

## A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis of Digital Advertisements

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### Abstract

Advertising has progressed into a multi-assisted communication. More specifically, digital advertising has undergone great transformations. It is mainly based on various modes for achieving successful promotion. Using multimodality is one of its dominant characteristics. Advertisements make use of different kinds multimodal semiotic modes: that is, audio-visual, written, spatial...,etc. Therefore, this paper applied a multimodal semiotic approach to analyze eight commercial and non-commercial digital advertisements. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) and Kress's (2006) model for interpreting visual signs was used to show how visual and verbal signs are interrelated with each other to make meaning. The three meta-functions of representational, interactional and compositional meaning helped the researcher understand the meaning conveyed through different semiotic modes combined with verbal elements in context. Each semiotic element in context is meaningful and enhances the persuasiveness and attractiveness of the image. It was concluded that the integration of both linguistic and semiotic elements in these visuals (i.e. digital ads) was of great asset in the meaning-making process.

**Keywords:** Digital Advertising, Multimodality, Semiotics, Commercial, and Non-Commercial Advertising.

### المستخلص

لقد تقدم مجال الاعلانات بفضل وسائل الاتصالات متعددة الوسائط . وبصفة خاصة ، فقد حدثت تطورات بالغة الاهمية في مجال الاعلانات الرقمية ، حيث انها تعتمد على عدة وسائط لتحقيق ترويج ناجح للمنتج . ويعد استخدام الوسائط احدى خصائصها السائدة، حيث تستخدم الاعلانات انواعا مختلفة من الانماط السيميائية متعددة الوسائط : اى السمعية والبصرية والمكتوبة والمكانية ... الخ. لذلك طبقت هذه الورقة البحثية نهجاً سيميائياً متعدد الوسائط لتحليل ثمانية اعلانات رقمية تجارية وغير تجارية. واستخدم الباحث نموذج ( Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) ونموذج (Kress, 2006) لتفسير العلامات المرئية لإظهار كيفية ترابط الاشارات المرئية واللفظية مع بعضها البعض لتكوين المعنى . ساعدت الوظائف الفوقية الثلاث للمعنى التمثيلي والتفاعلي والتركيبي الباحث على فهم المعنى المنقول من خلال انماط سيميائية مختلفة مقترنة بالعناصر اللفظية في السياق، حيث ان كل عنصر سيميائي له معنى في السياق ويعزز الاقناع ومدى جاذبية الصورة، وخلصت الدراسة الى ان دمج العناصر اللغوية والسيميائية في هذه المرئيات (اى الاعلانات الرقمية) كان له اهمية بالغة في عملية نقل المعنى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاعلانات الرقمية ، تعدد الوسائط ، السيميائية ، الاعلانات التجارية وغير التجارية

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## 1. Introduction

Advertising is an essential promoting tool in marketing. “Digital advertising is the process of publishing promotional material through online platforms such as social media, search engines, websites, and any other program that can be accessed digitally” (LYFE, 2020). It can address and influence a lot of people simultaneously and quickly. Thus, it is considered a mass means of communication. In fact, advertisements are all around us: They include signs, posters, newspapers and magazines, on billboards in the street, radios, televisions and the internet.

Advertising is a form of communication aiming at making the audience buy a particular product, job offering, promoting a socially beneficial ideas, sending healthcare instruction messages or asking the audience for a helping hand. Similarly, Deshpande (2019) stated that digital advertising is “the practice of delivering promotional content to users through various online and digital channels. It leverages mediums such as social media, e-mail, search engines, mobile apps, affiliate programs and websites to show advertisements and messages to audiences.”

Twitchell (2000, p. 1) believed that “language of products and services has pretty much replaced language about all other subjects”. Thus, the study of the language of advertising has become essential. As Cook (1992) put it, an advertisement has more than just linguistic elements as it “is a combination of elements” (Cook 1992: 5). Furthermore, Dyer (1982) asserted that advertising uses linguistic tools distinctively. For example, commercial and non-commercial advertisements make use of multiple modes of communication in designing messages that target their audience. Whereas recruitment advertisements used more informative language to attract applicants, advertisements that ask for donations use more psychological techniques to gain audience’s sympathy.

Advertising does not only refer to business expenditure for promoting goods, but to a vast range of symbols and ideas that constitute an essential part of modern culture (Jhally, Kline & Leiss, 1986). This is mainly because the main objective of advertisers is to enable people to identify a certain product and remember its name for the sake of persuasion. Thus, advertisements do not only depend on the use of

language, but also on the visual images or nonverbal tools. Crystal (1997) argued that both the design of an advertisement and its visual content have an initial impact on the audience and cause them to remember the name of the product and persuade them of buying it.

