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### The Rhetoric of #ShareaCoke



A “#ShareaCoke” international advertisement.

The main photographic image consists of five plastic Coca-Cola bottles ranging in size. Two of the bottles, positioned towards the back, are bigger than the 3 positioned towards the front. The bottles are arranged closely together, overlapping with hardly any space between them. None of the bottles stand completely upright and all are cut off about 60%-80% of the way down by the dimensions of the page. Each bottle has a clear, white name or title on its label. The names used are familial terms in both English and Hindi such as “sister” or “bhai”. Upon closer examination, one

would also see a smaller print on the label that says, “Share a Coke with your...”. Almost the same message can be seen on the left side of the advertisement in a larger print. Also on the left, specifically the top left corner, is a red circle which includes the classic Coca-Cola logo. In the top right corner, there is the #ShareaCoke hashtag. Both the large print on the left that says, “Share a Coke with...” and the hashtag have the word “Coke” in red and in a decorative, script font that bears some resemblance to the script type of the well known Coca-Cola logo. The rest of the space in the advertisement is left as a clean, white space.

There are quite a few linguistic messages at play here. First are the literal, denoted messages. There are the names and titles on the labels of the Coke bottles and the message of “Share a Coke with your...” above the titles. There is the main text message of “Share a Coke with...” on the left. The Coca-Cola logo sits in the top left corner while the #ShareaCoke hashtag sits on the top right corner. Second are the symbolic, or connoted, messages. The word “Coke” in the main text message and in the hashtag are both bolded, red, and in a script, serif format that closely resembles the look of the classic Coca-Cola logo. This script is the same used in the naming labels on the bottles, except in white. This font, and the use of white and red font, is meant to represent the Coca-Cola brand as a whole.

The next thing to consider is the non-linguistic part of the image and the connoted message it holds. The 5 bottles grouped close together are meant to symbolize a group. The tilted bottles, though close together, closely resemble the way a group poses for a natural, casual picture with others they are familiar with. The two bigger bottles symbolize two older adults, while the three smaller bottles symbolize three younger figures, in this case children. A group, physically close to each other in a

familiar manner, along with the 2 adults and 3 children; this overall composition is suggesting, and therefore symbolizes, the idea of a family. The way the bottles are cut off from the bottom resembles the way the legs would be out of the shot in a group or family photo. The non-coded, denoted, or literal image in this advertisement are the Coca-Cola bottles themselves. They do not have a greater signified/signifier relationship in this image; the bottles are simply bottles.

Of the two functions that a text has - those functions being *anchorage* and *relay* - the linguistic message of “Share a Coke with...” and the names on the labels such as “bhai”, “abu”, and “sister” are meant to do both. The grouped Coca-Cola’s already give off the symbolism of “one unit” but the use of familial titles on the labels anchor the group to the idea of family, as opposed to an alternative meaning or interpretation such as “unity” or “friendship”. The text that reads “Share a Coke with...” works together with the image and labels on the bottles to relay the intended message of sharing the drink with your family.

Though many would argue that the bottles in this image are purely denoted, Barthes rejects the idea of a “purely denoted image” unless one stays at comprehending the image through what Barthes refers to as ‘the first degree of intelligibility’. A possible argument could be made that the bottles are in fact *not* purely denoted icons because they are very specifically Coca-Cola bottles. From the iconic shape of the plastic, to the warm, dusky bronze color of the liquid inside, to the strip of red label wrapping the bottle; this is very clearly supposed to signify and symbolize a specific company with a specific historical image. So while the physical bottles themselves might not have any connoted message, the way the bottles are decorated does.

Multiple connoted messages within the image have already been shared. The advertisement does a good job at playing at what may be the viewer's *lexicon*. As an English speaker, one might not know the meaning of the words "bhai" or "abu". As a Hindi speaker, one might not know the meaning of the word "sister". However, most if not all people will have the association of "a group that is physically close together and is familiar with each other" and thus "this product is for those I am close to and familiar with". This allows the creator to play upon the intended message, which is specifically family, but also influence the consumer to think of different ways they can apply the symbol of "closeness" and "group". Even the use of the classic shade of Coca-Cola red is a connoted message. The ad aims to convey the message of sharing, closeness, and family and connect it with the Coke brand. The red is used on the bottles, on the logo, and on the specific word "Coke". This creates a symbolic connection in the consumers interpretation of the advertisement.

The *rhetoric of the image* is all the visual elements within an image that can be employed as signifiers of a message. The ideological metalanguage used in the ad consists of the consumers knowledge and previous associations with messages of closeness and family. The visual elements of images close together in a way that resembles the interactions of a familial group of people, specifically placed after the main text as if to finish the sentence of, "Share a Coke with..." all come together in an effective execution of connecting the message to the brand.

Image source: "Together Tastes Better: Coca-Cola®." *Official Coca-Cola Site*, [us.coca-cola.com/](http://us.coca-cola.com/).