in the level of importance attached to it by the concerned individual(s) (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976).

Consequently, the cognitions which are in consonance with study participants' long held cognition, – from their support for the energy balance thesis to other layers of motivations discussed in the sections above, alongside the analyses in Chapters Four and Five – indicate the possibility for Coca-Cola to be excluded from the limitations Holt (2002) theorises that corporations face, in relating with their contemporary consumers. According to Holt (2002), contemporary consumers are beginning to doubt the authenticity of popular brands as they gradually develop an insatiable appetite for muckraking exposés that describe the stealthy persuasion that underlie the marketing campaigns and strategies of these brands. However, from the foregoing, the young Africans enlisted for this study seem not to be part of these theorised consumers. They have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the brand, as they enjoy and have fun identifying with Coca-Cola commercials that align with their long standing cognition and operate within the hegemonic code where the brand has been a cultural capital since their childhood. They therefore align with, and remain dedicated to, their '*local*' brand and will rather come up with motivations in consonance with their cognition, than critically reflect on their continued consumption of Coke and long-standing loyalty to the brand, in light of the potential possibility of eventually getting some diet-related ill-effects or NCDs.

## **6.7 The interplay between self-understandings of health risks and engagement with Coke's media marketing messages**

While links between participants' self-understandings about the health concerns that accompany their continued Coke consumption and the media marketing campaigns/messages that they have engaged with recently and in past years, were only explicitly made in three of the focus group sessions (one in South Africa and two in Nigeria). The interplay between these will be highlighted, drawing on the analysis/discussion presented in the last chapter.

The two focus groups at the University of Lagos where links were made, pertained to the reference participants made to Coke commercials where prominent personalities were used to market it. The discussions that ensued around this, came from participants' remarks that pointed to how these notable artistes and others in the Nigerian entertainment industry who advertise Coke, are themselves healthy and free from diet related NCDs despite their consumption of Coke. They further stressed that they would not be marketing the product if they did not trust that it is safe for continued consumption. The trust participants have for these notable figures whom they look up to, as discussed in the previous chapter, is again brought to the fore here, as they believe these celebrities have a name to protect and would not endorse Coca-Cola if habitual consumption of Coke is truly a threat to bodily health. The passion that the study participants have for these personalities and their love and trust for Coca-Cola, seemingly make them oblivious to the possibility that these celebrities might associate with their favourite brand mainly for the monetary benefit, and not because they can vouch for the product(s) churned out by the brand. Additionally, participants also seem oblivious to the possibility that these prominent entertainers might also not be entirely truthful about being a habitual consumer of Coke like they are. Similar to the way participants reference Coke consumption by their older relations to get rid of the dissonance brought to the fore by conversations about the health concerns that accompany their habitual consumption, participants in these two focus groups draw on the celebrities that are the face of the mass media campaigns that they have engaged with.

Furthermore, the focus group at Rhodes University where a direct link was made to Coca-Cola's commercials, was specifically about the brand's sponsorship of sporting events. The discussion that ensued around this was centred on the oddity of how a brand that consistently supports sporting activities, like soccer and rugby for instance, can be accused of marketing

and selling products that are said to contain an unhealthy dose of free sugars. Rather than draw on this paradox to critically reflect on the attendant health concerns that have trailed excessive consumption of Coke because of the sugar content, participants, during this focus group session, insisted that the brand is too reputable to sell what would compromise consumers' health. This is exemplified in the assertion of one of the participants who remarked that Coca-Cola is *"a solid and reputable brand that is popularly known through their sponsorship of sports to support wellness and how people can keep fit and stay healthy ... it will be an error to say they are aiding the transmission of obesity and related diseases"*.