In addition, Cook (1992) illustrated that words in advertisements do not happen in isolation but occur in complex interaction with music, pictures and other text around them. In printed advertisements, integrating language with the visual text illustrations has important functions as attracting attention, illustrating visual images and presenting information. Thus, combining the language and the visual image is very effective in the meaning-making process of digital advertisements.

## 1.2. Purpose and Scope

Digital advertising, as defined by Powell (2020), is a strategy of promoting a product online: This promotion happens on social media platforms, search engines, websites, or even in your inbox. Basically, digital advertising promotes products or services to people on the internet. This paper aims at investigating how advertisers use language and visual images to convey certain messages and to achieve their goals in digital or online advertisements. The paper applied the multimodal semiotic approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Kress (2006) on online advertisements: It examines the role of viewer power, viewer distance, demand/offer, and involvement/detachment of the audience, color and salience in eight online commercial and non-commercial advertisements.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The present paper addresses the following research questions:

- How can multimodal semiotic approach be applied to manifest the persuasive tools of commercial and non-commercial digital advertisements?
- How is the combination of linguistic and visual tools important in the meaning-making process of digital advertisements?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Advertising as a Discourse

The word “advertising” is derived from the Medieval Latin verb *advertere*, “to direct one’s attention to” a product or service by means of some public announcement (oral or written); it is an integral part of marketing (Goddard 1998, p.6). It is a paid notice which aimed at persuading the customer for taking the action intended by the advertisers.

In “The Discourse of Advertising”, Cook defined advertisement as “the promotion of goods or services through sale through impersonal media” (2013, p.5).

Advertising falls into two main categories: (1) consumer advertising (i.e. commercial or product advertising), which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public; and (2) public relations advertising (i.e. non-commercial or non-product advertising), which is directed towards society by citizens or community groups, or by politicians, in order to promote some issue of social concern or political agenda. Non-commercial advertisements are endorsed by a charitable institution, political organization etc. The main objective of these ads is to create awareness, raise funds, and change consumer behavior (MBA Skool Team, 2018).

According to Ikaria-Maina (2014), advertising is a form of discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. The messages of advertising have permeated the entire cultural landscape. Printed advertisements fill the pages of newspapers and magazines. Commercials interrupt TV and radio programs constantly.

The discourse of advertising is based on the assumption that the text is produced with the intentions of persuading the viewer to buy a product or a service, or to present that product or service as desirable as possible to the viewer (Karlsson, 2015). This accords with Danesi’s (2015) claim that advertising has evolved into a form of social discourse that taps into styles and ideologies that people unconsciously recognize as part of normal discourse. Each brand product has developed its own discourse style to match the social image it intends to create and disseminate as part of its marketing strategy. Thus, there are discourse styles for cosmetics, beers, automobiles, and the like that tap into discourse levels or registers of the targeted audience.

Advertising thus borrows discourse styles to suit its purposes: a commercial can take many forms such as an interview about the product or competition and the target product wins it. This means that advertising discourse is a blended discourse, adopting and adapting relevant social discourses or trends for its own marketing purposes. As Danesi (2015) put it, advertising discourse utilizes technology to strengthen its persuasive appeal. He added that in the age of technology, this discourse is supported by multimodal, semiotic and multimedia techniques, that is, by technologies that allow advertisers to blend various modes of presentation (visual, aesthetic, and narrative) with different media (text, audio, visual).

## 2.2. Social Semiotics and Multimodality

Social semiotics is concerned with “the way people use semiotic resources “both to produce communicative artefacts and events and to interpret them ... in the context of specific social situations and practices” (Van Leeuwen, 2005). O’Halloran (2011) claimed that digital technology provides a common platform for semiotic resources to combine and unfold in new and innovative ways. Therefore, he concluded that digital technology is a multimodal social semiotic technology.

Multimodality is an approach that deals with the meaning made by using several modes of communication other than language. It is the source or means of describing a practice and representation in all semiotics complexity and richness (Adams, Matu & Oketch, 2014). Multimodality involves semiotics such as image, gesture etc. (Iedema, 2003 cited in Adams et al. 2014). Kress and Van Leeuwen are considered as the pioneers of developing Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Adams et al. 2014).

Multimodality is originally borrowed from Kress’s notion of modes (1997, 2001). It refers to integrating various types of modes, e.g, visual, audio, written, oral, spatial, etc. in human communication (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, Kress 2003). It is a theory which looked at many different modes that people used to communicate with each other and to express themselves (Kress, 2009). It offers a way to examine how language and image work together (cited in Adams et al. 2014): Thus, multimodality provides us a source of investigating semiotics such as image, gesture, text-based messages etc. It mainly focuses on studying the interrelationships between various communicative modes; visual or auditory, words or image. Furthermore, multimodality is an appropriate tool to measure and evaluate the extra-implied meaning.