The affordances of digital, mobile and social media through which participants mostly engage with Coke's media marketing messages/campaigns, as discussed in Chapter Five, thus has the propensity to enhance study participants' insistence on the healthiness of their continued consumption of Coke irrespective of the sugar content. This comes as a build-up that enhances the already formed cognition that comes through their observations and interactions with the 'healthy' elders in their households and other motivations that have been discussed in the earlier sections. Coca-Cola through SMSP, thus gets into study participants spaces and lives through faces of those they look up to and sports they follow, as explicitly drawn on by the participants in the focus groups cited above, to reinforce their cognitions in their already ideologically induced positions. As discussed in the last chapter, participants engagement with Coke's commercials through SMSP, enhances visual imagery that comes with a longing for pleasure/fun events which in turn has the propensity to condition them to resonate more with fun related activities connected to Coke, rather than discussions about the health risks that lie in their continuing their unchecked consumption of Coke. Additionally, the sense of belonging that emanated from Coca-Cola's 'name on can' campaign, alongside the online interactivity which came with an exhilarating feeling that fuelled participants' fantasy into believing that they, together with the multinational Big Food were co-creating and co-producing the SSB with Coca-Cola, instilled pseudo-individualisation in them. This has the tendency to position this study's participants to instinctively and consistently live up to their individuated identities by highlighting Coca-Cola's 'good deeds', which is within the parameters of the ideological instructions they have been raised. Coke's commercials, as alluded to in the previous chapter, thus serve as a useful mirror participants look into to further their identity goals. The more they recognise themselves through these commercials and the personalities involved in the marketing campaigns, the more they live up to their

individuated identities and instinctively uphold their favourite SSB as that which is fit for their continued consumption, thereby inhibiting them from critically examining their allegiance to Coke.

This is in congruence with CCT's theorising and research projects that speak to consumers' distinct recognition of, and identification with, the unique differences factored into the making of a marketplace product which over time, positions the consumers as pseudo-individuals who gradually become drained of anything more substantive beyond the product (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997; Adorno, 2001; Roberts & Cremin, 2019).

This chapter unpacked study participants' self-understandings about the health risks posed by their habitual consumption of Coke, their disbelief of these health concerns, and the motivations for maintaining their long held cognition which they drew on to reduce and eliminate the dissonant conversation that ensued during fieldwork. The next and final chapter of this study reiterates the findings and outlines the recommendations.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CLOSING COMMENTS, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This study, embedded within a qualitative research design, examined the reception of Coke's media marketing messages/campaigns especially the digital, social and mobile media marketing among purposefully selected young Africans from Nigeria's University of Lagos and South Africa's Rhodes University. The enlisted participants were enthusiastic about Coke and engaged with these marketing messages, having been habitual consumers of Coke since childhood. This final chapter provides a summary of the study's findings/closing comments and recommendations.

### **7.2 Closing comments/summary of findings**

This study was initially informed by the researcher's interest in unpacking how Coca-Cola over the years, has maintained its historical status as the foremost multinational SSB corporation in Nigeria and how it continues to do so through media marketing messages despite being implicated in the increasing rates of diet related NCDs which habitual consumption of Coke contributes to. The interest was further enhanced by how multinational SSBs have gradually begun to shift focus to African markets to increase their consumer base, drawing in young adults through the affordances of the newer forms of digital, social and mobile media on smartphones – as highlighted in extant literature – irrespective of the diet related NCDs that come with the increased consumption of these SSBs. This informed the focus on a purposefully selected group of young Africans who engage with Coke's media marketing/promotional messages and campaigns (especially the digital, social and mobile media marketing messages/campaigns) and who also habitually consume Coke just the way healthy humans would naturally and expectedly crave for water. The empirical insights gleaned during fieldwork at Nigeria's University of Lagos further motivated the researcher to examine if the same themes that emanated from the data gleaned from the transcripts and field-notes, resonate with another set of purposefully selected young adults (using the same selection criteria) in a different African context, hence the young South Africans enlisted for this study from Rhodes University. The paradoxically evident public health challenge of

malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, alongside that of overweight persons and obesity in sub Saharan countries, engendered and sustained the researcher's interest throughout the course of this qualitative research project.

With analyses/discussions underpinned by a theoretical framework built around CCT and insights from relevant theorising alongside the theory of cognitive dissonance, this study brings to the fore – through participants earliest dispositions and childhood experiences with Coke – how Coca-Cola has over the years been recognised and established as a notable generational and historical 'brandscape', alongside a cultural capital in the 'worlds' of these young adults purposefully enlisted for this study. Importantly, the study delineates the influence of older generations of Coke enthusiasts and consumers within participants' households and spaces of interaction in making Coke available for their consumption from childhood, as this informs their earliest forms of eventful occasions, memories and lived experiences about Coke. The study thus highlights how within the historical 'brandscape' and cultural embeddedness of Coke, the SSB is valued as a symbol of enjoyable family mealtimes, a suitable reward for excellence, good conduct and satisfying performance at home, in church, in school etc., thereby establishing how Coke spans beyond physical consumption within participants spaces of interaction.

Consequently, this study examines participants' lived experiences with regards to Coca-Cola and within this context brings to the fore their relationship with Coke and their self-understandings of this culturally embedded SSB. The study unpacks the similar personifying forms through which young Africans enlisted for the study, irrespective of their countries, communities, neighbourhoods etc., see Coke consumption as a tradition that is beyond them which they were unconsciously socialised into by older generations in their various spaces of interaction. This study underscores how this informs the cohesiveness and dedication that underlie participants' Coke consumption; how it also importantly underscores their conceptualisation of Coke, a multinational SSB, as a local/indigenous SSB and brand which is theirs and not foreign, as their lived experiences with Coke while growing up within their spaces of interaction negate the foreignness of the SSB/brand. This study further establishes how participants' self-understandings of Coke as a local SSB usefully explain their support for, and emotional attachment to, the SSB/brand and their resistance to other cola and SSB brands they were not accustomed to while growing up. This highlights how young Africans

with similar upbringings can become attached to Coke on the basis of how this brand is synonymous to older generations, who provide the foremost set of ideological lens, void of 'foreignness', with which they see Coke and its and brand. This foremost ideological lens underlie participants personifying references made to Coke during the study, as it was likened to an 'older family member' who has been there before they were born; so, although they do not know when Coke was 'born' they do certainly know it as a local brand and not a foreign one.

This study suggests that Coke's cultural embeddedness is useful in highlighting how participants' habitual consumption and emotional attachment to Coke goes beyond its taste, which these participants initially made reference to during fieldwork, as being the reason for their continued consumption. Through empirically driven insights, this study shows that beyond taste, participants' habitual Coke consumption and enthusiasm for it, stems from an unconscious inclination to align with an 'indigenous' family drink that cuts across generations and has over the years become a cultural resource which is beyond physical consumption. Even though participants insist that Coke's unique taste underlies their continued consumption, their palates which are already used to Coke's taste as a result of long years of consumption, could also have become used to Pepsi or any other cola brand, if these had been the SSB that the older generations had used in socialising them right from childhood.

Pertinent to the findings of this study, is how the ideological lens with which participants 'make sense' of Coke as a local/indigenous SSB and engage with it as a reward for excellence, good behaviour etc., is sustained over time and culminates into the ideological inducements and instructions that underlie their self-understandings, thought patterns and actions. The study through empirically driven insights gleaned from the transcripts from the researcher's fieldwork, show that these ideological inducements and instructions are maintained and re-enacted through the ubiquitous nature of Coca-Cola's aesthetics and signage, which participants unconsciously/subconsciously engage with and also through their engagements with Coke's media marketing and promotional messages/campaigns. These ideological inducements and instructions, this study establishes, serve as a hegemonic code which does not only confine participants engagements with SSBs to Coke, but also confine their reception and engagements with Coke's media marketing and promotional

messages/campaigns to those that resonate with their foremost/childhood and cultural inclinations which are underlined by these ideological leanings.