Therefore, this approach is useful in the field of advertising as it described the grammar of visual communication used by image designers. Multimodality in the discourse of advertising suggested the use of various communicative modes in a single advertisement. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) claimed that images have their own grammar and rules: “we take the view that language and visual communication both realize the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but that each does so by means of its own specific forms, and independently” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:17).

Thus, it involves an analysis of the rules and principles that allow viewers to understand the meaning potential of relative placement of elements, framing, salience, proximity, color saturations, styles of

typeface, etc. (Machin, 2007). As Baldry & Thibault (2006) proposed, “multimodality refers to the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resources systems are both co-develop and co-contextualized in the making of a text-specific meaning”.

### 2.3. Multimodal discourse analysis

Multimodal discourse approach adopts the view that diverse semiotic modes (e.g. language, images, music, sound, animation, and so on) are combined together to multiply the meaning in multimodal texts or communicative events (Li, 2016). Thus, multimodal discourse analysis is the study of the intersection and interdependence of various modalities of communication within a given context. It is used in many fields of contemporary writing and became a new trend in the studies of discourse analysis. Multimodal texts are more complex than written texts because they convey information by means of various modes such as visual images, written language, and design elements; it realized textual structure visually, through layout, color, and typography at the level of the discourse. It also focused completely upon interactive aspects of discourse that made communication easier for interactive participants.

The primary significance of multimodal discourse analysis lies in its combination of language with other relative meaningful resources (Gibbon, 2000). Researchers in this area sought to identify the influence of mode on meaning within a given context, focusing on co-occurrence and interaction between multiple semiotic systems.

### 2.4. Previous Studies

Vahid (2012) investigated the power behind images in advertisement discourse. His study indicated techniques used by consumer product companies to reach more consumers and sell more products. The results of his study showed that private producers tend to persuade viewers to buy a special product by giving them the power to choose. When the producer of the ad is the government, it tried to show its power. However, it could be understood from the results that the producers, generally tend to use their power and ideology to change people’s behavior and thought.

Liu (2013) studied the visual images and interpretive strategies in multimodal texts. His paper, drawing on the theories of semiotics, art and visual communication grammar, presented a framework of interpretive strategies. The results of his study analyzed and comprehend the visual images in contemporary multimodal texts, so as to expand the readers’

interpretive repertoires and strengthen their capacity in constructing and interpreting multimodal texts.

Yakub, Peter, and Omondi (2014) examined how the visual texts in Safaricom newspaper advertisements affected the audience's purchasing decisions. They noted that the audience just saw the images as meant to attract them but not communicate any message as expressed by the written word. The study results revealed and analyzed how visual semiotics and written language were used in the Safaricom advertisements to aid meaning interpretation and determined the effect of using the visual images and written language on the audience's ability to interpret the messages .

Maedeh and Saeed (2015) investigated the problems of Persian EFL learners encounter in reading advertisements. Additionally, it explored the hidden strategies behind each advertisement. The findings of the study indicated that Persian EFL learners had problems not only with semantic, syntactic and phonological aspects of language of advertisements, but also with non-linguistic elements such as colors in advertisements.

Liu (2019) explored the interactive meaning in three public service advertisement multimodal discourses, and he found that various modalities work together to realize the interactive meaning and to persuade the public in advertising discourse.

### 3. Methodology

The present study seeks to investigate the multimodal discourse analysis approach applied on eight digital advertisements. In particular, it aims to describe commercial and non-commercial ads in terms of gaze, spatial distance (high, medium shot), salience, and color. The data analysis is based on Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), a theoretical framework by Kress and Van Leeuwen.

#### 3.1 Kress and Van Leeuwen's Model

Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design and multimodal discourse analysis model were used to analyze the collected digital advertisements in this paper. In other words, a multi-modal semiotic analysis was conducted to examine the **visual grammar** of eight digital advertisements and to decode their meaning potential. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) assumed that "image, color, music, typography and other visual modes are similar to language and they can simultaneously fulfill and realize the three broad communicative malfunctions as language does".

Based on Halliday's theory of Functional Grammar, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996,2006) use different terminology for the three

metafunctions of linguistics in discussing the meaning of image in visual communication: representational instead of ideational; interactive instead of interpersonal; and compositional instead of textual.

As for the **representational meaning**, it has to do with the patterns of representation. That is, the way experience is encoded visually. The visual encoding is carried on either **narrative and/or conceptual** structures. Narrative structures present unfolding actions and events, processes of change and transitory spatial arrangements. As for conceptual structures, they represent participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 59).