Furthermore, this study underscores digital, social and mobile media, especially SMSP, as the medium through which participants engage with Coke's media marketing messages/campaigns ahead of traditional media, as the young Africans purposefully enlisted for this study asserted that Coke's media marketing messages and campaigns which they identify and engage with, are mostly through SMSP. Participant discussions of their reception and engagements with the #ShareaCoke campaign and other marketing/promotional messages which they identify with primarily through SMSP, affirms the more intimate and immersive affordances of SMSP. This study shows how these affordances allow Coca-Cola to build on an already existing relationship with participants through their marketing/promotional campaigns, as the visual imagery that is evoked through participants engagements with these marketing messages/campaigns come with the persuasive tendency to consume Coke. Consequently, this study shows that Coca-Cola's use of these relatively new and largely unregulated digital, social and mobile media platforms in disseminating their marketing and promotional campaigns, is being received and engaged with by the targeted youthful audience and also have the propensity to translate into physical consumption of Coke as exemplified by the young Africans purposefully enlisted for this study.

Whilst the youthful Africans enlisted for this study identify and engage with Coke's marketing messages/campaigns through digital, social and mobile media (primarily through SMSP), this study establishes that the conscious engagements they have with these marketing messages/campaigns is not solely because of the affordances it brings, but because these set of marketing campaigns align with their ideological leanings. Although the affordances that accompany SMSP holds a central and important place in today's contemporary world, Coke's media marketing messages/campaigns that participants identify and engage with amongst the plethora of available marketing messages churned out by Coca-Cola, are those that resonate with their foremost beliefs about Coke and are underlined by the ideological inducements and instructions within which they grew up. Consequently, this study also highlights the link/correlation between study participants' digital/online engagements and their physical/offline engagements with these marketing messages.

This study thus brings to the fore how the lived experiences of two groups of young Africans, their communal consumption memories and offline interactions around Coke, inform their online interactions and digital and social media engagements with Coke, in that, the core of the friends and acquaintances that they mostly relate and socialise with on social media platforms are those either within their geographical locations or those they had, or still have, a physical/offline relationship with. The thesis through this demonstrates how online engagement with Coke's commercials are influenced by their physical/offline associations and spaces of interaction which are underpinned by the ideological inducements and instructions about Coke that they grew up with. This study foregrounds how the 'success' of Coke's digital media marketing messages/campaigns, despite the exoticism, interactivity and other affordances, is hinged on the alignment of these commercials with the prevailing cultural beliefs, contexts and the underlining ideological instructions about Coca-Cola that these participants were raised with.

Likewise, this study also highlights the WOMM dimension that takes place amongst the young Africans enlisted for this study within their spaces of interaction, as they at different instances influence their friends/acquaintances both directly and otherwise to participate, offline and online, in the different fun-filled endeavours they are having with Coke. This study thereby exemplifies the possibility for youthful consumers of Coke to consciously or otherwise draw those within their spaces of interaction into their habitual consumption of Coke.

Within the broad contextual understanding gleaned from the in-depth analyses and discussions brought to the fore in this research project, as summarised above, this study examined the self-understandings of participants with specific focus on their continued consumption of Coke and highlights the motivations for their disbelief of the health risks this poses. While there are existing studies that point to the growing concerns of obesity, diabetes and other diet related NCDs on the African continent and generally in the developing world, most of these studies tend to focus more on the policy making organs of governments and the underlining politicking of the Big Food companies that have been implicated in the increasing rates in cases of diet related NCDs.

What remains neglected are the contextual self-understandings of the consumers that are at the receiving end of both the implemented policies and the products, especially the youthful Africans who on the continent interact more with the digital, social and mobile marketing campaigns of these ‘ready to eat and ready to drink’ products. This thesis, from a media studies perspective, however, brings this to the fore as a useful addition to the trans-disciplinary body of knowledge on the dynamics of SSB consumption and diet related NCDs on the African continent, as this qualitative research project highlights the prevailing cultural beliefs, contexts and ideological leanings, which have over time, become a hegemonic code within which participants receive and make sense of information about the health implications that come with their habitual consumption of coke.

This is useful for policy makers and relevant stakeholders as it gives in-depth understandings into the dynamics within which a qualitative sample of consumers of the foremost multinational SSB within a targeted demographic in Africa ‘make sense’ of their reception and engagements of media marketing and promotional messages/campaigns, their continued consumption and the accompanying dynamics. It is when such qualitative, in-depth and context sensitive analysis and discussion is taken on-board, that informed and well thought out action plans can be mapped out to re-orient young adults with similar inclinations as those enlisted for this study (and those they listen to in their spaces of interaction) who are unbothered about the health concerns that accompany their habitual Coke consumption. This can then serve as a useful template and reference in conducting similar research projects about young urban Africans and their interactions with, and consumption of, multinational SSBs.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

Drawing on the findings outlined above, this study recommends that on-going approaches across the countries on the African continent to raise awareness about the dangers inherent in excessive consumption of ‘ready to eat and drink’ products, especially Coke and other multinational SSBs, be reviewed in line with the insights brought to the fore through this research project. For instance, it is imperative in today’s world that digital, social and mobile media, especially SMSP, are fully incorporated as core media for reaching out to young urbanised Africans and not just as alternative media. This study recommends that a series of

‘straight to point’ mobile content suited for SMSP that is aimed at enlightening young Africans by answering specific questions about diet related NCDs and how SSBs are implicated in these health conditions, be made available to these young adults irrespective of their consumption patterns. It will be beneficial if such awareness/enlightening messages are provided in as many indigenous languages as possible, alongside foreign official language(s) used in each African country or better still, code-switching between the languages being spoken in the targeted province, state or country can be drawn on, to ensure that the messages are far reaching and resonate with the targeted demographic.

In line with the crucial role the prominent artistes and others in the entertainment industry play in Coke’s commercials, as evidenced in this study, such personalities that resonate with young Africans and that they find relatable (as being one of them in terms of sameness of generation and culture, racial category etc.) in each province/state or country, should be incorporated as stakeholders in these enlightenment messages/campaigns and featured in the messages/campaigns. Those who will be enlisted should be meticulously re-oriented about diet related NCDs and the impact of excessive/habitual sugar consumption in exacerbating the likelihood of being diagnosed with these diseases, after which they should be formally brought on-board as ambassadors for healthy dietary choices.

Additionally, this study recommends that staged interventions and enlightenment campaigns targeted at young Africans should also, within the confines of ethical rules and regulations, feature young Africans who once were addicted to excessive consumption of Coke, or other SSBs, and have consequently been diagnosed with any of the diet related NCDs. This will resonate more with youthful consumers who do not have a reference point for such issues amongst those within their age group and their spaces of interaction.

It is, however, important to highlight the need to not neglect the traditional media if the efforts put into the enlightenment messages/campaigns must be holistic. Relevant stakeholders and government officials must take a cue from the existing synergy between Coca-Cola’s use of traditional and newer forms of digital marketing as established in this study. While the multinational Big Food is prioritising digital, social and mobile marketing, traditional media is still being honed and used alongside the newer forms of digital, social and mobile advertising/marketing to reach their consumers on the continent. Even though the

young Africans that participated in this study are not always as conscious of their reception of Coke's commercials through traditional media as they are of digital, social and mobile media, it however, as established in this study, provides the impetus for them to go and engage with such commercials through the relevant digital platforms, especially through SMSP.