As for **the interactive meaning**, Kress and Van Leeuwen have proposed three ways to examine it through three aspects: contact or gaze (demand or offer), social distance (intimate, social, or impersonal), and attitude (involvement, detachment, viewer power, equality, representation power etc.).

The last metafunction refers to **the meaning of composition**, being related to “the way in which representations and communicative acts cohere into the kind of meaningful whole we call ‘text’” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996,p.181). Meaning is built by three interrelated systems: “information value (given or new, ideal or real, important or less), salience (achieved through size, color, tone, focus, perspective, overlap, repetition, etc.), and framing”. In addition, these systems are not restricted to single pictures, but they apply also to composite visuals, i.e. visuals, which combine text, image and/or other graphic elements, and their layouts.

### 3.2. Data Collection

Digital advertisements are highly multimodal in nature, consisting of different semiotic resources coupled with written text. Therefore, a multimodal semiotic approach proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996& 2006) is adopted to analyze the data collected for this research. More specifically, eight digital advertisements (i.e. four commercial and four non-commercial advertisements had been selected for analysis within the theoretical framework of Kress and van Leeuwen ’s (1996&2006) multimodal semiotic approach. Thus, visual elements as gaze, color saturations, shots, viewer distance, involvement and detachment, salience of the advertisements, and other factors that attract the viewer are investigated.

The digital advertisements analyzed are four commercial and four non-commercial ones as follow:



- a) Dettol. (<http://mulnomis.blogspot.com/2010/04/print-ad-dettol.html>)
- b) Nescafe. (<https://www.behance.net/gallery/13032701/Nescafe-Print-Advertisement>)
- c) Diet Pepsi. (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/387942955371100810/>)
- d) NIVEA: Nail Polish. (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/70720656628170862/>)
- e) No Smoking. (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/455567318534569663/no-smoking-creative-ads>)
- f) Drive Safe: ([https://www.reddit.com/r/AdPorn/comments/1ywx65/1000x654\\_the\\_fro\\_tier\\_post\\_creative\\_way\\_to/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AdPorn/comments/1ywx65/1000x654_the_fro_tier_post_creative_way_to/))
- g) Save Water. (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/162200024053445431/>)
- h) Self Medication. ([https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/patil\\_hospital\\_anti\\_selfmedication](https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/patil_hospital_anti_selfmedication))

### 3.3. Procedures

In order to collect the data, the following procedures were used:

- Firstly, eight advertisements, promoting product advertisements and instruction advertisements, were selected carefully from online resources such as Pinterest, Reddit, Enhance.Google Images and Facebook.
- Secondly, the choice of advertisements was based on the level of creativity, attraction, color, viewer, and other elements of multimodal discourse analysis.
- Thirdly, the multimodal discourse analysis approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) was applied on eight digital advertisements: Four commercial and four non-commercial ads.

## 4.Data Analysis

### 3.1 Commercial Ads:

As mentioned above, commercial ads are targeted to generate sales and revenue. They have to do with selling goods and products. The following examples illustrate how advertisers make use of semiotic devices to convey their messages and promote their products.

#### 3.1.1.Example 1 : Dettol



## Visual Analysis:

### The Representational Meaning

As shown above in the image, **the represented participants** in this advertisement are: a woman, two passengers, a bus, human hands and Dettol bottle. There is a woman standing in a bus holding a strong, healthy, clean hand. The bottom half of her body cannot be seen; she wears a white blouse with a brown belt around her waist and she is holding her brown arm bag. The bus is almost empty as there are only two passengers sitting at the back. The handholds of the bus are replaced by human hands, and they are not in a good health except the one which she holds with her hand, that is the only healthy hand. The **interactive participants** refer to those who produce the images and texts (e.g. painters, photographers) and those who view and read them. The producer of the advertisement is Dettol Company and its objective is to persuade viewers/customers to buy and use Dettol to keep safe and away of germs and illnesses.

### The Interactive Meaning

The eye-level angle shows an equality of power between represented and interactive participants. The **medium close shot** evokes that there is a social relation between them too. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006,p.124) illustrated, *medium close shots* present the figure from the waist up, demonstrating far personal distance between ‘ people who can touch figures if they both extend their arms’; a distance at which “subjects of personal interests and involvement are discussed ”. The frontal angle also shows involvement with the woman. The main represented participant (i.e. the woman) doesn’t look at the viewer directly which means **offering** the product (i.e. Dettol), and conveys the message that she feels very safe when she holds the right hand. In addition, as can be seen that the woman is holding the hand very tight which reveals safety too.

### The Compositional Meaning

As mentioned before, *the information value* of an image is determined according to how different elements are placed in an image. In this image, new information (i.e. Dettol bottle or the Product) is placed on the right part of the image. At the bottom of the image, there is a green bar and is written on with white color and capitalized: "WHOSE HAND ARE YOU HOLDING?" According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), elements placed at the bottom represent the *Real*, or more specific and practical information. This rhetorical question placed at the bottom

emphasizes the idea that the woman is holding the only clean and healthy hand.

The second system of composition is **salience**. Kress and van Leeuwen(2006,p.210) described as “ the degree to which an element draws attention to itself, due to its size, its place in the foreground, its color, its tonal values, its sharpness or definition, and other features.” Bayston (2020) rightly believed that colors of ads are very important in boosting sales. He believed that colors can strongly affect how a business is seen by visitors and customers: Colors contribute best to conversions when they reinforce brand personality. Bayston (2020) stated “green’s associations are with the environment – ‘green’ is a one-word reference for the whole spread of natural, organic, environmentally friendly. So it gets used by businesses that want to appeal to similar audiences or that align with similar interests, even if there’s no direct connection”. The bar at the bottom of the image is in green and the writing is in white: Both colors are those of the product itself. Moreover, the woman is dressed in white which reflects cleanliness, purity and sterilization.

### 3.1.2 Example 2 : Nescafe



## Visual Analysis:

### The Representational Meaning

As depicted in the advertisement, there is a red Nescafe cup in which there is a hot Nescafe drink that produces a light brown vapor shaped as an alarm clock. Thus, the represented participants are the Nescafe cup and the shape of the alarm clock. In this respect, Kress and van Leeuwan (2006) stressed that the represented participants could be humans, quasi-humans or objects. The interactive participants are the producer and the viewer. This advertisement is produced by Nescafe Company and its main objective is to promote the product. The company used a persuasive strategy by using the alarm clock-shaped vapor to show that this product is what the viewer/customer exactly needs when he/she wants to wake up to life.

### The Interactive Meaning

The angle expresses whether the image producer and viewer are involved with the represented participants or not. In this image, the eye-level angle shows equality in the power between the participants (producer and viewer). As Kress and van Leeuwan clarified, **offer images** lack the element of contact: The represented participants do not look directly at the viewers, but rather the represented participants function as the object of the viewers' looks and not vice versa. The medium shot shows a balance and normal social distance. There is some involvement with the idea of waking up evoked by the frontal angle with which the picture was captured. This image is an offer one.

### The Compositional Meaning

The image of Nescafe cup is placed in the center. The elements positioned in the center are considered the most important information that has to be highlighted in **the foreground** of the image (Kress and van Leeuwan, 2006). Moreover, at the center bottom of this picture is a sentence that reads: "WAKE UP TO LIFE" written in white.

The **colors** in the image are meaningful. The background is in dark brown, which is originally the color of the coffee. Brown (i.e. an earthy tone), is known as a comfort color, lending relaxation to customers (Morris, 2013). Moreover, the color of the cup itself is divided into two shades of red; the dark and the light one. In fact, red is an attention-grabbing, vibrant, hot color that is generally associated with high energy and warmth (Kramer,2019). It is obvious that the word Nescafe written on the cup is positioned in the lighter part of the cup to attract the

viewer's attention to it. The vapor is in light brown to make the viewer able to see it.

The time seven is specially chosen to mean that the viewer should take this Nescafe drink at 7 o'clock in the morning and begin his/her day with it, due to the fact that most of full time jobs begin at that early time. This exactly goes with the sentence written at the bottom to make him/her wake up to life.

### 3.1.3 Example 3:



#### Visual Analysis:

##### The Representational Meaning

In this advertisement, there is a hidden cat showing only its tail from a small hole in the wall. This hole is known to be a mouse hole. There is also a wrinkled Pepsi can written on it the word "PEPSI DIET". Thus, the cat's tail, the Pepsi Can and the hole are the represented participants. The producer of this advertisement is Pepsi Company and its objective is to promote its product to the viewers or customers.

##### The Interactive Meaning

From the vertical angle, an eye-level angle shows equality in power between the represented participants and the viewers. The medium shot means a normal social relation. From the horizontal dimension, the frontal angle represents the involvement with the participants too. As mentioned above, the image here is considered an **offer** image as it does not include human object. The image has fully saturated colors, mainly

white and blue. Moreover, the play of light and shade as well as the different degrees of brightness draw attention to the product (i.e. Diet Pepsi)

### **The Compositional Meaning**

The image of Pepsi can is placed on the right: that is, new information. The word diet is written in red to attract the viewers' attention. The dominant colors used in this advertisement are white and blue. As Campos (2016) illustrated, blue is a calming and soothing color and it transmits trust to audience. Moreover, white offers a sense of peace and calm, hope and comfort: It creates a sense of order and perfection (Waggener, 2019).