While CCT draws on relevant studies to provide a framework useful for research endeavours in cyber cultural studies which combine media and cultural studies with Internet research, it is recommended that further research projects should be convened, hinging on this study, in the fields of cultural and media studies. These should be conducted to enhance specific theorising within CCT that will be useful in unpacking the synergy between audience reception of traditional media messages and newer forms of digital, social and mobile media messages. The dynamics that underlie the synergy between the traditional and digital and social media in terms of how media messages are received by young Africans through either of the media and how this informs both their disposition to other media and how they make sense of the interplay between these media, are useful areas for further research.

The need for policy makers, ministries and Departments of Health, other relevant government and non-governmental agencies and all stakeholders in African nations to brainstorm effective ways of reaching out to the older generations of Coke consumers is imperative, as this study shows that the decades of habitual consumption by these consumers provide a ready template that young Africans within their spaces of interaction emulate. This study recommends that these sets of consumers, who are grandparents, parents, guardians, uncles, aunts, teachers, community and religious leaders etc., should be re-oriented and educated in an attempt to enable them to get the narratives right about what diet related NCDs are, the impact of excessive sugar consumption and the role played by habitual Coke consumption. The entertainment, arts and cultural agencies in each African nation should be leveraged, to systematically get these messages across through soap operas, stage plays/dramas and other cultural and arts events, where the language(s) that resonate best with the targeted demographic are used.

Getting the message across to these older generations of consumers remains vital, considering that the young Africans that participated in this study were not deterred at this phase of their lives by the increase in the price of SSBs, especially that of Coke, their favourite drink. This

was because they are mostly dependent on these older generations, within their spaces of interaction, for their stipends and day to day finances and are therefore all out to buy Coke and consume as much as they want until they feel satisfied. Such empirically driven insights must inform policy decisions, as this study shows that an increase in the price of Coke will not necessarily keep youthful consumers who are already habitual consumers of Coke away, as this study's participants say they will always go for Coke even if there is an increment in the price as they only have to prioritise Coke within their stipends and allowances.

This study recommends that specialised sessions/seminars be held for medical and health professionals to ensure that their actions and inactions are not counterproductive to the proposed enlightenment campaigns, considering that these professionals are also part of the older relations that, according to this study, indulge young adults in their habitual Coke consumption. The study also recommends that non-governmental organisations should be encouraged to seek ways to bring the spouses of elected officials at various levels on the continent on-board and get them involved as ambassadors for healthy dietary choices. This is because they have the influence to sway decisions, make funding appeals to the appropriate quarters and also make emotional appeals to older generations and other concerned individuals, in ways that will be useful in the drive to mitigate the consumption rate of free sugars and SSBs without necessarily going through hectic bureaucratic procedures.

An example of this is evident in the narrative of the former first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, in her book *Becoming* (2018), who asserted that despite the vagueness of her job which was initially an issue for her, she was able to successfully work with local non-profits and make a human appeal (as opposed to the regulatory one that was the norm) to parents, chief executives of SSB companies and other stakeholders, on the need to have healthy dietary patterns and lifestyle choices amongst young people.

This study recommends the need for long-term, consistent and proactive communication from government at all levels and health journalism that is solutions-based and available in multiple official and indigenous languages. This remains paramount if efforts to mitigate the excessive consumption of Coke and other SSBs are to succeed. The solutions-based journalism should ideally be demographic specific, with the tone and tenor of the journalism tailored to young audiences.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

While these recommendations are useful steps that policy makers and relevant agencies could incorporate into their agenda, there cannot be a simplistic approach to reducing the rate of consumption of SSBs, because their symbolic relevance as attested to by the commonalities in the empirical insights that emanated from the fieldwork at Nigeria's University of Lagos and South Africa's Rhodes University, remain strong and ongoing. Communicators, journalists and health policy makers will have to take on, and be as creative, as Coke has been for the past century, in their communication, if they are to moderate consumption of SSBs and reduce the long-term impact on the health of millions of Africans.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Consent Form



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### Informed Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in Olutobi Akingbade's research project titled '*Digital media marketing and the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in Africa: A reception analysis of the multi-channel marketing of Coca-Cola among young Africans from the University of Lagos, Nigeria and Rhodes University, South Africa*'.