What the producer wanted to show is that the cat drank Pepsi diet and was able to catch the mouse and enter the small hole in the wall. There are no words written on the picture except the name of the product. This is because the image is informative enough that everyone will understand its meaning without any further explanation.

### **3.1.4 Example 4**



### **Visual Analysis:**

#### **The Representational Meaning**

The represented participants in this advertisement include a can opened by a woman's nail and a nail polish bottle. This nail is painted with NIVEA nail polish. This advertisement is a product one. The

producer is NIVEA Company and its aim is to promote its new NIVEA nail polish.

### **The Interactive Meaning**

Similarly, the eye-level angle constructs a balance of power between the viewer and the advertisement. The medium shot represents a normal social distance. The frontal angle shows involvement with the woman inside the advertisement.

### **The Compositional Meaning**

The image of the nail polish bottle is placed at the bottom right of the picture: that is, new information. There is a phrase written in white besides the bottle; it reads: "FOR EXTRA STRONG, EXTRA LONG NAILS". All words are capitalized to attract viewer's attention.

Moreover, the color used for the polish is red. This color is to attract the viewer's attention to the nail polish. The red color also gives the impression of strength and power. Besides, the strength of the nail is manifested through the opening of the metal can without breaking or any other effect happened to it. Although the image itself is obvious and helped in giving the overall meaning and idea of the ad, the words written at the bottom of the advertisement emphasize the meaning conveyed through the semiotic elements. Thus, the producer chose to make use of combination of different modes to emphasize the meaning.

### **3.2. Second: Non-Commercial Ads:**

Non-commercial ads or public-service ads mainly aim at sharing information that hopefully people will put to good use. For example, a non-profit organization may implement an advertising campaign to increase public awareness and education about a certain health issue. The following examples how multimodal semiotic devices are used to achieve the objectives of such advertisements.

#### **3.2.1. Example**



## Visual Analysis:

### The Representational Meaning

As can be seen in this ad, there is a woman holding a cigarette in her hand. This cigarette is producing a vapor which is like a hanging rope-shaped that surrounds her neck. Thus, the represented participants are the woman, the cigarette and the vapor. The producer of this advertisement is 'an awareness campaign' against smoking. Its objective is to make people aware that smoking takes their lives and when they stop it they will live longer that's why they used a young lady. That is, this ad belongs to healthcare discourse.

### The Interactive Meaning

The eye-level angle shows power equality between the participants. The close shot (i.e. 'close-up') of the woman shows only her head and shoulder, and thus reflects close personal distance; "the distance at which one can hold or grasp the other person, and therefore also the distance between people who have an intimate relation with each other" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.124). The frontal angle indicates that the viewer is a part of the participant's world.

The eye look is not directly towards the viewer, which means that this advertisement is an offering one. However, this kind of offering is not to buy a product; it gives advice. It tries to convince viewers of giving up smoking. Thus, this offering image aims at guiding people or making them aware of one way of saving their lives, that is, to stop smoking. In addition, the eye look with her whole facial expression reveal that she is not aware of what she is doing and careless about everything, and she seems like throwing everything behind her back. Therefore, the woman is not aware of the danger she puts herself in when she is smoking.

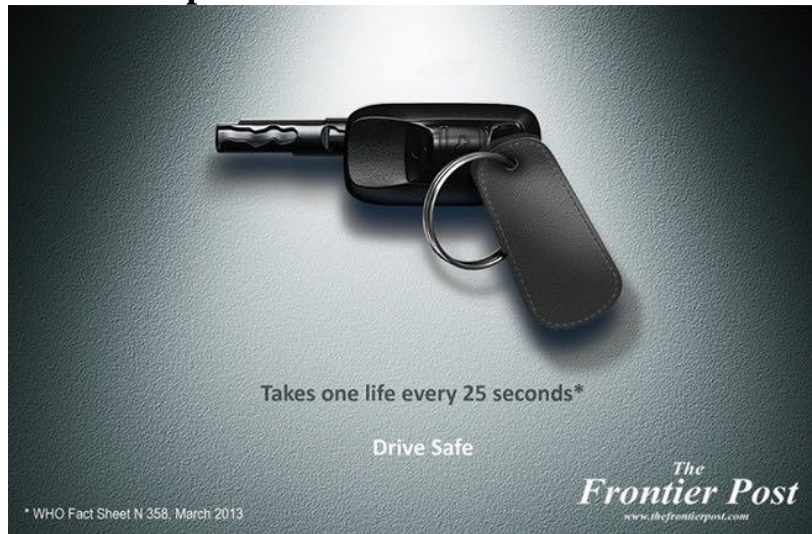
### The Compositional Meaning

New information in this image is placed at the bottom right in the form of a sentence written in white. The sentence reads, "KILL a CIGARETTE AND SAVE a LIFE. Yours." The most significant and catchy element in this sentence is the word 'Yours'. The ellipted words in this sentence can be deduced easily. Although it is one word, it has a very important meaning (i.e. 'it's your choice, it's your life').

The colors in this picture are very strict and clear. The black (the background), grey (the woman) and white (the vapor) colors give the impression of death and sadness, so as to meet the objective of the advertisement which aimed at making the viewer afraid of smoking. The idea of death appears also in the hanging rope that wraps her neck.



### 3.2.2 Example 2:



#### Visual Analysis:

##### The Representational Meaning

As can be seen in the ad, there is a black car key that is put in a way to make it look like a gun. The producer of this non-product advertisement is The Frontier Post online newspaper. Its aim is to help people to take care of their lives and drive safe.

##### The Interactive Meaning

As mentioned before, the third dimension of the interactive relations of different participant participants in visuals is **perspective** which is, as Kress and van Leeuwen stated, about selecting a particular angle (or ‘a point of view’) rather than another, In that sense, Kress and van Leeuwen observed that images in Western cultures are of two kinds: **subjective** images and **objective** images. They added that **subjective images** are “images with central perspective (and hence with a ‘built-in ‘point of view)’”. Thus, the image in this ad is **subjective**. The viewer is the main concern in subjective images as they are meant basically to present a certain point of view to the viewer. Moreover, the eye-level angle of the viewer shows power balance between the participants. The medium shot represents a normal social distance, like all day situation. The frontal angle shows an involvement with the participants.

##### The Compositional Meaning

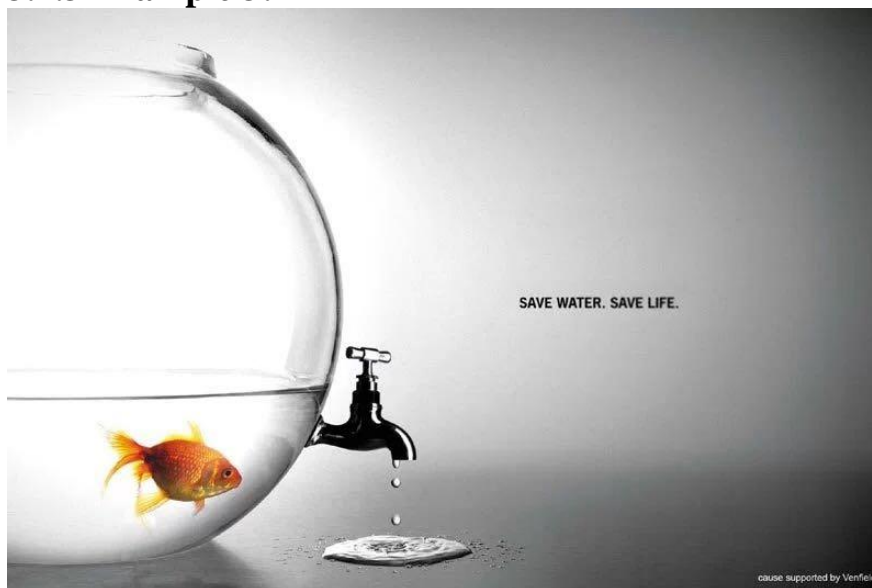
The image of the car key is placed at the center, and below it there are two sentences: The one directly under the car key is written in black and reads: "TAKES ONE LIFE EVERY 25 SECONDS\*"; and the other one is written in white and reads: "DRIVE SAFE." Thus, the image and the sentences are placed at the center to represent nucleus information. The

background sides are in greyish black but the car key is lighted with white light.

The colors in the advertisement are informative. They are just black and white. These colors are depicting the life and death that are meant to be understood from the advertisement. The black color is surrounding the car key to mean death, but the white one is centered to the key to mean that if one used it wisely, he/she would be safe. That is why the key was lighted to grab the viewer's attention.

In addition, it is clear that the only sentence put in a different color is the one explaining the reason why the car key was shaped like a gun. This is to avoid the conflicting views that could result about the producer's message, whether he meant preventing people from driving at all by giving them a negative picture and frightening them of driving, or he wanted to warn them about the danger of driving carelessly to make them drive safe.

### 3.2.3 Example 3:



#### Visual Analysis:

#### The Representational Meaning

In this advertisement, there is a small aquarium that has a quarter part of it filled with water, and a small orange sad fish looking at the tap of the aquarium. The tap is dropping few drops of water and there is a spot of water on the ground. Thus, the presented participants are the aquarium, the fish and water. This non-product advertisement was supported by the Venfield Company as is written in the sentence at the right bottom. The aim of this company is to raise awareness regarding rationalization of water consumption among viewers.