I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a (PhD) degree at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on 063 148 1169 or on +27 63 148 1169 (cell phone) or [akingbadeolutobi@gmail.com](mailto:akingbadeolutobi@gmail.com) (email). The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of Professor Harry Dugmore in the School of Journalism and

Media Studies at Rhodes University, who may be contacted through  
h.dugmore@ru.ac.za (email).

2. The researcher is interested in identifying and understanding the motivations, ideas and experiences that inform the consumption of Coke and other sugar-sweetened beverages by enlisted young Africans who are studying at the University of Lagos and at Rhodes University and who are exposed to the mass media marketing of these products.
3. My participation, will involve being part of a focus group/in-in-depth interview session and will be at my convenience.
4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any question about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.
5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concern I have about my participation in the study, in terms of consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and that I have the right to demand that such concern be addressed to my satisfaction.
6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however, I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.
7. The report on the project will contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but the report will be designed in such a way that I will not be possibly identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date):

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Focus Group/Semi-Structured Interview Guide



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### **FOCUS GROUP/SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**

*(The following questions guided the facilitation of the focus groups/interviews as the themes discussed emanated from this guide and the questions, in no specific order, were adapted to suit each session depending on the group/participant and university campus).*

1. This Coca-Cola hub was built early this year; what do you think about the hub and the Wi-Fi access that it has?

→ I have seen you around here a number of times, what does this hub symbolizes to you and why do you frequent this spot?

2. Drawing on your years in primary and high schools, prior to your admission into the university, describe your relationship and experience with coke and other soft drinks.

→ Do you think your relationship and experience with coke has changed over the years when you compare your childhood days with now that you're a university student?

→ How have your interactions with friends on campus and back home in your neighborhood influenced, positively or otherwise, your coke perception and consumption?

→ Looking back at your growing up days, was coke something special in your house

when you were growing up?

- Was coke a routine drink or was it only consumed on special occasions?
- Kindly share other memories/experiences/ads/jingles about coke that comes to mind from your childhood days?

3. Generally/broadly speaking, how would you describe Coke?

- Why this description?
- When last did you have a coke and why?
- What was the occasion?
- While you've maintained, during our initial chats, that you've been a keen coke consumer over the years, In your estimation, for how long do you really think you have been having Coke?
- Kindly share with me your family/traditions and your everyday duties/activities that you think as helped you maintain your consumption habit/practice for the estimated time you gave.

4. What do you think coke represents/symbolizes to you?

- You mentioned during our preliminary chats that you take coke at least once every day, is this related to the adverts/marketing of Coke you have come across?
- What do you make of your earlier estimation of how long you have been drinking Coke and the adverts/marketing of Coke you have come across?

5. More specifically, you mentioned that you saw and actively participated in the #shareacoke campaign; what do you think/make of the campaign and in what way(s) did you participate? (Like with whom did you share a coke? Was this online/offline?).

- You also hinted that you saw coke's creative spin to advance for peace in the then 2015 general elections. This particular #shareacoke campaign had two bottles 'joined' at the top with names that signalled the two major political parties in Nigeria. What did you think of this specific ad?
- In Nigeria, coke has been a major sponsor of football events, (a major sport in the country) with many adverts around this, all over the country, as (a) Nigerian youth(s), thinking of this broadly, what does this symbolize to you?
- We chatted very briefly, weeks ago, about COPA football tournament and other football and music events sponsored by coke, what aspects of these do you get to talk about among your friends either on campus or in your neighborhood at home.

→ Let's watch this particular advert from the 2014 edition of the COPA football tournament organized by coke (which you also say you are familiar with mostly on TV and social media. (I plan to play this ad on my laptop). What does this advert in relation to the football tournament for teens, that has been ongoing in the country for over 6 years now, symbolize to you?