### **The Interactive Meaning**

This image is an offer one. It positions the viewer as an observer only, and “offers” the represented participants as ‘information’ to be taken in by the viewer. The aquarium and the small fish help the viewer to get the likely piece of information ‘offered’. The advertisement is positioned at an eye-level angle which shows equality in power between participants. The very close shot reveals intimate distance between participants and viewers, and the frontal angle shows involvement too.

### **The Compositional Meaning**

The aquarium in this image is placed on the left as given information. Lifted up on the right side of the picture there is a sentence written in black and reads: "SAVE WATER. SAVE LIFE." It represents ideal information. Moreover, this imperative sentence creates a direct contact with the audience. In fact, the sentence combines with the semiotic modes of the image to persuade and attract the viewer towards it through strong meaning conveyed by it.

As mentioned before, one of the most important factors that works to retain attention in marketing is the **effective use of color (Ambreen, 2019)**. The small orange fish may encourage viewers to take action regarding wastage of water. “Orange is another popular color in marketing because it also tends to get attention. Orange is considered a friendly, warm, exciting color. It is often used as a palette for a call to action” (Ambreen, 2019).

Moreover, the aquarium part is lighted to make the viewer concentrate on it, and the other parts of the advertisement are gloomy and getting darker when moving towards the opposite side of the aquarium. This is because the producer wanted to make the viewer feel danger and expect the bad consequences that could result when over consuming water. In addition, the look of the fish is very expressive as it describes how sad the fish is, due to the wasted water and feels afraid of the near death that will face it.

### 3.2.4 Example 4:



#### Visual Analysis: The Representational Meaning

In this picture, there is a strip of pills of fifteen places of pills, but just eight of them are found. The pills are bullets. Thus, the main represented participant is the strip of pills containing bullets instead of pills. The producer of this non-commercial advertisement is clearly a hospital. Its objective is to help saving people's lives and make them aware of the right use of medicine.

#### The Interactive Meaning

Similarly, this is an offer image as it gives instructions to the viewer's regarding self-medication. As can be seen, the represented participant (i.e. the strip of bullets) is shown from the frontal angle which indicates involvement with the viewer. The vertical angle depicts the represented participant as more powerful and dangerous where the viewer looks at it from a low angle. The frontal angle means that the viewer is involved in the advertisement and should participate.

#### The Compositional Meaning

At the bottom of the picture, there are three sentences, one is bigger in font than the other two. The bigger one is a rhetorical question that reads: "**Can you treat yourself better than a doctor?**" In fact, using rhetorical questions is an effective persuasive device in ads. The two sentence below the rhetorical question are written in smaller font and reads: "**Self-medication can put your life in danger. Always consume medicines only after consulting your doctor.**"

The strip is in grey as this is the normal color of medication strips. Grey stands for professionalism and practicality (Kramer, 2019). The bullets are in yellow with their heads in orange. The background is somehow gloomy and dark to make the atmosphere looks like there are bad consequences and danger. The sentences are in white on a black background to be noticeable.

Furthermore, the producer of this advertisement meant to make the strip half-filled and half-empty to show that someone used it before. He meant to replace the pills with bullets to show the idea of bad consequences that could lead to death if one used medications without the consultation of the doctor.

## **Conclusion**

This paper analyzed eight online advertisement visuals according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model of multimodal semiotic discourse (i.e. visual grammar). The three meta-functions of representational, interactional and compositional meaning helped the researcher understand the meaning conveyed through different semiotic modes combined with verbal elements in context. Each semiotic element in context is meaningful and enhances the persuasiveness and attractiveness of the image. Thus, both linguistic and semiotic elements in these visuals (i.e. digital ads) integrated in the meaning making process.

For analyzing these images, the researcher at first described the participants in the image (i.e. both the represented and interactive participants). Second, the interactive meaning is investigated through three aspects: contact or gaze (demand or offer), social distance (intimate, social, or impersonal), and attitude (involvement, detachment, viewer power, equality, representation power etc.). Thirdly, the researcher examined the placement of the items in the image. Colors play very important role in boosting sales in ads. A careful selection of colors proved to be essential in making the advertisement attractive and persuasive. Therefore, the researcher focused on the colors used in the images to get the meaning conveyed. Finally, the verbal elements used in presenting the features and qualities of the product were also analyzed with focus on the font, capitalization and its placement in the image. The findings led to the conclusion that the use of different semiotic modes besides the linguistic elements in digital advertisements enhanced persuasion. Thus, advertisements are deliberately designed this way to attract and persuade the viewers or consumers.

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