→ Coke, through these adverts and tournaments, has always had a way of attempting to 'unify' Nigeria although; we are largely divided across tribal/ethnic and religious lines, why do you think they do this and how successful do you think this attempts has been?

→ Casting your mind back on this specific 2014 ad that we just watched, and other adverts/marketing messages that you've seen over the years, do you sense either these messages or the actual consumption of coke make you a more patriotic or nationalistic Nigerian? And why do you ?

6. We had preliminary chitchat about coke's 'taste a feeling' and #MamaDiMama marketing campaigns which trended on social media and which you said you joined millions of other netizens on social media to engage with. See these two particular ads again (I plan to also play two of the ads on these campaigns from my laptop). What did you make of these ads when you first saw them?

→ Can you remember and describe any similar scenarios to these ads that has played out either on campus or in your homes and neighbourhoods (whereby you think coke fosters intimacy, sharing, unity and happiness, etc.)?

→ In what ways do you identify with the music artistes you see in these ads?

→ You hinted, during our preliminary chat, that your participation in coke-organized events (both offline and online) evidences your loyalty to the brand, how has these relatively new digital ads/marketing messages played out in your sustained loyalty and enthusiasm about coke.

→ More specifically, what do you think have changed in comparism with your childhood days when coke digital ads/marketing messages, smartphones etc. wasn't a thing.

→ You mentioned during preliminary chats that coke adverts are part of your everyday life. Can you explain further, what you mean by this? Is this both on campus and at home during vacation?

→ On which specific medium do you think you have you seen coke adverts the most? (Traditional TV/radio or social media and online platforms?)

7. In terms of online participation through technological device (smartphone, tablets etc.) on what device did/do you participate?
- Can you share with me why you use the device and not other devices?
8. From my observation as a researcher and my emic perspective being a Nigerian myself, I see that coke is served at birthdays, weddings, funerals and other social events in the country. Can you share some specific experience(s) you've also had (either in support or against my assertion), recently or over the years, attending similar events?
- Drawing on your shared experience, (either in support or against my earlier assertion) has this been a recurring feature of the events you've also attended?
  - Why do you think this is the case?
  - If you've personally hosted a similar event or you've simply had a couple of friends over for lunch/dinner, what soft drink did you serve and why?
  - There are quite a number of young folks out there who either doesn't like coke or are indifferent about coke, as a coke loyalist/enthusiast, what does this mean to you?
  - Do your friends, siblings and parents drink coke? In addition, do you socialize with any of them over coke?
9. What other soft drink(s) do you consume apart from coke?
- Do you sometimes/or have you at any time consumed these soft drink(s) more than coke?
  - Do you consume alcoholic drinks? (Does this relate directly or otherwise to your religion/belief system?)
  - Do you think your consumption/non-consumption of alcoholic drinks relate in any way to your consumption of soft drinks?
10. I have met some students both on and off campus who either do not like coke or are not as enthusiastic about the drink as you do; as a coke loyalist/enthusiast, what do you think of these folks?
- There are also others, who specifically argue that coke consumption has health implications and therefore, hate coke and do not take it; what do you make of this?
11. Do you think coke contain too much sugar?
- Do you think excessive consumption of coke can lead to severe health conditions?
  - As a coke loyalist/enthusiast, has anyone or any organization, either through direct one on one conversations or through print, broadcast, digital/social media, advised you against

excessive coke consumption? Please share your reaction/experience about this?

→ Have you heard of non-communicable diseases before? If yes, how do you describe these? If no, have you heard of diabetes?

→ Do you think there is a link between the excessive consumption of Coke and the possibility of being diagnosed with diabetes/non-communicable diseases?

→ As a coke loyalist/enthusiast, if for instance coke isn't available for an elongated period, how do you think you'd fare? How long do you think you can go without Coke? (Hours, Days, weeks, months, years?).

→ Is this applicable to other soft drinks you consume or just coke?